



Victorian Local Governance Association

MEDIA RELEASE

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Major parties must make pokies and online gambling safe

A coalition of 60 local governments, as well as 15 community health, advocacy and other community organisations concerned about problem gambling, today launched their 2010 State Election Platform. This included a call for all major parties to make pokies and online gambling safe, and to return decision-making on pokies applications to local communities.

VLGA President Cr Heinz Kreutz said that it was time for debates and programs addressing pokie and online gambling to change.

“ In media coverage and community discussions, local governments hear disturbing information about the costs of homelessness, debt, bankruptcy, poverty and cost-of-living pressures, family breakdown and violence, mental illness, and crime. But debates about pokie and online gambling losses are stuck in a time-warp. Industry strenuously defends free markets. They argue that the impacts of gambling are individual rather than community problems. If we look objectively at the impacts of problem gambling, it is impossible to separate the individual costs from family and community impacts.”

Cr Kreutz noted that local governments and communities stand ready to work constructively with the next State Government, and we are not only ‘whingeing from the sidelines’. He noted the City of Moreland’s award-winning gambling storyboard for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, which was launched this morning.

“ This resource, which Moreland will make available to all local governments and community organisations, along with their fight to set differential rates to gaming venues, should be applauded as positive steps to address the harms associated with pokies.

The VLGA’s Local Government Working Group on Gambling (LGGWG) Chair Felicity Leahy, said most major parties contesting the State Election are far too silent about any concrete policies to reduce the harms associated with unsafe gambling products – especially pokies and online gambling.

Ms Leahy was speaking at the launch of LGGWG’s *2010 State Election Platform: addressing the local impacts of gambling and supporting communities to have their say* (see attached Platform, Background and Launch Speech).

VLGA President Cr Heinz Kreutz said that the LGGWG’s 18 ‘calls to action’ represented months of discussions of its advisory group.

“ Our ‘calls to action’ represent real measures to shift debates and programs away from a focus on individual rights and free markets, to a focus on consumer protection, public health and product safety. They also focus on planning and capacity measures needed to give local communities and governments a greater say in responding to applications, and addressing the local impacts of problem gambling.

LGGWG’s 18 ‘calls to action’ cover 3 key areas, including:

1. Allowing communities more say in gambling applications in their local area, and
2. Building local and state government capacities to properly consider and address the social and economic impacts of pokies, and
3. Making pokie and online gambling safer.

“ Local communities across Victoria are reacting to the fact that the cards appear to be stacked against a proper social and economic analysis of applications. We are therefore asking all major parties to implement the recommendations of the Auditor General’s *Taking Action On Problem Gambling Report*, Cr Kreutz said.

Ms Leahy added the truth about pokie and online gambling has to be told. Rather than stigmatising problem gamblers as individuals, as a community we need to acknowledge the science behind these forms of gambling.

“ The State Government’s own literature states that each poker machine has a computer program. Pokies are programmed so that, in the end, the machine will always win. Nothing you do changes this truth. For example, when playing a game like Black Rhinos, to have a 50 per cent chance of getting five rhinos, playing one line at a time, it would take 6.7 million button presses and cost nearly \$330,000, Ms Leahy observed.

“ Local governments and communities are also deeply concerned that online gamblers can stay in the privacy of their own lounge or study, and lose their home without ever leaving it. There is also significant community concern that the pervasive and cynical advertising tactics of the online gambling industry in Australia is only feeding this. How many ads did we see during the AFL telecasts? Cynical overkill is what we are hearing from many in the community, “ Ms Leahy concluded.

[More information: see attached Platform, Background & Launch Speech.](#)
[Interviews and photo opportunities: contact Cr Heinz Kreutz 0438 006 656.](#)