



Singleton joins clubs in \$20m pokie push

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THE HOTEL baron and high-profile gambler John Singleton has signed on to a \$20 million advertising push by the clubs against the federal government's poker machine reforms.

The Gillard government is compelled to implement the problem gambling reforms to retain the support of the Tasmanian independent Andrew Wilkie.

But Mr Singleton's advertising agency Banjo is developing a campaign to focus on recreational gamblers' fears of having any government keeping tabs on their betting habits.

The Banjo contract, signed this week, is for a \$20 million campaign over two years, starting with online video and newspaper ads next month.

It will then move to radio, TV, billboards and pub coasters.

News of the campaign comes as Access Economics this week began interviewing the hotel industry for a government commissioned cost-benefit analysis on the impact of the reforms.

The clubs industry opposes a mandatory scheme for players to register before playing poker machines, using smartcards and self-selected gambling limits.

Clubs Australia argues that

gambling revenue will plummet as recreational gamblers are deterred from playing.

Mr Singleton and a consortium of investors including the investment banker Mark Carnegie, the retail magnate Gerry Harvey and the former Qantas chief executive Geoff Dixon have purchased a string of high-profile Sydney pubs including Kinselas, the Bellevue Hotel and Peakhurst Inn.

Mr Singleton also jointly owns the Hotel Steyne in Manly.

He had a strong association with the Labor government under Bob Hawke during the '80s and early '90s, but last year developed ads attacking Labor on health during the election campaign, and earlier joined the push against the mining tax with a campaign for a Perth client.

Forty-five federal politicians have confirmed they will attend the launch of the clubs campaign at a dinner in Canberra on March 23, which will be addressed by the chief executive of the National Rugby League, David Gallop, and the RSL president, Rear-Admiral Ken Doolan.

Access Economics has told hotel representatives in private meetings this week that evidence on the impact of the reforms is "quite patchy".

The economic modelling firm conceded it had been "forced to think a bit outside the square to fill the gaps".

"The government's belated decision to perform a cost benefit analysis on mandatory pre-commitment is back to front," a spokesman for Clubs NSW said.

"This sort of analysis should have been done before the government announced it was introducing the technology.

"If that had been done then almost certainly the Prime Minister would never have been conned by Andrew Wilkie into making a commitment that will devastate the club industry."

Mr Wilkie said there was "nothing secret" about the Access modelling, which had formed part of his agreement with Ms Gillard.

The Families Minister, Jenny Macklin, said yesterday: "The government's position is clear and has not changed."

It is understood Access Economics has also been asked to look at where gamblers would spend money if they weren't spending it on poker machines, including clothing, rent and food, and the reduced costs to states on counselling services and work productivity.