

# PUTTING PEOPLE BEFORE POKIES AND PROFITS

The ACT Greens want to protect the most vulnerable in our community from the harms caused by gambling. Because no one should lose their livelihood over a bet.

But the reality is that gambling causes significant harm to the ACT community. When people suffer losses from gambling it can have lifelong detrimental impacts on their health, their relationships and the wider community. Research shows that for every person whose behaviour is classified on the “Problem Gambling Severity Index” as “problem’ gambling,” six other people are negatively affected.<sup>1</sup>

We will introduce a series of best-practice harm reduction measures that will provide important protections, especially for people using poker machines, which is a key area needing reform in the ACT.

Through our balance-of-power status the ACT Greens have already achieved significant reform in the gambling space. This includes a significant reduction in the number of pokies in the ACT (from over 5000 to 3500), an increase to the problem gambling assistance fund levy, and assistance to Canberra’s clubs to help them diversify their business away from gambling revenue and, at the same time, to increase their environmental performance

## THE ACT GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Address the harm caused by pokies by introducing registered gambling cards, mandatory precommitment with default loss and time limits, supporting self exclusion, all linked by a central monitoring system (CMS)
- ▲ Work with and support clubs to transition away from pokies revenue
- ▲ Continue to reduce the number of poker machines in Canberra.
- ▲ Restrict gambling advertising
- ▲ Ban political donations from gambling licence-holders
- ▲ Fund a peak gambling harm reduction body
- ▲ Strengthen gambling harm protections in law and regulation, and improve the powers of the regulator

<sup>1</sup> Brett Hetherington and Tony Phillips 2023, *Discussion paper: Gambling harm and the online gambling environment*, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Melbourne.

# ADDRESSING POKIES HARM

There is a clear and strong body of evidence showing that the best way to protect people from the harm caused by pokies, is to implement:

- A registered, universal gambling card that anyone gambling on pokies must use.
- Mandatory precommitments with default loss limits and time limits.
- This system works across all ACT pokies, linked by a central monitoring system.

## PRECOMMITMENT AND LOSS LIMITS

Poker machines are designed to be addictive and they cause significant harm to the ACT community. While reducing pokies numbers is important, we need to prioritise best practice harm reduction measures on the existing pokies to protect people from harm.

The ACT Greens will implement a registered, universal gambling card for anyone using poker machines, as well as mandatory precommitments with default loss limits and time limits.

The Greens propose, as a starting point, to adopt the default loss limits that will be used in Tasmania and which were informed by the research of the Australian Gambling Research Centre: \$5,000 a year, \$500 a month and \$100 a day. A person's precommitment can be stricter than the default limit if they choose, and only increased under a mechanism - to be determined in consultation with experts - that ensures appropriate harm-minimisation. If a

person reaches the loss limit, the card prevents them gambling any further.

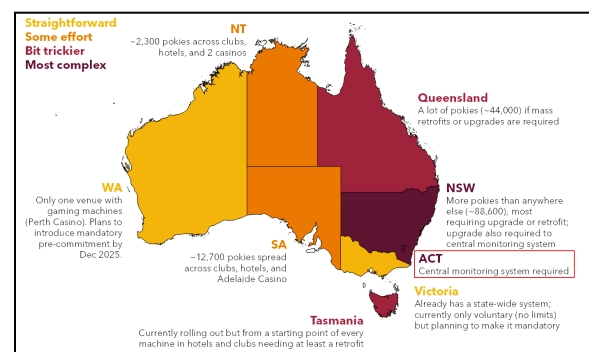
The measures would apply across all ACT poker machines, across all venues - linked by a central monitoring system.

The gambling card would automatically become inactive for 15 minutes every hour of play, causing a mandatory break.

The system would be in place by 2027.

## WHY A CENTRALISED MONITORING SYSTEM (CMS)

A CMS is a system that can link together electronic gaming machines across all venues in Canberra so that they can be centrally controlled and managed. It provides the backbone infrastructure for harm reduction measures. It is a key part of the Greens' pokies harm reduction proposal because it ensures the "universality" of the harm reduction measures, linking all venues and ensuring people cannot "venue hop" to continue gambling and exceed the predetermined loss limits.



Grattan Institute, 2024: *How Australia should prevent gambling harm.*

## EFFECTIVE SELF-EXCLUSION

People sometimes struggle with a gambling dependency and choose to "self-exclude" - meaning they ask to be

refused entry to gambling venues. However, venue staff are currently responsible for enforcing self-exclusions, which is cumbersome and ineffective.

