



AUSTRALIAN HOTELS ASSOCIATION

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MEDIA RELEASE

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INDEPENDENT SENATORS MUST NOT ABUSE THEIR POSITION BY CULTIVATING A NEW WOWSERISM

The AHA today called on Family First Senator Steve Fielding to base future policy proposal on up-to-date evidence.

The call comes as the AHA lodged its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Poker Machine Harm Reduction Tax (Administration) Bill 2008.

"The AHA represents 5000 members nationwide and we strongly urge the Senate Community Affairs Committee to take full account of the possible effects of the bill," said AHA Chief Executive Officer Bill Healey.

"The proposed measures cannot be justified on economic and social policy grounds.

"The removal of electronic gaming machines (EGMs) from hotels as proposed under the current bill would have devastating consequences for the financial viability of hotels, particularly those in regional communities and put at risk the jobs of many of the more than 81,000 people employed in the sector.

"There would be negative flow-on effects for hotel suppliers and their employees and for State revenues.

"It will significantly reduce the enjoyment of the overwhelming majority of EGM players who are not problem gamblers."

The current review does not have any specific terms of reference. It merely refers to a number of assertions by Senator Fielding, the proponent of the bill.

These assertions are based on selective references to the 1999 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling.

Mr Healey said the Senator failed to take account of any of the changes in the use of EGMs that occurred since 1999.

The bill also ignores evidence suggesting that the best way to deal with problem gambling is through education and harm minimisation initiatives.

These reduce the potential for individuals to become problem gamblers and provide long-term self exclusions, counselling and support services when a person develops a problem.

The Rudd Labor Government is committed to an evidence-based policy development culture within the Australian Public Service. This culture must be supported by all sides of the political spectrum.

The AHA is committed to research, consultation and policy development to arrive at a joint industry and government solution to the issue of problem gambling.

Senator Fielding and his new Parliamentary colleague Nick Xenophon will have significant power when the Senate forms next month.

"There's a new wowserism in the air and it's pretty ugly to behold," Mr Healey said.

"Things will only get worse when South Australia's media-hungry Nick Xenophon takes up his seat in the Senate in July."

**For further information:
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If you would like a copy of the AHA's submission, please email Bill Healey – healey@aha.org.au

The Australian Hotels Association (AHA) is the pre-eminent tourism and hospitality industry organisation in Australia. It has around 5000 members operating general and accommodation hotels. It has a National Office and Branches in each State and Territory. It also has a discrete Branch to represent the interests of its Accommodation members that covers four and five-star properties operated by the major chains.