PUBLIC

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SESSIONAL COMMITTEE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION A MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART, ON FRIDAY 16 OCTOBER 2026.

INQUIRY INTO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO GOVERNMENT POLICY ON POKER MACHINE HARM MINIMISATION.

The committee met at 11 a.m.

CHAIR (Ms O'Connor) - Good morning. Treasurer, welcome to today's hearing of the Legislative Council Sessional Committee inquiring into recent developments relating to government policy on poker machine harm minimisation. At the table here we have Simon Scott, who's helping us as secretariat; Meg Webb, Independent member for Nelson; myself, Cassy O'Connor, Greens member for Hobart; and Clare Glade-Wright, Independent member for Huon. We also have Ali Scott down at the end of the table there helping out.

Could you please state both your names and the capacity in which you're appearing before the committee?

Mr ABETZ - Eric Abetz, as the Treasurer, and next to me is Jonathon Root, who I understand is deputy secretary, Revenue and Regulatory Services Division.

CHAIR - Can I confirm you've both received and read the information for witnesses guide sent to you by the committee secretary?

Mr ABETZ - I think witnesses do - I think I am exempt. I know it.

CHAIR - You are, although you are a witness, but yes.

Mr ABETZ - I will be telling the truth.

CHAIR - And Jonathon?

Mr ROOT - I am familiar with that material, thank you.

CHAIR - All the evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, allowing individuals to speak with freedom, without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of parliament. I need to remind you that any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such a privilege.

This hearing is public, which means members of the public and media may be present. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available. The hearing is also being broadcast. Should you wish for some or all of your evidence to be heard in private, you need to make that request to the committee, and the committee will consider your request.

Jonathon, the committee is taking sworn evidence, so we need you to take the statutory declaration in front of you.

Mr JONATHON ROOT, DEPUTY SECRETARY, REVENUE AND REGULATORY SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you. We'll take a 10-minute break at 12.30 p.m. but, other than that, you are with us for some time today. Treasurer, do you wish to make a short opening statement?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, if I may, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to appear. The issue of poker machines goes back quite some time. As you would be aware, the parliament has resolved to allow poker machines. I was around very early in those days, albeit not in the state parliament. Just out of interest, it was my view that poker machines ought be in RSLs and sports clubs only. That was my personal view, given that clubs often have a greater capacity to look after their members, et cetera. For whatever reason, and we can't change history, we now have what we have, and it's with that that we are dealing. The Tasmanian parliament has allowed for poker machines in pubs, clubs and the casino. While we may want them banned from pubs and clubs or, indeed, altogether, they remain a lawful form of entertainment. As a result, people have made significant investment decisions based on the legislation which passed the parliament.

Tasmania has the lowest density of electronic gaming machines of any state that allows gambling outside casinos. Tasmania has the lowest spend per quarter on EGMs and the lowest prevalence of problem gambling. We have, on the other hand, heard the personal stories of problem gamblers and the impact on both the individual and those around them. When I say 'we have heard', I suspect in our role as parliamentarians, as opposed to heard in this actual committee, albeit I understand there has been such evidence provided. The impact can be devastating. The lived experience of those who have a gambling addiction or have been impacted by a loved one's gambling addiction cannot and should not be dismissed. The Tasmanian government remains committed to reducing the harm caused by poker machines.

I have come to this portfolio with a perspective of harm minimisation and seeking to protect the most vulnerable among us as my first concern. It is a balancing act between supporting Tasmanians who need help with their gambling behaviour and respecting an individual's choice and right to their own agency. This is what our harm minimisation package seeks to achieve. Most importantly, the package seeks to protect the problem gamblers from themselves, for example, by allowing immediate exclusion. It is currently a cumbersome process for someone to self-exclude and may take weeks to be implemented, if the person follows through at all. The time between any feelings of remorse and self-exclusion may be long enough that an individual doesn't go through with it. These changes address that issue. This is a critical element of the reform and will be strengthened by facial recognition technology in venues to support the individual's compliance with the exclusion.

