



AUSTRALIAN HOTELS ASSOCIATION

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MEDIA RELEASE

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COAG DECISION ON PROBLEM GAMBLING A SENSIBLE WAY FORWARD

The Australian Hotels Association has welcomed the decision at yesterday's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting to ask the Commonwealth Treasurer to arrange for the Productivity Commission to update its 1999 inquiry into problem gambling.

The decision by the Prime Minister and his State and Territory colleagues recognises that any policy decisions in this area must be based on up-to-date facts.

AHA Chief Executive Officer, Bill Healey said: "The review will provide an opportunity to establish the current level of problem gambling in the community, assess the benefits of the many harm minimisation strategies that have been introduced over the past decade and identify further ways that the industry can assist the small percentage of our patrons who have a problem. Recreational gambling is one of a suite of products and services that our members provide to their customers.

"Hotels across the country provide wagering services and are allowed a limited number of electronic gaming machines (EGMs). The income this provides contributes to the ongoing financial viability of hotels, particularly those in regional communities, and helps underwrite the jobs of the 90,000 people who are employed in hotels.

"Having a flutter on the races or playing an EGM also provides enjoyment for the overwhelming majority of hotel patrons who are not problem gamblers."

Many of the critics of EGMs make assertions based on selective references to the 1999 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling.

"Yesterday's decision is a further example of the Rudd Labor Government's commitment to the creation of an evidence-based policy development culture within the Australian Public Service," Mr Healey said. "It is pleasing that the States and Territories share a similar view. It is time for this culture to 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. The AHA has asked the Government to establish a National Responsible Gaming Advisory Council to ensure that all decisions on gambling can be made based on reliable research that establishes the true extent of problem gaming and the best way to address identified problems.

"We look forward to contributing to the review and working with Government and community agencies to implement any evidenced-based reforms that may emerge from the process," Mr Healey said.

For further information:

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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.