



## MEDIA RELEASE

### FULL POKIES ‘PRE-COMMITMENT SYSTEMS’ NEEDED

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Australians need the protection of full ‘pre-commitment systems’ to reduce the financial and social harm from poker machines, according to a discussion paper released today by the Australian Gambling Research Centre.

Eight per cent of the Australian adult population – or 1.4million people – experience some degree of gambling problem. Of these almost half are moderate or high risk gamblers, with poker machines the most harmful form of gambling in Australia.

Australian Gambling Research Centre (AGRC) Manager, Dr Anna Thomas said to be the most effective there needs to be a universal pre-commitment system for poker machines that operates across all jurisdictions with binding loss limits.

“Full pre-commitment systems require gamblers to set a binding limit on the amount of money they wish to spend before a gambling session starts,” Dr Thomas said.

“This can help people to manage how much money they spend and can reduce the harm for gamblers who are already chronically over-spending.

“The evidence from trials here and overseas indicates that binding, universal systems provide the best protection from harm. However, these systems are not yet available in Australia.”

Currently full pre-commitment systems operate in Norway and Sweden and partial systems have been trialled in venues in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland. In 2015, Victoria became the first state to adopt a partial, voluntary pre-commitment system.

AGRC Research Fellow, Dr Angela Rintoul said poker machine users often underestimate their gambling expenditure by substantial amounts and commonly report spending more than they intended.

“Poker machines are designed using increasingly sophisticated structural characteristics, such as ‘losses disguised as wins’ and ‘near misses’ that encourage users to spend more money and time on them.” Dr Rintoul said.

“In Australia, unlike most other countries, gaming machines are highly accessible and available for use in local hotels and clubs for up to 20 hours a day.

“Pre-commitment can provide a way for gamblers to set and track monetary and time limits to prevent unintended, excessive pokies use.

“However, partial systems that don’t require all gamblers to use the system may be ineffective in supporting gamblers to stick to pre-determined limits.

“Experiences internationally and in Australia have demonstrated that the uptake of voluntary or partial pre-commitment systems is low.

“A full, universal system – where an individual’s spending on all machines is captured – is the most useful in ensuring gamblers are prevented from exceeding their limits.

“Evidence demonstrates that pre-commitment features help gamblers reduce their expenditure.



“A South Australian trial of pre-commitment measures in 70 venues reported high risk gamblers reduced their spending by 56 per cent.”

Dr Rintoul said pre-commitment systems must be intuitive and simple to navigate to encourage engagement with all features of the system as well as protecting consumers’ privacy.

“It is also important not to link pre-commitment systems to venue operator loyalty programs,” she said. “This can send conflicting messages to consumers who on the one hand are being rewarded for increasing their spending while also being offered a tool to contain their spending.

“Despite this obvious conflict, a number of systems have adopted this model, including the partial pre-commitment system in Victoria.”

Access the [\*Pre-commitment systems for electronic gambling machines – Preventing harm and improving consumer protection\*](#) discussion paper No. 9.

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*The Australian Gambling Research Centre is based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies; the Australian Government's key research body in the area of family wellbeing. AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them. Go to: [aifs.gov.au](http://aifs.gov.au)*