Account-based gambling, with a person's card linked to their identity, will allow for city-wide enforcement of the exclusion registers at the poker machine interface, and without preventing people from going to a club for other reasons like family dinners.

We would also introduce a third-party exclusion pathway for immediate family members impacted by gambling harm, developed with stakeholders, including harm reduction advocates and the Human Rights Commission.

### **WHAT'S THE INVESTMENT?**

Based on preliminary costing work and interstate examples (Tasmania's CMS fees, and Victoria's "YourPlay" fees), a CMS and related harm minimisation measures are expected to cost less than 5% of the \$180-190 million per year of current poker machine net revenue.

The ACT Greens would work with experts to minimise these costs, and work out how they are shared between government and the clubs.

### **TURNING POKIES OFF: 2-10AM**

Evidence shows that a significant proportion of gambling losses, and gambling harm, occurs late at night or early in the morning.

The Greens support reducing the operating hours of poker machines, so that they do not operate between 2am

and 10am every day. This can be further reviewed in 2027.

### **HELPING CLUBS TRANSITION**

The Greens will continue to work with clubs to assist them to diversify away from pokies revenue. We'll support having an independent inquiry by three leaders in harm-reduction, finance and club sector expertise to recommend on what clubs need to continue operating successfully.

It will be essential that future grants are tied to reciprocal commitments to expand harm-reduction tools or reduce machine numbers.

### **REDUCING MACHINE NUMBERS**

The clear advice from experts on harm minimisation is that while it is important to curtail machine numbers, this is less important than having harm minimisation measures like precommitment that are outlined above.

Consistent with the proposal put forward by the Canberra Gambling Reform Alliance, we propose to reduce machines to 2000 over time. This number of machines would make the ACT the best performing Australian jurisdiction in terms of pokies per capita (bar WA, which only has pokies in its casino).

The Greens support a more rapid reduction in pokies numbers should fewer harm reduction measures be adopted.

### **GAMBLING ADVERTISING AND ONLINE GAMBLING**

The ACT Greens support strong Federal action to regulate online gambling, including exploring the introduction of universal, mandatory pre-commitment systems for online gambling; a comprehensive ban on all forms of advertising for online gambling; and an online gambling ombudsman, as well as other recommendations from the Australian Parliament Committee's online gambling inquiry.<sup>2</sup> We will advocate for these reforms and work with the Australian Government to implement them in full.

We will also seek to ban gambling advertising in the ACT to the extent legally possible in the ACT. We would commence by banning gambling ads on TV and Radio, on sports jerseys and at sporting events, based on the law operating in South Australia.

### **BANNING POLITICAL DONATIONS**

The ACT Greens want to keep the big money of harmful industries out of politics, which includes gambling licence-holders. We've seen the extent to which the gambling industry goes to keep people on the pokies, and we need to put a block on that political nexus.

A more detailed policy on reforms to political donations is [on our website](#).

### **SUPPORTING ADVOCATES**

Harm-reduction advocates play a significant role in the ACT community.

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<sup>2</sup> Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Parliament of Australia, *You win some, you lose more: online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm* (Final Report, June 2023)

However, there is currently no organisation funded by ACT Government to advocate on behalf of individuals, families and organisations harmed by the gambling industry.

The Greens want to ensure there is a voice in the community for people who are dealing with gambling harm, and for ongoing expert input into Government gambling policy.

The Greens will provide \$150K annual funding to support a peak gambling harm reduction organisation.

### **FURTHER STRENGTHENING GAMBLING HARM REGULATION**

The Greens will make a range of further improvements to support gambling harm reduction. These include:

- Reviewing and improving the powers of the Gambling and Racing Commission to ensure it: responds to breaches by gambling venues, including by removing pokies licences for predatory practices; improves transparency; and improves responsiveness and efficiency working with complainants and victims.
- Reviewing and strengthening bans on "inducements to gamble" provided by gambling operators (eg: 'free' drinks etc)
- Reviewing the role, powers, and training requirements of Gambling Contact Officers, to ensure they are suitably effective in reducing and responding to gambling harm in venues.

- Changing the language used in legislation, Ministerial titles, and Government communications, to ensure it is non-stigmatising and recognises the seriousness of gambling harm in the community.