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NEWS 07

Abetz gambling retreat

Elise Kaine

Government backs down on closing hours

The government has been accused of interfering with the work of its own independent gaming commission and preventing “even a small amount of harm minimisation” after an eleventh hour direction from Treasurer Eric Abetz to scrap a rule standardising closing hours across all clubs.

A ministerial direction from the department of treasury and finance in June 2026 directed the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission to “extend the mandatory closure period for gaming areas in hotels and licensed clubs that are op-

erating gaming machines to be seven continuous hours every 24-hour period, effective from 1 August 2026”.

The TLGC then sent correspondence to stakeholders which said the commission determined that a standard closure period of 2am to 9am daily would apply to all gaming machine areas in hotels and licensed clubs from August 1, 2026.

On July 29 another direction was issued, displacing the previous one, and specified the

mandatory closure period would be extended to seven hours “without specifying the start time of the closure period”.

Independent member for Nelson Meg Webb said this was an “unprecedented example of ministerial political interference” and accused the Rockliff government and Treasurer Eric Abetz of capitulating to the industry.

Ms Webb said the harm minimisation of mandatory closing periods would be reduced under the new direction,

as venues would be able to stagger their closing times.

“Venue hopping” refers to the practice of gamblers moving between different gaming venues with staggered closing times to extend their gambling sessions, circumventing harm minimisation measures.

In today’s Talking Point, Anglicare CEO Dr Chris Jones agrees with Ms Webb’s opinion on staggered closing hours.

“Without standard closure hours, the measure will have minimal impact on reducing

gambling harm, as venues can stagger their opening hours,” Dr Jones said.

“Shame and stigma must move away from individuals experiencing gambling harm, and towards industry behaviour which enables it.”

The treasurer said venues have had the flexibility to choose their closing hours for 18 years and the “status quo remains”. He said the extension of the closing hours meant “venue hopping (would) not be a realistic possibility”.

“This was potentially a live issue when venues only closed for four hours.”

He said the closing hours would help mitigate early morning problem gambling.

In 2022 the Liberal government announced it would implement “gold standard” mandatory commitment cards for all pokie machine gambling, a proposal that was later also scrapped.

Treasury data shows in the financial year 2025-2026 Tasmanians lost a record \$208.2m on poker machine gambling – up 7.4 per cent on the previous year.

Talking Point, Pages 16-17