

17 June 2010

### **Far North District Council has ignored public opinion about pokies**

The Problem Gambling Foundation says the Far North District Council has not listened to the community when considering the options for their three-yearly Gaming and TAB Venue Policy review.

The council stated in a recent report that their previous policy review in 2007 'attracted in excess of 100 submissions, mainly in favour of greater restriction of pokie machines, indicating a high level of interest amongst the community'.

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says despite the high level of community interest the Council is not considering the best option to restrict the number of pokie machines for the people of the Far North.

"The Council is proposing to cap the number of pokie machines at the national average but the Far North is not an average region. There is a high Maori population and 66% of the population of the Far North live in low socio-economic areas," he says.

The national average stands at one pokie machine for every 156 people aged over 18 but in the Far North there is one pokie machine for every 104 people.

Graeme Ramsey says the concentration of pokie machines in lower socio economic areas is concerning.

"In Kaikohe, a low socio economic area with a high unemployment rate, there is one pokie machine for every 41 people aged over 18 years," he says.

"If you compare that to Kerikeri that has an unemployment rate of 4.6 percent, there is one pokie machine for every 105 people aged over 18 years."

Graeme Ramsey says Maori are two to three times more likely to develop a gambling problem.

"Maori are over-represented in problem gambling statistics, a fact that the Far North District Council has acknowledged in their report," he says.

"The Council needs to do more to keep the number of pokie machines down as the cost to the people of the Far North is too high."

"Nearly \$15.5 million has been lost on pokies over the last 12 months in the Far North, predominantly from communities that can least afford it. 40 percent of the money going into machines comes from people with a gambling

problem. The social cost to the community is huge with problem gambling contributing to poverty and deprivation, crime, domestic violence and mental illness," Graeme Ramsey says.

The Problem Gambling Foundation says the Far North District Council should consider a sinking lid policy so that there can be no new pokie machines or pokie venues and machines can't be moved when a venue shuts.

Graeme Ramsey says a sinking lid policy would be the best outcome for the Far North as it will permanently reduce the number of pokie machines in the Far North District and minimise the harm caused by problem gambling.

Submissions close at 4.30pm on Wednesday 7 July. For further information, or for help with making a submission, visit [www.pgfnz.org.nz/FarNorth](http://www.pgfnz.org.nz/FarNorth).

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