

Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce

MEDIA RELEASE

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CHURCHES SAY POKER MACHINE REFORM WILL CONTINUE

Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce Chair, Rev Tim Costello said he has no doubt the Government will continue its poker machine reforms, despite the changes made in the House of Representatives today.

Speaking shortly after Liberal Party member Peter Slipper replaced the ALP's Harry Jenkins as Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rev Costello said both Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Minister for Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin are women of their word who would not cave in to pressure from the poker machine industry.

In an unprecedented move, a non government member now presides over the House of Representatives.

Reverend Costello said that by releasing Harry Jenkins from the job, he was able to join his ALP colleagues on the backbench, delivering more certainty in terms of numbers to the fragile minority Government.

"With stronger numbers in the House, contentious legislation like the Government's proposed poker machine reforms stands a better chance of getting up," Rev Costello said.

"The Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce will continue its advocacy on this important issue in the interests of some of the most vulnerable Australians, their families, and the communities in which they live.

"A majority of Australians support the proposed reforms and I am confident this Government will not walk away from the difficult task.

"They've successfully negotiated a number of complex pieces of legislation this year and I have no reason to think they will not pursue their commitment to poker machine reform with equal vigour.

"Poker machine gambling is a problem for around a third of regular players. Around 95,000 players lose on average up to \$21,000 a year. Some lose a lot more. Australians spend \$12 billion a year on poker machines and forty percent of clubs revenue comes from people addicted to poker machines. This is an ethically indefensible business model and would not be tolerated in any other industry.

"It's time to put simple measures in place that limit the damage caused by poker machines.

"People living with or recovering from poker machine addiction are often too ashamed to speak out. They are not skilled advocates and statistically come from fairly disadvantaged backgrounds.

"I am confident our decision makers will hold their nerve in the face of the industry's aggressive self interested campaign and deliver for those Australians caught in the grip of, or at risk of addiction.

"The Taskforce looks forward to the tabling of the legislation in the new year, and to contributing to the debate in the lead up to the Federal Budget in May next year.

Members of the Australian Churches Gambling Taskforce include the heads of Australian Christian Churches and the heads of their social services agencies nationally. Established earlier this year the Taskforce is united by a commitment to reduce the harms caused by poker machine gambling.

Contact: Judith Tokley 0408 824 306 / 02 6249 6717

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