

Gordon Moody Association response to the Triennial Review of gaming machine stake and prize limits

April 8 2013

As a charity providing residential treatment for problem gamblers we have the following comments to make. We have only responded to those questions on which we believe we can offer useful information and have not commented on questions of which we do not have direct experience.

Question 13: The government is calling for evidence on the following points:

a) Does the overall stake and prize limit for B2 machines, in particular the very wide range of staking behaviour that a £100 stake allows, give rise to or encourage a particular risk of harm to people who cannot manage their gambling behaviour effectively?

b) If so, in what way?

Whilst we have no direct evidence that the overall stake and prize limit gives rise to or encourages a particular risk of harm we have observed amongst some of our client group that these machines provide the player with the possibility of winning a lot of money very quickly, thus feeding into the illusion that potentially this could be a quick fix or way out of their problems. The spins/repetition of play is so quick that it does not facilitate the opportunity for the compulsive player to utilise any positive internal thought processing that could result in a modicum of control or a more reasoned decision base.

c) Who stakes where, what are the proportions, what is the average stake?

d) What characteristics or behaviours might distinguish between high spending players and those who are really at risk?

The behaviours which our client group report are of erratic behaviour that comes with chasing losses and the stress they are experiencing because of the losses. They may speed up both mentally and physically so will display agitation or the inability to be still for any length of time. They may be more prone to making stupid bets, in turn leading to increased agitation as there will be more of a risk involved in their gamble as they know they can't afford it and the consequences of what they are doing begins to register.

e) If there is evidence to support a reduction in the stake and/or prize limits for B2 machines, what would an appropriate level to achieve the most proportionate balance between risk of harm and responsible enjoyment of this form of gambling?

We have no evidence to support such a reduction.

f) What impact would this have in terms of risks to problem gambling?

People prone to problem gambling are likely to find any opportunities to gamble which will provide them with fast response, are easy to access and offer the possibility of winning large amounts of money. In theory a reduction in the stake and/or prize limits may mean that some problem gamblers are less likely to get into a financial mess as quickly therefore would not be as likely to get into chasing mode as quickly and the debt that inevitably comes with that. However it is unlikely to reduce the overall number of problem gamblers.

g) What impact (positive and negative) would there be in terms of high street betting shops?

Question 14: a) Are there other harm mitigation measures that might offer a better targeted and more effective response to evidence of harm than reductions in stake and/or prize for B2 machines?

Increased awareness amongst staff of the signs of problem gambling and a willingness to intervene, signpost support and exclude people from playing when loss chasing becomes apparent. Provide a private space within the betting shop where such conversations can take place.

b) If so, what is the evidence for this and how would it be implemented?

Discussions with our clients and also with betting shop staff

c) Are there any other options that should be considered?

Consider introducing time limits for play or maximum number of spins per play

3.59 As discussed under Package 3, the government does not think there is sufficient evidence to support an increase in the prize limit to £1,000, especially so soon after changes to the maximum stake limit and premises entitlements were introduced in 2011 (the effects of which are still to be assessed).

3.60 The government therefore proposes to retain the £500 maximum prize limit.

Question 15: Do you agree with the government's proposal to retain the current maximum stake and prize limits on category B3 gaming machines? If not, why not?

We do not offer an opinion on this.