

Norwegians outline gambling solutions

Representatives from Norway's gambling industry have told an Australian parliamentary committee the introduction of maximum daily limits and player identification cards has helped to slash problem gambling in the Scandinavian nation.

In 2007 all slot gaming machines in Norway were removed and replaced in 2009 by networked interactive video terminals with loss limits of €50 per day or €275 per month, operated by personal identification cards preventing players from exceeding limits by changing venues or machines.

Speaking to the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, Norsk Tipping senior adviser Bjørn Helge Hoffmann said the new system has allowed the government to control gambling losses and monitor problem gambling behaviour.

"That system we launched was a ground-breaking system worldwide," Mr Hoffmann said. "We used our player card to identify the players. In Norway, 55 per cent of the adult population have this player card. For all types of lotteries and games, they use the player card to register to play.

"The new machine, the new VLT, is based on a PC and has a touch screen, and is connected to a central network. That means that we have the ability to upload different limits on the machines. Since it is a central network, they can also monitor the machines and the turnover."

The Norwegian Ministry of Culture admitted the 2007 ban on slot machines led to the disappearance of an entire industry and 1,500 people may also have lost their jobs, but social benefits were considered to outweigh employment issues.

The government-owned Norsk Tipping has provided gambling services

in Norway since reforms in 2007 brought the industry under a state-controlled monopoly. Operating under the Ministry of Culture, it supplies and controls the gambling industry, which includes lottery, bingo, game machines and sports betting.

The company said that before the reforms there was nothing stopping gamblers from losing \$1,000 an hour playing the old slot machines.

"The new regime stated that in the game you have to control the net loss of each player. That is why they use the player card," said Lars Martin Ottesen, Norsk Tipping VLT games manager.

"We keep track of your net loss and your maximum net loss is €275 per month and €50 per day. The machine is disabled once you reach your maximum, so you cannot transfer any more funds to your terminal and you cannot play anymore."

In the Gambling Reform Committee's latest report, committee chair Andrew Wilkie (Denison, Tas) and Senators John Madigan (Vic), Richard Di Natale (Vic) and Nick Xenophon (SA) made additional comments comparing the Norwegian example to proposals in Australia to introduce mandatory pre-commitment, where gamblers would set a maximum limit they could lose before they start playing.

"While the environments and systems differ to those in Australia, it is clear that setting limits in Norway has reduced problem gambling and gambling harm," the four committee members stated in the report.

"Limits in Norway have been set by the government, whereas with mandatory pre-commitment the intention is to provide that tool to the gambler to set their own limit."

Responding to a question from Mr Wilkie, Mr Hoffmann said there

had been little if any community hostility or resistance to the reforms.

"No, not at all, except for some principal debate whether slot machines should be allowed or not," he said. "Since people have seen the machines there has been no protest against them as far as I know. The organisations that help people with problem gambling are all very happy with the solutions that we have introduced into the market."

Usage figures confirm the limits have been well accepted, with only 21 per cent of players reaching the government mandated limits each month.

Norsk Tipping also said the introduction of machines with limits had not introduced any new problems.

"We do not think there is very much of a black market," Mr Hoffmann said. "We cannot say that we have seen any huge movement to online gaming." •

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