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## Productivity commission report gambling 2010

This investigation report was released on 23 June 2015. Download the report The rapid growth after liberalisation of gambling in the 1990s has given way to more mature industrial growth. Total recorded expenses (losses) in Australia reached just over \$19 billion in 2008-09, or an average of \$1500 per adult as gambled. Gambling is a pleasant pursuit for many Australians. As much as possible, the policy should aim to preserve the benefits, while also targeting measures against gamblers who face significant risk or harm. While precision is impossible, various government surveys suggest that the number of Australians categorised as problem gamblers varies around 115,000, with people categorised as at moderate risk stretching around 280,000. It is common to report prevalence as a proportion of the adult population, but this can be misleading for political purposes, given that most people do not gamble regularly or on forms of gambling that cause significant difficulties. The risk of gambling addiction is low for people who only play lotteries and scratches, but rises steeply with the frequency of gambling on table games, bets and especially gaming machines. Most political interests center on people who regularly play on pokies. About 600,000 Australians (4 per cent of the adult population) play at least weekly. While survey results vary, around 15 percent of these regular players (95,000) are problem gamblers. And their share of total spending on machines is estimated to vary around 40 percent. The significant social cost of gambling addiction - estimated to be at least \$4.7 billion a year - means that even policy measures with modest effect to reduce harm will often be worthwhile. Over the past decade, state and territory governments have put in place a number of regulations and other measures to reduce harm to gamblers. Some have been useful, but some have had little effect, and some have imposed unnecessary burdens on the industry. A more coherent and effective political approach is needed, with targeted policies that can effectively address the high frequency of problems experienced by those who play gaming machines regularly. Recreational players usually play at low intensity. But if machines are played at high intensity, it's easy to lose \$1,500 or more in an hour. The amount of money that players can feed into machines at any given time should be limited to \$20 (currently up to \$10,000). There is strong reason to lower the bet limit to around \$1 per push of a button, instead of the current \$5-10. When adjusting costs and technology are taken into account, this can be fully implemented within six years. Shutdown periods for gaming in hotels and clubs are too short and mostly occur at the wrong time. They should start earlier and be of longer duration. There should be a progressive move over the next six years to full pre-commitment systems that allow players to set limits on their losses. Under a full system, it would be safe standard with players able to choose other limits (including no limit). In the meantime, a partial system of non-binding limits will continue to provide benefits, providing lessons to implement full pre-commitment. Better warnings and other information in venues would help. But school-based information programs can have perverse effects and should not be expanded without review. Moving ATMs away from the gaming floor and introducing a \$250 daily cash withdrawal limit in gaming sites would help some gamblers. But the net benefits of removing ATMs entirely from venues are uncertain. Effective injury minimisation measures for gaming machines will inevitably reduce industry revenue, as problem gamblers lose so much. However, this will not happen overnight and the reductions may be offset by other market developments. Counselling services for gambling addiction have worked well in general. But there is a need for increased training and better service coordination. Online gaming by Australians seems to have grown rapidly despite the illegality of domestic supply. Gamblers seeking the benefits it offers are subject to further risks and damages from offshore websites that can be avoided under carefully regulated domestic regulations. Liberalizing the domestic supply of online poker card games, accompanied by appropriate damage minimisation measures, would test whether managed liberalization should be extended to all online game forms. Recently passed race field legislation has been the main way jurisdictions have addressed the dual reform challenges of preventing the freeride of wagering operators and facilitating a competitive neutral task force. Should racial field legislation fail in either respect over the next three years, a national funding model should be established, based on federal law and with an independent pricing body. The arguments for retaining the exclusive right of the TABs to offer off-course retail sales products are not convincing. Governments have improved their policy-making and regulations with respect to gambling, but significant governance flaws remain in most jurisdictions, including insufficient transparency, regulatory independence and coordination. There is a special need to improve the arrangements for national research. Ralph Lattimore (Assistant Commissioner) 02 6240 3242 Preliminary Front Page, Copyright, TransitionAI letter, Terms of reference, Content and abbreviations Overview - including key points Recommendations and findings Chapter 1 Introduction 1.1 What has the Commission been asked to do? 1.2 Request processes 1.3 How is this report organised? 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