

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

1 June – 3 June 2010

Question: BET 274

Topic: Removal of poker machines

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Eggleston asked:

- a) Does the Productivity Commission still believe that poker machines should be removed from hotels, pubs and clubs?
- b) Is the inquiry into online gambling likely to be influenced by this report?

Answer:

- a) The Government released the Productivity Commission's inquiry report into Gambling on 23 June 2010.

The Commission's view in the final report was that *if* Australian governments had been aware of the problems posed by gaming machines *at the time decisions about liberalisation were proposed*, then a model of liberalisation based on destination gambling (one or a few centrally located venues, as in the Western Australian model) may well have been appropriate. For that reason, the Commission supported maintenance of destination gambling in Western Australia. (p. 14.5).

However, in respect of other jurisdictions, the decision to liberalise has already been made, and in the Commission's view, it would be 'difficult for any government to completely, and suddenly, revert to a destination model of access to gaming machines in jurisdictions outside of Western Australia' (p. 14.6). While the Commission did not recommend a reversion to destination gambling, much of the report is aimed at making machines in community venues safer for their customers to play.

Nevertheless, the Commission commented (p. 14.20) that in respect of expansions of gaming accessibility, a variety of measures would be consistent with a precautionary approach to addressing harm:

- regulators to be satisfied that there would be no net detriment from introducing machines into an area, with particularly close attention to vulnerable communities
- regulators to advise local councils about all applications for gaming machines in their communities and a capacity for such councils to provide input into decisions to approve them. This reflects the closer dialogue of councils with local communities than is generally possible for state governments.

The Commission also noted that another aspect of accessibility — the ability to play gaming machines late into the night in community venues — should be

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curbed through mandatory shutdowns (recommendation 14.1). A longer shutdown commencing at night, provides patrons with a sustained break in play and, given evidence about playing behaviours by time of play, targets problem gamblers well.

- b) The Senate Community Affairs Committee instituted an inquiry into the prevalence of interactive and online gambling in Australia on 24 June 2010. The Commission's gambling inquiry has a chapter devoted to online gambling (chapter 15), which, as well as covering important policy matters in relation to this area of gambling, also includes a detailed discussion of the prevalence of online gambling. This may be useful to the Committee.