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NEWS 03

'Bombshell' pokies report

David Killick

Government ignored warnings on new laws

The state's Liquor and Gaming Commission was not consulted about the Liberal government's latest round of poker machine law reforms – which it says will fail to reduce harm.

Treasurer Eric Abetz announced a suite of changes in April, including reduced opening hours and the rollout of facial recognition technology to seclude problem gamblers.

But the government has abandoned plans for a nation-leading card-based mandatory pre-commitment scheme, which the industry opposed.

Documents released under right to information laws re-

veal the commission was not informed until the day before Mr Abetz's announcement – and said the reforms wouldn't work.

"As an introductory statement, the commission has no evidence that it can provide to you that any of the initiatives proposed in the package will minimise harm," the TLGC wrote. "Indeed, we are concerned that many will not deliver protections from gambling harm, but in fact will have the opposite effect."

Independent Member for

Nelson Meg Webb described the documents as a "bombshell".

"We now have formal confirmation the Rockliff government not only failed to seek initial advice from the independent expert gaming commission, it then deliberately refused to heed the commission's strong warning the government's new measures will cause more harm than deliver protections," she said. "These bombshell RTI documents are a damning indictment on the Rockliff government.

"The only reason you don't ask the statutory independent entity charged with providing you advice on a critical public policy matter is because you know you, or your industry mates, will not like the answer."

Mr Abetz said the measures he had introduced needed to be viewed as a whole rather than individually.

"The reforms are designed to reduce opportunities for harmful gambling behaviour through stronger controls, limits on access to cash, enhanced exclusion mechanisms, ex-

tended shutdown periods and the introduction of ticket in, ticket out with strict load limits," he said.

"The commission's role is an important one, and its advice was sought and considered in relation to implementation, however, it is the role of government to set the policy parameters in relation to this reform.

"The package should also be viewed as a whole, including mandatory closure periods, a reduction mechanism for machine numbers, strengthened

exclusion arrangements, facial recognition technology for exclusion enforcement, cash access controls and gaming care officers."

Greens deputy leader Vica Bayley condemned the handling of the matter.

"Instead of locking in economic and job creation benefits and protecting vulnerable Tasmanians from predatory poker machines, the Liberals have caved to the influence of the gambling lobby and is now proposing an approach that will make things worse.

"The Liberals' pokies policy is utterly nonsensical and against the public interest."