

Harm Minimisation Technologies

Consultation Paper and Questions

Introduction

The Minister for Finance has directed the Tasmanian Liquor and Gaming Commission (the Commission), to investigate the extent to which facial recognition technology and a player card gaming system for electronic gaming machines in casinos, hotels, and clubs could minimise gambling harm. The Commission is to provide a report on the outcome of the investigations and recommendations as to the most effective method of implementing these harm minimisation technologies by 30 June 2022.

- Facial recognition technology - would be used for the purpose of alerting the presence of a person entering a premises or gaming area who is potentially registered as an excluded person on the Tasmanian Gaming Exclusion Scheme database.
- Player card gaming - restricted use cards, either physical or digital emulation of a card (eg a digital wallet), with the functionality of or similar to an account, that at a minimum can identify the player, provides cashless gaming and the ability for players to set spend and time limits.

The Commission's investigation includes:

- A scoping study of the use of these technologies in national and international gaming environments.
- Work on the feasibility of the technologies and implementation considerations in a Tasmanian context.
- Stakeholder consultation, through public, targeted and face-to-face consultation.

Purpose of this consultation

This consultation paper seeks to inform debate with a targeted audience of industry and community stakeholders regarding the implementation of these technologies, specifically the extent to which these technologies could minimise gambling harm, and considerations for adoption of these technologies by casinos, hotels and clubs in Tasmania.

Scoping Study Findings

Research on the use of these technologies in national and international gaming environments has been undertaken by an independent consultant. A copy of this report can be found on the Liquor and Gaming website, under Public consultation (<https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/liquor-and-gaming/community-interest/public-consultation/harm-minimisation-technologies>).

Feasibility considerations

Spectrum of harm minimisation measures

In its 1999 report on Australia's gambling industries¹, the Productivity Commission categorised harm minimisation measures as being either:

- a) Informed choice: the ability to make an informed decision on whether to engage in gambling activities;
- b) Consumer control: measures designed to direct individuals and their actions; or
- c) Venue/game restrictions: regulatory limitations placed upon operators and venues as well as technical restrictions on machine and game features.

FRT and player card gaming are considered to be consumer control harm minimisation measures. It could be argued that the *successful implementation* of a consumer control harm minimisation measure should be judged on its accuracy, reliability, availability, and ease of use. However, the *effectiveness* of a consumer control measure is dependent on participation and behaviours, and these are not influenced by the consumer control measure itself.

FRT as a consumer control harm minimisation measure

There is no doubt that modern facial recognition technologies provide recognition of subjects with high degrees of accuracy. FRT requires a database of known images and “recognition” means that a face detected from a live camera stream has matched an image that had previously been recorded in that database of known images. In a gaming setting, FRT is well suited to detecting persons previously identified through a self-exclusion process, or other forms of exclusion (provided photos of the persons are recorded).

It is important to appreciate that FRT is a detection mechanism that can be used as a preventative measure (such as barring entrance to a person) but FRT systems can only raise an alert, not intervene. Effective use of FRT requires human intervention to confirm an individual and to take appropriate action.

The value of FRT as a harm minimisation measure is argued in the research community. Many commentators applaud its value for persons already identified as exhibiting harm, but not as a preventative tool for others. FRT does not offer any predictive capabilities such as monitoring gambling levels or game usage. For this reason, FRT has a narrow window of application on the spectrum of harm minimisation.

There is considerable public discussion of this technology, much of which is focused on central Government biometric databases and the use by law enforcement agencies. There have been widespread privacy complaints. Consent from self-excluded persons may be required for a digital photo to be collected and for that image to be used by FRT systems.

¹ Productivity Commission 1999, Australia's Gambling Industries

In South Australia, gaming reforms were introduced in 2019 requiring installation of FRT systems to prevent barred persons from entering certain gaming venues. Venue FRT systems are integrated with the State barring (self-exclusion) system and by all accounts this process is working well.

Technology considerations

The TGES system in Tasmania could be adapted to provide similar functionality to that operating in South Australia. There would be no need for integration with the proposed Monitoring Operator, as FRT Systems do not require gaming machine data, and responding to facial matches requires in-venue staff in real time.

Venue set-up and installation costs would include:

- Purchase of image capture devices (it is recommended that at least 2 cameras are acquired and installed)
- Purchase of an FRT system
- Potential purchase of 'match alert' devices (eg iPad)
- Installation and commissioning of image capture devices
- Data cabling as required
- Additional power outlets as required

It is also assumed that the TGES online database system is capable of simultaneous connection to a large number of venues and has the ability to respond to multiple system requests for data (ie images and data for excluded persons for a particular venue), subject to enhancement.

Player card gaming as a consumer control harm minimisation measure

Player card gaming is a consumer control measure designed to allow individuals to control their activity at gaming machines.

The simplest form of player card data may be a photograph printed on a card, but in practice, the minimum player card data is an identity number that has a corresponding record in a system database where more complete details of the card holder are held (eg name, address, date of birth, etc.). More capable player cards (such as those with large internal memory) may also store more data than a simple identity number and this may also be updated in real-time based on player card usage.

Generally, player card gaming systems share common features such as player identification (eg card), limit setting, a display interface at a gaming machine, and monitoring of limit progress. However, jurisdictional requirements such as decisions around voluntary/mandatory participation, venue based/statewide limits, anonymous/registered players, and actions to be taken if a limit is reached impact any ultimate technical solution and implementation cost and timing.