We are also increasing the mandatory closure hours from four to seven, a move which has been welcomed by Anglicare. The commission chair stated in her testimony before you, it is the late-night gambling or possibly, more correctly, very early-morning gambling, which is considered the most dangerous because there is usually alcohol involved, and the research there is much stronger around it. This is harm minimisation in anyone's book, and we are providing this benefit now.

Additionally, allowing venues to host an ATM onsite fitted with facial recognition technology will provide far stricter controls around access to cash than the current EFTPOS

system. This was again acknowledged by the commission chair. Our harm minimisation package should be judged against the existing system, not against the proposed player gaming card, which has been put on hold subject to a national approach to it. The reality is the operational complexities of the proposed card-based system, for example, the need to create a centralised banking system, would have delayed implementation and increased costs significantly. As a small jurisdiction, we need to leverage the experience and resources of other larger jurisdictions. But neither I nor this government are content to just wait it out. Instead, we are taking a practical approach by introducing real harm minimisation measures which give help for those Tasmanians who need it.

CHAIR - Thank you, Treasurer. I might just kick off the questions here. It would be good to explore with you how we got here, because we've gone from having a framework announced through the mandatory precommitment card, which would have been nation-leading, which on the evidence would have reduced the risk of harm caused by gambling, to a framework which has been described by Rev Chris Jones from Anglicare as having minuscule harm minimisation effect. Are you able to take us through the government's thinking when it changed from an ethical mandatory precommitment card process to a framework which experts in this field regard as having very modest harm minimisation effect?

Mr ABETZ - First of all, I would say that I would invite everybody to judge the reforms in the ministerial direction of myself against the current system as it exists. I think if you do the compare and contrast with that, you will see a substantial improvement. That said, a lot of people I think are seeking to judge - and your question seems to indicate that, that the precommitment card and what we've done as being the two touchpoints, whereas the touchpoint, in fact, ought to be what we have in existence now. That said, as you would be aware, I got elected in 2024. After that election, if I recall, it was minister Street that became - and look, I have a timeline, which if you'll allow me -

CHAIR - Yes, that's good if you could. And also any interactions that you or members of the Cabinet had with the Tasmanian Hospitality Association, Hospitality Tasmania, given that the framework that's in place now has effectively the endorsement of Hospitality Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - Mr Street became the minister after the 2024 election. Then we had, in November 2024, the government announced that implementation of the mandatory player card gaming system would be deferred and that a broader package of harm minimisations would be developed. So, that became the policy in -

Ms WEBB - There was a missing step there, I think.

Mr ABETZ - Sorry?

CHAIR - The missing step was, what we're trying to establish here is how the government formulated a position that moved away from national best practice in harm minimisation to a framework that has the endorsement of the hospitality industry but has been judged quite harshly by the community sector.

Mr ABETZ - Well, they're your words.

CHAIR - It's just a statement of fact.

Mr ABETZ - The hospitality sector, in their submission, indicated that they weren't over the moon about these changes, and some of the community organisations have been willing to acknowledge that even if it's minuscule, they are improvements on what is currently in existence. The Premier, as I understand it, at the time wrote to all his colleagues around the country to ascertain whether there was an appetite amongst them for a national approach. And it would be fair to say - and if I need to correct the record I will, but I am pretty sure I can say that there was a lack of interest by his first minister colleagues around Australia. As a result, the government at the time determined that it mightn't be the right time. So, our policy still is to pursue a precommitment card when/if the rest of Australia puts a scheme together.

CHAIR - I think you've sort of avoided the question, because what we're trying to establish here is the interaction between the newly re-elected government that you're a part of and Hospitality Tasmania, because the government that you're a part of went to the 2024 state election with a policy for a mandatory precommitment card to reduce the harm caused by poker machines. Profound harm. We're trying to understand here the interactions with Hospitality Tasmania in the development of the framework that you're here to speak to today.

Mr ABETZ - At the 2024 election, I was a lowly candidate, and I was not part of the government and decision-making up to that point -

CHAIR - But you were straight after the election.

Mr ABETZ - I was then elected, absolutely. And the Premier and the then minister for Finance, minister Street, made certain announcements.

CHAIR - That were endorsed by Cabinet.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, endorsed by Cabinet. And Cabinet solidarity, as you would know, being a former Cabinet minister, applies, and that is what transpired.

