

# LETTER TO GLADYS BEREJKLIAN ABOUT THE RE-OPENING OF NSW PUBS AND CLUBS WHILE KEEPING POKER MACHINES SHUT

Letter to Gladys Berejiklian about the re-opening of NSW pubs and clubs while keeping poker machines shut

**27 April 2020**

Dear Premier,

I write this open letter to ask you to reconsider the role of poker machines in NSW post COVID-19.

The Alliance is completely behind the recent move by the ACT Government to support community clubs in surrendering poker machines in exchange for \$15,000 per machine that must go towards retaining and supporting staff. That is the sort of visionary policy making that we need now more than ever, and I implore you to consider a similar move for the sake of the health of the residents of NSW.

In the less than five weeks since poker machines were shut down around Australia, it is estimated that more than \$1 billion has been saved from pouring into poker machines in pubs and clubs. That figure jumps to \$1.5 billion if you count losses from poker machines and other gambling in casinos.

Based on the NSW poker machine data released last month, the losses on poker machines in NSW clubs alone in 2019 could finance your government's entire COVID-19 support package, estimated at \$3.3 billion whereas \$3.968 billion was lost in NSW clubs.

Behind those astronomical economic savings, there are thousands of human stories of lives changed for the better thanks to poker machines being shuttered. These tales range from the simple story of a mother who was able to buy her children Easter eggs because for the first time in many years those machines of addiction could not drain her every cent, through to another mother who is no longer worrying about her son dying by suicide due to his pokies addiction.

We fully support the reopening of NSW pubs and clubs as soon as it is safe to do so. Clubs and pubs are the lifeblood of our communities, but should be safe places for people to gather, have a meal, catch up with friends and family, and see live entertainment. Imagine if we could come out of this crisis with a return to community entertainment and a move away from poker machines. All of those musicians and comedians and other artists currently out of work would have stages on which to perform -- they could help our communities heal as we come together again.

Even the pubs that operate poker machines will find that they contribute much more to local economies without poker machines. **Research suggests** it is far more productive to invest in hospitality than gambling, where we know for every \$1 million spent on food and meals 20 jobs are created. Contrast that with a mere three jobs for the same amount lost to gambling.

You have had to make some extremely difficult decisions this year and have demonstrated some tremendous leadership through the bushfires and this current COVID-19 crisis. As devastating as both of these crises have been, they have presented us with opportunities to rebuild healthier, more sustainable and connected communities.

Poker machines do not bring people together, they drive them apart.

Let's take this extraordinary opportunity to rebuild NSW with a stronger and healthier pubs and clubs sector, free from harm and machines of addiction. The coming generations will have to bear the burden of the debt we have necessarily taken on to get through this year's crises. Let's at least give them the opportunity to use their local pubs and clubs without exposure to gambling, just as they no longer have to be exposed to smoking. The community needs a positive to come out of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

**Rev Tim Costello**

Chief Advocate, Alliance for Gambling Reform