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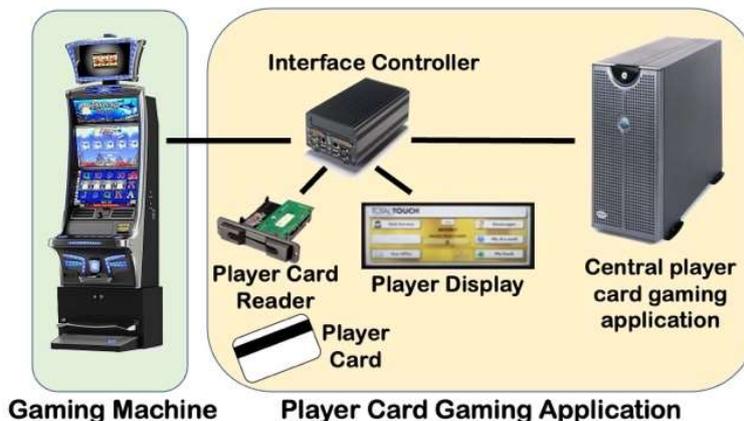
Voluntary participation in pre-commitment (eg the Victorian model) has demonstrated that providing the technical capacity alone does not result in high levels of take-up or participation in player pre-commitment. Participation in player pre-commitment is impacted by consumer awareness, and motivation, the harm minimisation principles of informed choice, consumer control and venue/game restrictions – all of which are matters for Government policy consideration and direction.

A player card gaming system cannot guarantee that a person using a player card is the same registered person associated with that card. (eg someone who may have reached a limit uses a card from someone who has not yet reached a limit). Security measures such as a PIN can offer some level of surety around card usage, but this is not foolproof.

The 2010 Productivity Commission report² presented an optimistic outlook for emerging technologies in new gaming machine protocols and network systems that would provide improved ways of delivering effective harm minimisation. This has not occurred; in fact, no new protocols impacting gaming machine operation have been approved in Australia since the mid-2000s, and no enhancements have been approved for gaming network systems to deliver new functionality or software to a gaming machine.

Technology

The common elements of a PCG system are a player card, player card data, player card reader, player display, interface device and player card gaming applications.



In Tasmania, the operation of a player card gaming system would require access to real-time gaming machine data and thus would necessitate participation and cooperation of the Monitoring Operator.

² Productivity Commission 2010, *Gambling*, Report no. 50, Canberra

A pathway to the implementation of FRT

Whilst the technology components of an FRT system are generally available 'off the shelf', there are many steps to consider and implement prior to the commencement of widespread operation in Tasmania, including:

- a) Regulatory impact;
- b) Commission rules, standards, and guidelines;
- c) Legal considerations in relation to existing exclusions and use of data;
- d) Modification to the TGES; and
- e) The potential need for field trials.

Further work is needed to determine any requirement for amendment to the Act or regulations. The Commission would need to consider the necessity for:

- technical standards for FRT Systems including image resolution, minimum data storage, security and access control, privacy, and data exchange between TGES and venue FRT Systems;
- operational guidelines for venue operators including data security, privacy, installation rules, response/reporting requirements;
- consent of excluded persons for use of their images and data held in the TGES on-line database as control images for a facial recognition in gaming venues in Tasmania; and
- update of existing forms, material and like used in exclusion processes to include acknowledgement that image data will be used in FRT Systems.

The TGES on-line database would require enhancements to facilitate data interchange with FRT Systems in gaming venues prior to any field trials or wide-spread introduction of FRT. This means completion of detailed business requirements and functional specifications, design, implementation, and testing, including an application programming interface for data interchange.

The technology development aspects of FRT implementation, including TGES enhancements could be completed within a 15-to-20-month timeframe.

A pathway to the implementation of a player card gaming system

As with FRT, there are many steps to be addressed prior to the commencement of player card gaming in Tasmania, including:

- a) Regulatory impact including determining jurisdictional settings;
- b) Impact on gaming machines and Electronic Monitoring System (EMS);
- c) Commission rules, standards, and guidelines; and
- d) System design.

Further consideration is required of the impact on gaming machines and the Monitoring Operator's EMS to support the ultimate player card gaming operational settings including:

- a) Capabilities of the current gaming machine communication protocols (eg player messaging, EGM status messaging);

- b) Recommended form of player card;
- c) Commission approval for hardware modifications to EGMs to house a player card reader, player display and interface device; and
- d) Necessary enhancements to a venue EMS host.

The technical aspects of a player card gaming system could be developed within a 24- to 30-month timeframe. The development effort would include detailed business requirements, user experience (eg interfaces, messages, and website), modification of the Central EMS Host and Venue EMS Host software, and certification testing.

Related initiatives in other States

Governments in New South Wales, Victoria, and Western Australia are all examining the introduction of player card gaming.

In New South Wales field trials of digital wallets with pre-commitment capability are expected to commence this year and findings from this work may help to inform the approach in Tasmania.

Consultation questions

The aim of these questions is to understand the costs and benefits of adoption of facial recognition technology and a player card gaming system by casinos, hotels and clubs.

1. In your opinion, what do you see as the costs and benefits of Facial Recognition Technology (FRT)?
2. In your opinion, what do you see as the costs and benefits of player card gaming (PCG)?
3. From an implementation point of view for you as a (venue owner/provider of support services), what should the Commission take into consideration for the introduction of FRT?
4. From an implementation point of view for you as a (venue owner/provider of support services), what should the Commission take into consideration for the introduction of PCG?
5. What features of FRT would be most effective in reducing gambling harm?
6. What features of PCG would be the most effective in reducing gambling harm?
7. Have you any other considerations or feedback from other jurisdictions on these two solutions?