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Submission to the Tasmanian Government's *Gaming Control Amendment (Future Gaming Market) Bill 2021*

The *Gaming Control Amendment (Future Gaming Market) Bill 2021* demonstrates that the Tasmanian Government has no intention of minimising the harm caused to Tasmanians by poker machines. This is despite research that demonstrates poker machines are a dangerous product designed to addict that increase rates of crime, child poverty, domestic violence and suicide.

Instead the Bill proposes tax cuts for Tasmania's casinos, providing a tax rate of almost half the amount that currently applies to poker machines in casinos. The State Government's justification for this decision, which essentially aims to compensate Federal Group for the expiration of the 50-year monopoly on the state's gambling licence, is nonsensical. Federal Group has no inherent right to any licence and consequently there is no justification for compensation for the removal of a licence. Indeed Federal Group has significantly profited from this monopoly and the tax cut will only reduce State Government revenue at a time when Tasmania continues to battle the economic impacts of Covid-19.

Moreover it is dissembling for the State Government to assert that the increase in the tax rate on poker machines in pubs and clubs will offset the loss to state revenue from the casino tax cuts. The reality is that hotels will benefit handsomely from these changes because the value of every hotel with poker machines will skyrocket on account of them owning their own poker machine licence. In other words the fortunes of the hotel sector will be turbo-charged by the Government's changes and that will increase the value of hotels, boost revenue, grow businesses and subsequently increase the harm to Tasmanian communities as poker machine venues become even more dominant in the suburbs. The Government's revenue from the increased hotel tax rate will be nothing compared to the costs of the predictable and devastating harms caused by poker machines.

Poker machines are the leading cause of crime in the community after the illegal drug trade. They are a preventable factor in many suicides. Almost half of all losses on these machines – some 40 per cent - come from people with an addiction to this state-licensed product. And yet this legislation fails to address any of this effectively, instead locking in failure for decades to come.

When a product is proven to be dangerous, governments have a duty to either ban it or impose measures to make it safer. Quite frankly this Bill must be amended to include evidence-based effective player protection measures, and in particular the following:

1. Machines must be programmed for a spin rate of every six seconds, down from the current rate of about every three seconds.
2. Maximum bets must be capped at \$1, down from the current \$5 limit.
3. The average return to machine users must be increased to 90 per cent.
4. Machine-use hours must be reduced in all venues to encourage breaks.
5. Note acceptors must not be allowed in suburban venues and prohibited from future use in Tasmania's casinos.
6. 'Fake near misses' must not be allowed on any Tasmanian machines.
7. 'Losses disguised as wins' must not be allowed on any Tasmanian machines.
8. Tougher penalties must apply to any poker machine venues that break a law, fail to exercise effective duty of care or disregard player exclusion safeguards.

It is disappointing this Bill again demonstrates the State Government's desire to protect the poker machine industry at the expense of the Tasmanian community. If the State Government is serious about protecting Tasmanians from the harmful effect of poker machines, it must include all the player protection measures outlined in this submission.

Yours sincerely



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