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Legislative Council launches inquiry into Tasmania's abandoned pokies card

Pulse Tasmania
Fri August 28, 2026 5:00am

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The inquiry will examine Tasmania's scrapped pokies card policy. Image / Pulse (File)

A new parliamentary inquiry will examine the Tasmanian government's decision to scrap its promised mandatory pokies pre-commitment card earlier this year.

The Upper House Government Administration Committee A appointed a sub-committee on August 11 to investigate the policy change, with its first meeting held on August 25.

The state government announced in January it would abandon the card system and instead introduce a suite of alternative harm minimisation measures.

Independent Nelson MLC Meg Webb, who serves as deputy chair of the sub-committee, welcomed the inquiry.

Independent Nelson MLC Meg Webb welcomed the new inquiry. Image / Pulse

Webb said January's decision came as a shock to many, including former Minister Michael Ferguson, who had championed the card during his time in cabinet.

"Tasmanians deserve to know what that abrupt policy decision was based upon," she said.

The inquiry will examine Tasmania's scrapped pokies card policy. Image / Pulse (File)

"Was there any credible research or data to underpin it and which stakeholders, if any, were meaningfully consulted?"

Webb pointed to a government-commissioned Deloitte access economics report which found the pre-commitment card could generate a net increase of around $230 million in gross state product and more than 200 local jobs.

She said the Independent Gaming Commission had also stated the government's replacement measures were likely to cause more harm from poker machines rather than reduce it.

"It is the role and responsibility of Parliament to scrutinise and test the rigor of how the government goes about developing public policy."

The inquiry will examine the evidence underpinning alternative harm minimisation measures. Image / Pulse (File)

She said "particularly when it lands on a position which appears to fly in the face of available evidence and the public interest."

Treasurer Eric Abetz defended the government's approach, saying the reforms were "specifically designed to reduce opportunities for harmful gambling behaviour" through measures including immediate self-exclusion from venues, limits on cash access and extended shutdown periods.

Abetz said the government "developed its EGM harm minimisation package after considering a wide range of policy options and stakeholder views."

He said Tasmania already has the lowest density of poker machines of any state that permits gaming outside casinos, the lowest expenditure per capita and the lowest problem gambling rate at 0.7%.

Treasurer Eric Abetz defended the government's harm minimisation approach. Image / Pulse (File)

The inquiry will look at the government's response to the Deloitte report and the evidence underpinning the measures announced in January.

Submissions and evidence will be sought from key stakeholders including gambling support services, the pokies industry, government departments and the Gaming Commission.

The sub-committee will be chaired by Cassy O'Connor, with Clare Glade-Wright also serving as a member.