CHAIR - Okay. Rev Tim Costello, who came before us from the Alliance for Gambling Reform a couple of days ago, has described the framework that's in place now as a total ethical fail. What's your response to that?

Mr ABETZ - Rev Costello, like his brother Peter Costello, are exceptionally good with their advocacy skills and have a great capacity to use colourful language and capacity to grab the headlines. That said -

CHAIR - Are you saying what he said is not reasonable?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I had a discussion with Rev Costello about these changes. I fully understand his position, which is that he wanted the precommitment card. He's bitterly disappointed that it's not being pursued. I can understand that. But when I came into the portfolio, it was already apparent that the precommitment card had been put on hold and the commission had been asked to stop work on it, I think by my predecessor, Mr Barnett. I can understand that, but if you go through - and I'm happy to go through each item, for example, extending -

CHAIR - We'll get to that.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but if you have a look at each item, with respect, I find it very difficult to understand Rev Costello's assessment, who, as I suspect like so many others, is doing the comparison between the precommitment card and what we are seeking to implement, as opposed to the existing situation and framework, and what we are implementing.

Ms WEBB - Or the protection we could provide people who are being hurt.

CHAIR - Treasurer, when was the last time you met with Steve Old?

Mr ABETZ - That I couldn't tell you but -

CHAIR - Are you sure?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. But do I meet with him on a fairly regular basis? Yes, of course I do, and he's one of these -

CHAIR - You haven't met with him recently?

Mr ABETZ - No, I haven't. Well, it depends what you mean by 'recently'.

CHAIR - Have you had a coffee with him recently?

Mr ABETZ - My diaries are disclosed, so any of those meetings will be disclosed and on the public record. But I don't want to get into semantics whether a week, a fortnight, a month or two months is 'recent' or not. It's fully disclosed.

Ms WEBB - In the first instance, I'd like to make a factual correction of you, if I may, Treasurer, both to the things you've written in your submission but also the things you've stated in your opening today.

Tasmania does not, in fact, have the lowest density of EGMs of any state permitting them outside of casino environments. We have the second-least. Victoria has less than us. Victoria has 5.2 EGMs per thousand adults. Tasmania has around eight per thousand adults. It's a shame you can't be confident fully in the factual information you're being provided, but that's a small correction for you before we start.

In terms of the suite of measures, I'm interested to understand the development of this suite of measures, particularly because you put a lot of emphasis on them as a suite. You've made different comments about this in the public domain about how these were arrived at, and there are some descriptive things in the submission made to this committee that I'd like to understand better against some of the things that you've put on the parliamentary and public record previously. For example, previously in parliament you have specifically said - and indeed you had to say it a couple of times because you had to correct yourself the first time. When you corrected yourself, you said:

> I indicated that I had personally consulted with three organisations prior to the Cabinet decision.

It was only, in fact, two: Anglicare and Hospitality Tasmania. And the commissioner was consulted afterwards. So, that was your correction indicating two organisations consulted prior to the Cabinet decision on this suite of measures.

Mr ABETZ - I'm sure you've never misspoken, Ms Webb. And what did I do?

Ms WEBB - No, no, I'm not taking an issue.

Mr ABETZ - I immediately corrected the record once I became aware of it.

Ms WEBB - I am taking no issue with your correction.

Mr ABETZ - Well, you are, because you're trying to put it on the public record to make it look as though I'm not across the brief.

Ms WEBB - No, I'm actually going to seek some information as to whether you might need to correct your correction of the record further. That's what I'm seeking to do here, Treasurer, so if I finish my question, we might get to that bit.

Having said that in your correction in parliament, what we've now heard, having had hearings with both those two groups, Anglicare and Hospitality Tasmania, is that Anglicare had a meeting with you 10 days before the January 2023 announcement of these measures. I don't know where the Cabinet decision lay in the timeline of things. You might be able to clarify that. Again, that wouldn't be breaching anything other than to clarify a particular date, or even a broad date, that the Cabinet decision you reference in your parliamentary remarks occurred, because Anglicare met on these measures with you on 10 January, they said. Sorry, 10 days before they were announced. So, I'm wondering, did the Cabinet decision occur between that meeting with Anglicare and then the announcement on the 23rd? You could confirm that, potentially.

