



# FAMILY FIRST



Steve Fielding Family First Senator for Victoria

**Senator Steve Fielding  
Family First Leader**

**Second Reading Speech**

## **Poker Machine Harm Minimisation Bill 2008**

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Governments in Australia have ignored problem gamblers for too long, which is why Family First is introducing the *Poker Machine Harm Minimisation Bill 2008*.

The Productivity Commission estimated that 293,000 people have a significant gambling problem in Australia.

A paper published this year in *International Gambling Studies* stated that more than 50 per cent of regular poker machine users are problem gamblers or at risk of becoming problem gamblers.

The close link between poker machines and problem gambling is shown by the fact that about 85 per cent of problem gamblers use poker machines.

The study also estimated problem or at-risk gamblers account for about 53 per cent of the money spent in Victoria on poker machines in hotels and clubs in 2005-06.

Why is this allowed to continue? One of the key reasons is that state and territory governments depend on poker machine taxes to prop up their budgets.

Poker machines are addictive for players, but they are also addictive for state and territory governments.

State government revenue from poker machines and Keno in 2006-07 was almost \$3 billion. Gambling addicted state governments are incapable of weaning themselves off poker machine taxes.

Unless there is Federal intervention the policy paralysis at the state level will continue. The states have shown they are incapable of kicking their addiction to pokies. That is why Federal intervention is necessary.

Action is needed, especially when we see the reported comments of then chief executive of pokies giant Tattersalls, Duncan Fischer, who, in response to concerns about problem gambling, said he intended to "screw the problem gamblers" for as long as he could.

Groups with a significant financial stake in the pokies industry have made claims that Family First is led by an "anti-gaming zealot" and that this legislation is part of some so-called "new wowserism". If being a wowser means making sure that poker machines do not destroy people's lives, Family First is happy to live with that.

So far, much of the approach of state governments and poker machine operators has been to wait and see who develops a gambling problem, then try to help them. Why not take a more proactive approach and minimise the harm of pokies by changing the amount and rate of money that flows through poker machines?

There is evidence that the harm of poker machines can be greatly reduced by a number of simple measures, so Family First is taking action to change those things that encourage pokies addiction.

Research into gambling shows that targeted changes can cut rates of excessive gambling and that cutting rates of excessive gambling is a very important part of addressing problem gambling and allowing people to play the pokies with reduced harm.

Family First's Bill will set out a number of harm minimisation measures.

It will limit the amount of money gamblers can lose and slow down the addictive nature of poker machines by:

- banning multiple line betting and free spins;
- mandating a 5 second delay between spins;
- limiting ATM withdrawals in gambling venues to \$100 a day; and,
- limiting bank note acceptors to denominations of not more than \$20, to a maximum total of \$100.

For cash bets on poker machines:

- bets will be limited to \$1 a spin; and,
- payout prizes will be limited to a maximum of \$1,000.

For those poker machine players who wish to play higher risk poker machines, they can use machines which accept a pre-commitment smart card with a maximum fortnightly monetary credit of \$1,000, which allow:

- Bets over \$1 and up to \$5 a spin; and,
- Payout prizes limited to a maximum of \$2,000.

The legislation uses the powers available to the Federal Government. It uses the corporations power to force poker machine manufacturers and suppliers to modify their machines. It also uses the banking power to deal with automatic teller machines.

In addition to this Bill, Family First's *Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008*, introduced earlier this year, deals with the problem of the accessibility of poker machines. It would over time see pokies out of pubs and clubs and have them restricted to casinos and racetracks, which are dedicated gambling venues.

Family First is determined to ensure that Australia's problem gamblers are not ignored and that poker machines are as safe as possible to help stop the misery that the Productivity Commission's gambling inquiry found of suicides, marriage breakdowns and financial hardship.