

## Media release

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### Maori Party Bill to put communities in control of pokies

The Problem Gambling Foundation is delighted the Maori Party's Gambling Harm Reduction Bill submitted for ballot addresses the big issues around problem gambling.

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says the measures proposed in the Bill will strengthen the Gambling Act and bring into focus the devastating effect of pokies on communities.

"The Bill for ballot addresses not only measures relating to harm minimisation, but also ensuring that money from gambling benefits the community and gives communities real power over gambling," he says.

The Bill proposes several changes to the Gambling Act. It will:

- Enable local authorities, in consultation with their communities, to reduce the number, or eliminate pokie machines from areas where they are particularly concentrated.
- Cut out racing and racing stake money as an 'authorised purpose' for pokie grants.
- Require that at least 80 percent of pokie funds generated by gambler losses is returned to charitable organisations in the community it has come from.
- Phase out the distribution of pokie funds through corporate societies or 'pokie trusts' within a year. The responsibility for these distributions will go to special committees of local authorities with a majority of representation from community organisations.
- Make player tracking devices and pre-commit cards a required condition of a pokie machine venue operator's licence.

Graeme Ramsey says it is about time the distribution of pokie funds through trusts came to an end.

"The Bill will place the responsibility for distribution of pokie funds into the hands of local authorities where it should be, and will be modelled on the Creative New Zealand Creative Communities Fund Committees and the former Hillary Commission Local Committees," he says.

"This will ensure accountability and transparency which we do not have through pokie trusts."

Graeme Ramsey says pokies have had a devastating effect on communities and particularly on low income communities.

"Maori and Pasifika are particularly at risk. However the changes proposed under this Bill will benefit all New Zealanders," he says.

The Problem Gambling Foundation says the measures proposed in the Bill are long overdue.

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