

Media release

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Australia and New Zealand aligned in approach to gambling

The final Australian Productivity Commission report on gambling released yesterday shows Australia and New Zealand are aligned in their approaches to gambling.

Problem Gambling Foundation's Chief Executive, Graeme Ramsey, says this comprehensive report lets Australians know the significant harm that is being caused by pokie machines in their country.

"The recommendations are very much in line with the approach New Zealand has adopted," he says.

The report has comprehensively examined all research into gambling and identified that pokie machines are the biggest issue in Australia. It concludes that:

- About four percent of adults play pokie machines weekly or more often. Around 15 percent of this group would be classified as problem gamblers, with around an additional 15 percent experiencing moderate risks.
- Problem gamblers account for 40 percent of the total gaming machine spending. Moderate risk gamblers account for a further significant share.
- While problem gambling prevalence rates for the adult population as a whole have probably fallen in Australia there is no reliable indication of a significant decline in the rate of problem gambling amongst regular pokie players and no evidence that the share of total spending accounted for by problem gamblers has fallen.
- Even under conservative assumptions a sustained 10 percent reduction in the costs associated with problem gambling is estimated to generate benefits to society of around \$450 million a year in 2008/2009 prices.

Graeme Ramsey says pokie machine gambling is the real issue in problem gambling.

"This report which updates the 1999 report by the Commission clearly indicates that there is a major social issue caused by pokie machines in Australia, just as there is in New Zealand," he says.

The Commission recommends a number of measures to address this issue. These include:

- Public health campaigns similar to those run in New Zealand.
- Clear 'health' warnings displayed on pokie machines.
- The introduction of electronic warnings on pokie machines.

- Limiting the size of bets able to be placed by players.

Graeme Ramsey says it is great to see the Australian approach aligning with New Zealand's and building on our experience in the public health and treatment approaches to problem gambling.

"They have clearly identified in the report that a public health approach works. The report also clearly shows that specialist treatment works for those that seek help for gambling problems," he says.

The Australian Productivity Commission report on gambling can be found at:
<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/gambling-2009/report>

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