

Media release

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Convention centre at what cost to Auckland?

While the Problem Gambling Foundation applauds the building of a convention centre in the heart of Auckland, it is concerned about the social impact of increasing the number of pokie machines and gambling tables at SkyCity Casino.

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says the SkyCity Casino already has 1,647 pokie machines.

"We know how dangerous these machines are and how much harm they can cause our communities. Why would we want even more of them?" he says.

Although it has not been disclosed how many additional pokie machines there will be at SkyCity, Graeme Ramsey says even a few machines increases the chances of people developing gambling problems.

"A recent Australia and New Zealand meta-study has found that there is an increase of problem gambling by nearly one new person per each new machine and we know that every problem gambler impacts between seven and 17 other people," he says.

"Problem gamblers account for 40 percent of the total revenue through gambling machines.

"We are very concerned about the implications of this and the social cost to our society."

The Problem Gambling Foundation says it is concerned about potential changes to gambling regulations and legislation but is pleased that reportedly the Government has ruled some areas out of the discussion, such as reducing the age of entry to casinos, allowing SkyCity an internet gambling licence or additional casino licences.

Graeme Ramsey agrees Auckland needs an international-sized convention centre to boost the tourism and business sector but disagrees that it should be funded by gambling.

"It is well reported that casinos are havens for crime, loan sharking and drug dealing. It was only recently that drug dealers reportedly spent nearly \$20 million at SkyCity laundering the money through pokie machines. In addition we have seen other social issues such as children abandoned in vehicles. Do we really want to potentially increase this kind of activity in our city?"

"We should be clear about the impact of expanding the casino and increasing the number of pokie machines. The hardest hit will be problem gamblers and their families," Graeme Ramsey says.

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