

# Media Release

**JENNY MACKLIN MP**

**Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services  
and Indigenous Affairs**

**BILL SHORTEN MP**

**Assistant Treasurer**

## **Release of legal advice on gambling reform**

The Australian Government today released legal advice on the Commonwealth's power to legislate for important reforms to address problem gambling.

The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, agreed with the Independent Member for Denison, Andrew Wilkie, to commission this legal advice. The Prime Minister and Mr Wilkie also agreed that the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform would be informed of the legal advice.

The Australian Government is committed to working with the states and territories and industry to introduce key reforms which address the harm from problem gambling, including a full pre-commitment scheme for poker machines.

State and territory governments are responsible for the regulation of the gambling industry, except for online gambling.

However, problem gambling is a serious issue and the Australian Government believes more must be done to help problem gamblers and their families, particularly by reducing the harm caused by poker machines.

Research shows that three-quarters of severe problem gamblers have problems with poker machines.

Problem gambling can destroy families and ruin lives.

Problem gamblers spend an average of \$21,000 a year on gambling. That's a lot of money by anyone's standards – money that isn't being spent on food, bills or the family mortgage.

We have written to Mr Wilkie, as Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, to our state and territory colleagues on the Council of Australian Governments Select Council on Gambling Reform, and to Professor Peter Shergold AC, Chair of the Ministerial Expert Advisory Group on Gambling Reform, to provide them with the legal advice.

The advice from the Australian Government Solicitor confirms there are a range of constitutional heads of power available to the Australian Government, including corporations, trade and commerce, telecommunications, banking, currency, taxation and territories powers.

While this advice identifies the legislative options available to the Commonwealth, the Australian Government remains committed to reaching an agreement with the states and territories to progress these important reforms.

Gambling is a legitimate industry and a valued form of entertainment for many Australians. We will work with industry to implement these reforms in a staged, evidence-based way. We have established the Ministerial Expert Advisory Group on Gambling, chaired by Professor Peter Shergold AC, to seek advice from the industry, academics and gambling support services on how to best implement the reforms.

The Productivity Commission recommended the Commonwealth intervene if the states and territories do not agree to implement gambling reforms Australia wide.

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Media Contact: Keely Bell 0417 297 157