



The Coalition's Policy to Help Problem Gamblers

August 2013

Key Points

The Coalition believes in meaningful and measureable support for problem gamblers.

Although most people gamble responsibly, gambling is a major problem for some Australians and effective measures are required to assist these people.

The Coalition supports a national voluntary pre-commitment programme for electronic gaming machines as part of a broader plan to assist problem gamblers. We will work with clubs and gaming venues on a realistic timetable for the introduction of venue-based voluntary pre-commitment.

We will put a stop to Labor's trial of mandatory pre-commitment in the Australian Capital Territory and abolish the National Supervisory Levy.

The Coalition will establish an industry advisory council, comprised of representatives of clubs and gaming venues, that will meet quarterly with the responsible Minister. The industry advisory council's priority will be to develop a detailed plan for the roll-out of appropriately targeted counselling and support services for problem gamblers at gaming venues.

We will encourage venues to partner with counselling services to assist patrons. The industry advisory council will also work to develop self-help and brief treatment options to assist problem gamblers.

The Coalition will work with the States and Territories to develop more effective self-exclusion programmes, enabling problem gamblers to restrict their access to gambling.

The community is rightly concerned about the growth of online gambling. The Coalition does not support proposals by the Rudd-Gillard Government to relax online gambling regulations – proposals that could turn every smart phone into a legal, handheld casino.

We will also legislate to control gambling advertising if current self-imposed industry regulations prove ineffective.

Responsible gambling is all about people gambling within their means. Extending lines of credit to gamblers runs contrary to this principle and the Coalition will legislate to prohibit the practice.

Labor has walked away from meaningful gambling reform, opting instead to create further levels of bureaucracy that divert much needed resources away from frontline services for problem gamblers. The Coalition will eliminate this bureaucracy and restore investment to measures that meaningfully assist problem gamblers.



Introduction

The Coalition understands that gambling is a big problem for some Australians. For many others, it is a recreational activity that they enjoy within personal limits that they set for themselves.

The vast majority of Australians gamble responsibly. We recognise that gambling is actually an entertainment industry that employs over 150,000 people across Australia.¹ It is also a key offering within our broader hospitality, tourism and accommodation sectors.

Although the Productivity Commission has assessed that problem gambling prevalence rates have fallen,² effective measures are required to address, mitigate and prevent problem gambling.

Support for the small percentage of the population who suffer gambling problems must be offered across the spectrum of gambling products, from gaming machines to online betting.

Effective policies are those that will help the small, but important, percentage of the population who suffer gambling problems and gaming addictions.

It is also critical that any effective policy response to problem gambling should cover all types of gambling and not merely poker machines, or we risk the obvious outcome where problem gamblers substitute one type of gambling for another.

Fundamentally, any worthwhile policy approach must demonstrably be capable of working and must deliver real, meaningful and measurable outcomes for problem gamblers across all forms of gambling.

The Rudd-Gillard Government has failed to ensure adequate support for problem gamblers and those at risk. Labor's efforts have focussed on an unworkable 'licence to play' system of mandatory pre-commitment for electronic gaming machines, which it ultimately failed to deliver.

Rather than police online gambling, the Rudd-Gillard Government has proposed loosening the rules applying to internet gambling that would expose Australians to further risks.

The Commonwealth has a role in developing nationally consistent minimum standards in the provision of support for problem gamblers that are administered by the States and Territories. The Coalition supports a national policy approach that is capable of delivering real support for problem gamblers.

¹ Productivity Commission (2010) *Gambling Inquiry*, Report No. 50, p. 2.14

² Productivity Commission (2010) *Gambling Inquiry*, Report No. 50, p. 48



The Plan

1. A National Voluntary Pre-Commitment Programme

The Coalition does not support mandatory pre-commitment because it will not effectively tackle problem gambling. Gambling reforms need to ensure that problem gambling is prevented and problem gamblers helped. Mandatory pre-commitment is highly unlikely to achieve either of these aims.

Another major flaw of the Rudd-Gillard Government's mandatory pre-commitment proposal is that it was thrust onto the national agenda without adequate consultation with State and Territory governments which have the primary jurisdictional responsibility for gambling, as well as receipt of the revenue stream.

The Coalition supports voluntary pre-commitment programme for electronic gaming machines adopted in concert with other measures, such as targeted counselling services and an effective self-exclusion scheme.

The Rudd-Gillard Government's desire to introduce 'licence to play' gaming machines through mandatory pre-commitment simply won't work.

The Coalition will put a stop to the trial of mandatory pre-commitment in the Australian Capital Territory and instead devote much needed resources to programmes that will actually help problem gamblers and those at risk.

The National Supervisory Levy will also be abolished by the Coalition.

We will work with gaming machine manufacturers and operators, together with the States and Territories, to develop a realistic timetable for ensuring electronic gaming machines are capable of being networked to venue-based voluntary pre-commitment systems.

The Coalition supports a national voluntary pre-commitment programme for electronic gaming machines as part of a broader plan to assist problem gamblers. We will work with clubs and gaming venues on a realistic timetable for the introduction of venue-based voluntary pre-commitment.



2. More Counselling and Support Services and Better Research

The Coalition believes that more and better targeted counselling and support services should be made available for problem gamblers.

