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POKIE LAW TIMETABLE NOT FAIR ON CLUBS & PUBS

While Clubs Australia remains supportive of voluntary pre-commitment technology being installed on poker machines, the Federal Government's proposed timetable for its introduction doesn't provide sufficient time for the majority of clubs to comply with the 2016 deadline.

Under the terms of the legislation introduced into parliament yesterday, and only sighted by clubs at that time, all 198,000 poker machines in Australia must include technology that offers the gambler the option of pre-setting a limit which if reached, locks them out for a period of 24 hours.

Given the majority of clubs update their poker machines on average once every ten years, the law means that in 2016 many clubs will be forced to spend millions of dollars replacing machines that they had not budgeted to replace for many years to come.

Executive Director of Clubs Australia Anthony Ball said the timeline of 4 years is substantially less than that proposed by the Productivity Commission for the roll-out of voluntary pre-commitment.

"Clubs have long been supportive of voluntary pre-commitment technology. But that support can't be at the expense of clubs that have no way of replacing their poker machines at a cost of \$25,000 each in less than 4 years time when they had budgeted to do so over ten.

"A fairer method would be to require all new poker machines be equipped with voluntary pre-commitment but to allow all remaining machines to be phased out of their natural life cycle.

"The Productivity Commission in its support for voluntary pre-commitment proposed a timeline of 6 years. While this is itself too short for many clubs, it would be a sufficient time for the majority of clubs to fast track the replacement of their poker machines.

"I am aware of several clubs that have already spoken with their banks about borrowing so they can meet the Federal Government's 2016 deadline.

"Not surprisingly, they have been met with grim replies.

"Clubs and hotels employ more than 250,000 people across the country. We expect no favours from our politicians but we do expect legislation that is fair and reasonable. This legislation is neither.

"The Government's legislation should be submitted to a regulatory impact statement as the Government's own Office of Best Practice Regulation requires. This would identify the clear shortcomings of the legislation including the insufficient time for clubs to replace their poker machines and the complete lack of evidence supporting a \$250 daily cash withdrawal limit.

"Only through sitting down and talking with industry will the Government learn of the substantial cost it is forcing on clubs and hotels across the country as well as the total absurdity of a 4 year replacement deadline on a product that is replaced every 10," Anthony Ball said.

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