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MEDIA RELEASE

TED BAILLIEU'S GRAB FOR A HEADLINE BACKFIRES

Like opposition leaders before him, Ted Baillieu is attempting to grab headlines and embarrass the government by making sweeping statements about gaming machines. It is all about Ted and the government – it has absolutely nothing to do with helping problem gamblers, and at last the media seems to be seeing these tactics for what they are.

The reality is that numbers don't count. As both the Age and the Herald Sun point out this morning – the universal Australian experience shows that the number of machines bears no relationship to the amount spent on gaming or the incidence of problem gambling – in particular the reduction in egm numbers in South Australia and capped areas in Victoria has had **NO** effect. All the research shows that numbers are irrelevant. But, it seems the Liberals are determined to continue to ignore reality and the scientific data about assisting problem gamblers. Instead the Liberals are relying on Ted's ideas of how to attract attention.

The Liberal's policy "reaffirm[s] the 50/50 distribution of poker machines between hotels and clubs" despite the recent study by La Trobe University's AIPC that found "hotels are much more likely to be high risk venues than clubs".

The Clubs' community focus is generally ignored by political parties. But Clubs don't fund politics, they fund community sports, aged care services, ethnic support, cultural events and general connectivity.

The Liberal Policy calls for "extension of the administration of the current Self-Exclusion Program from Australian Hotels Association members to all hotels and clubs" – the program has never been restricted to AHA members. Despite copious briefings on the current Victorian self-exclusion program, the Liberals still don't know that the current program is unique in that it covers **ALL** clubs and pubs in the state, and has done so since its inception in 1997.

The Liberals call for a ban on ATMs in gaming rooms and a daily withdrawal limit - measures which are already in place! There is a virtual ban on 24 hour venues, and a requirement for venue staff to be trained in responsible service. There is nothing new in these initiatives.

The Liberals do themselves a disservice by making these fundamental mistakes, because they cloud the other positive aspects of the policy. ClubsVIC applauds the concentration on research, more funding for counselling and education, better targeted advertising and direct benefit for the communities.

The best way to ensure that the income from pokies benefits the communities from which it is derived is through clubs. The clubs are owned and operated for and by the community. They are not privately owned, they are community assets and the income is directly applied to providing the state with the social and sporting infrastructure that keeps us all involved and healthy.

ClubsVIC is happy to work with any political party to assist in addressing problem gambling and ensuring that the people of Victoria get the best returns from gaming income.

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