The Productivity Commission found that “the majority of problem gamblers satisfactorily manage their gambling following counselling / treatment.”³ The Productivity Commission also recognised the effectiveness of self-help and brief treatment options in assisting self-recovery of problem gamblers.⁴

The Coalition will establish an industry advisory council, comprised of representatives of clubs and gaming venues, that will meet quarterly with the responsible Minister. The industry advisory council’s priority will be to develop a detailed plan for the roll-out of adequate and appropriately targeted counselling and support services for problem gamblers at gaming venues.

We will encourage venues to partner with counselling services to assist patrons. The industry advisory council will also work to develop self-help and brief treatment options to assist problem gamblers. The Coalition will require gaming loyalty programme operators to send information about these services to their members bi-annually.

The Coalition will work with the gambling industry to encourage gaming venues to enter into formal agreements with recognised counselling services to provide patrons who require assistance with access to counselling on demand. Under these agreements, counselling service providers could also assist venue staff in recognising problem gambling behaviours and provide advice on how to deal with patrons demonstrating such behaviours.

We will also work with State and Territory governments to develop effective self-help and treatment options to be advertised in gaming venues.

The Rudd-Gillard Government’s national gambling regulator represents unnecessary duplication of a function already satisfactorily undertaken by the States and Territories. The Coalition will shut down the national gambling regulator and divert funding earmarked for it to the States and Territories to fund additional counselling and support services for problem gamblers.

³ Productivity Commission (2010) *Gambling Inquiry*, Report No. 50, p.34

⁴ Productivity Commission (2010) *Gambling Inquiry*, Report No. 50, p.49



3. Effective 'Self-Exclusion' Programmes

The Coalition will work with the States and Territories, the gambling industry and counselling services to develop effective self-exclusion programmes that will enable problem gamblers to restrict their access to gambling.

A number of successful self-exclusion programmes currently operate in a range of gambling environments, and we will work with key stakeholders to develop a minimum operating standard for such schemes.

Stakeholders will be consulted on the feasibility of extending requests for exclusion to third parties, such as family members, subject to privacy considerations.

The Coalition will investigate whether financial institutions might assist in restricting those on self-exclusion programmes from accessing cash at gambling venues.

We will also develop an ATM self-exclusion programme for gaming venues through the industry advisory council and restore State and Territory control/jurisdiction over the placement of ATMs and withdrawal limits.

4. A Stronger Online Gambling Environment

The Coalition does not support proposals by the Rudd-Gillard Government to relax online gambling regulation.

There are ongoing community concerns that the current laws prohibiting certain forms of online gambling, such as online poker and casino games, are not adequately enforced. Gambling sites illegally offered to Australians do not comply with strict probity requirements and harm minimisation requirements and pose a significant risk to users.

The Coalition will investigate methods of strengthening the enforcement of the *Interactive Gambling Act* and ensuring Australians are protected from illegal online gambling operators.

The Coalition is concerned that the increasing popularity of sports betting has brought with it an increase in gambling advertising.

We always prefer self-regulation over government regulations, but there are some social problems that, from time to time, demand government attention. We welcome the fact that the industry is moving to ensure that we don't have gambling promotion posing as commentary at sporting events. But they must do more than talk the talk, they have also got to walk the walk.

We will legislate to control gambling advertising if current self-imposed industry regulations prove ineffective.



The Choice

Labor's approach to gambling policy is chaotic, ill-considered and contradictory.

On the one hand, the Rudd-Gillard Government pursued a scheme to introduce draconian, unworkable mandatory pre-commitment for gaming machines; on the other, it planned to expose Australians to unprecedented access to online gambling by removing protections enshrined in the Howard Government's *Interactive Gambling Act*.

Labor's review of the *Interactive Gambling Act* proposed removing restrictions on online poker – a proposal that would have turned every smart phone in Australia into a legal, handheld casino.

Labor has walked away from meaningful gambling reform, opting instead to create further levels of bureaucracy that divert much needed resources away from frontline help for problem gamblers.

The Coalition believes in real, meaningful and measurable support for problem gamblers, rather than legislative gestures.

It was the Coalition (under then Leader of the Opposition, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson) that called on the Rudd Government to consider the issue of problem gambling by commissioning a comprehensive review of Australia's gambling industry from the Productivity Commission.

Since the report was delivered in February 2010, the Rudd-Gillard Government has dithered on all recommendations other than those dealing with poker machines. The development of a government response was first referred to COAG in March 2008, but not progressed further until the negotiations surrounding the establishment of the Gillard minority government forced the issue back onto Labor's policy agenda.

The Productivity Commission looked at the economic, social, workforce, tourism, online and harm-related aspects of Australia's gambling industry. However, the Labor Government has neglected the opportunity to work with industry and the states on a whole-of-industry (as opposed to "pokies-only") strategy to tackle problem gambling that also recognises the legitimate right of adults to gamble responsibly.

The Coalition supports a national voluntary pre-commitment programme rather than Labor's unworkable mandatory scheme.

We will amend the *National Gambling Reform Act* to put an end to Labor's bureaucracy and invest resources in measures proven to support problem gamblers, such as counselling.



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