

Media release

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It's time to put people before pokie machines

The Problem Gambling Foundation says it is time to put people before pokie machines and that's exactly what Te Ururoa Flavell's Gambling Harm Reduction Bill proposes.

The bill, commonly referred to as the 'people before pokies bill', is due to have its first reading in Parliament next week.

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says it is time to focus on the people and communities this money is coming from rather than where the money is going.

"Pokie machines are concentrated in our most vulnerable communities and 40% of the revenue from pokie machines comes from problem gamblers," he says.

"Between 70% and 80% of all people seeking help with gambling problems cite pokie machines as their primary mode of gambling."

Graeme Ramsey says the bill takes a fence at the top of the cliff approach rather than just an ambulance at the bottom.

"It will ensure public views are taken into account and give real power to local authorities to keep the number of pokies down or eliminate them completely, particularly in communities where it is justified," he says.

Graeme Ramsey says the bill also proposes that player tracking and smart cards are a required condition of a pokie machine venue operator's license.

"Smart cards are an effective way of giving people control of their gambling by allowing them to set limits on the amount of money and time they spend gambling," he says.

"The bill also puts the onus on venue operators to keep track of each gambler's overall losses and time spent gambling using a player tracking system."

"There are significant issues with problem gambling, crime, sustainability of the current pokie funding system and the economic drain these machines have," Graeme Ramsey says.

The Problem Gambling Foundation believes a review of this situation is overdue and the best way to do this is by rigorous examination of a Parliamentary Select Committee.

"New Zealand needs to re-debate gambling and this bill provides a great basis for this discussion," Graeme Ramsey says.

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