THE SKY IS THE LIMIT FOR PROBLEM GAMBLERS

The announcement that the operators of the Darwin casino, SKYCITY Darwin PTY Ltd, will be expanding its gaming operations as a result of a new 20 year licence deal with the Martin Government should be matched by a commitment from the Territory Government to increase funding to curb problem gambling.

“Gaming is a legitimate business that brings great pleasure to many punters but it also has a dark side that destroys lives and tears families apart,” says Richard Lim, Acting Shadow Minister for Licensing.

“Only a relatively small percentage of gamblers become addicted to the past time but the damage they wreak upon those around them can be devastating.

“Families lose their homes, businesses are destroyed and otherwise law abiding individuals often resort to criminal acts in the downward spiral that accompanies a gambling addiction.

“With increased government revenue from gambling taxes comes increased government responsibility to reduce the impact of problem gambling.

“Gambling taxes have become increasingly lucrative for the Territory Government.

“Last year has Treasury received $58 million dollars from Gambling Taxes. This is an increase of $10 million dollars from the previous year and $20 million dollars more than their take in 2003.

“Yet the Government’s annual contribution to support services for problem gamblers is a measly half a million dollars, or about 0.9% of what they took in revenue last year.

“Three gambling amelioration grants were paid worth $502,843 (these funds are for programs for problem gamblers) and $110,274 was paid to the Charles Darwin University for Gambling Research.

“Further the Community Benefit Fund, which funds many good causes, received just $1.71 million. (This fund makes small grants to sporting and community groups and is based upon a 10% levy received from taxes from Pokies).

“It is time for the Government to put more money towards services for people who develop problems with gambling addictions.

“It is not acceptable to rake in the revenue from gambling and pay lip service to the social cost of gambling.

“It’s time for the commitment of cold hard cash to match the rhetoric.”

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