Hospitality Tasmania, when we asked them, were not able to identify any meeting on this suite of measures with you prior to the January 2023 announcement. They identified to us that they hadn't met with you on this suite of measures. So, I'm wondering whether the fact that you, in parliament, said that prior to the Cabinet decision you'd met with Anglicare and Hospitality Tasmania required further clarification or correction?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I don't know who the witnesses were in front of you, but I did meet with stakeholders in relation to these -

Ms WEBB - It could be helpful, then, for you to provide us with a blow by blow on these measures, who was consulted when and perhaps position the Cabinet decision within that timeline, so that we can understand whether those consultations occurred prior to Cabinet decisions.

Mr ABETZ - I would need to take that on notice and work out the diaries et cetera just to make sure that the information is exact.

Ms WEBB - We would like it to be accurate, for sure. It would be good to clarify. With a few different things in the public domain at the moment it gets a bit confusing. Thank you

for taking that on notice. That will be useful. Can I keep asking about the development of the measures?

CHAIR - Yes, of course.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. In the submission that you made to us, Treasurer, you speak about work being done, getting informed by advice from a wide range of sources for these measures. And you talk about Treasury undertaking work to investigate potential reforms to provide advice to government on the options for broader harm minimisation packages. Then you reference a trip to South Australia in 2024. That work by Treasury, I'm just trying to understand the development timeline of this suite of measures and when the policy work was done on them.

Mr ABETZ - It started with minister Barnett when he announced that the playing card would be put on hold and that there would be developed another suite of measures. That was all part and parcel. I then became the minister and kept working on a suite of measures.

Ms WEBB - So, the policy work that fed into these measures was done under minister Barnett?

Mr ABETZ - Started under minister Barnett and kept on with myself.

Ms WEBB - Other than the trip to South Australia which is mentioned that occurred in late 2024, or perhaps early 2025, further policy work was done by Treasury. I presume the Liquor and Gaming branch of Treasury. Would that be correct?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms WEBB - On this suite of measures?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. There was consultation between my office and Treasury. The exact dates, et cetera, I don't know. And then when I had a draft, a ministerial direction, I am assuming it was forwarded to Treasury for, if you like, fact-checking and other things to make sure that it was in an appropriate form to go forward.

Ms WEBB - Would the ministerial direction have come after the January announcement this year, the development of that?

Mr ABETZ - The draft ministerial direction.

Ms WEBB - Okay, so that was developed prior to the January announcement of the measures in the public domain, was it? Because you didn't release the ministerial direction on 23 January. That came later.

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms WEBB - But that was developed prior to the announcement in January, was it?

Mr ABETZ - It was being developed. With these things, that's an iterative process that goes for quite some time and gets refined as well.

Ms WEBB - I'm just trying to tease out where things got refined. After the trip to South Australia in December 2024 and where you say in your submission to us:

> Findings from these discussions informed Treasury's assessment of available policy options and advice provided to government regarding potential harm minimisation reforms, although not all options were accepted by government.

Obviously, a piece of work was provided subsequent to the South Australia trip. When was that piece of work provided to government?

Mr ABETZ - That I don't know, but if that trip was when you say it was -

Ms WEBB - Your submission says.

Mr ABETZ - And I said that was before I became the minister.

Ms WEBB - Okay. December 2024 is when your submission tells us that South Australia trip was, and that there appears to have been a piece of work that derived from that trip. What I'm leading to is, I'd like to understand when that piece of work was provided to the relevant minister, whether that was your predecessor or you. And I'd like to understand whether each of the elements in your harm minimisation suite announced in January were in that piece of work subsequent to the South Australia trip?

Mr ABETZ - That I would have to check on. But I know from my own personal commitment to harm minimisation, one thing that I could not believe was that if you wanted to self-exclude, you could not self-exclude immediately at the time, one suspects, of a person's most deepest regret and before they could leave the venue. That is why, and I must say, that was something that I felt very strongly about, that we get a QR code as part of it for people to self-exclude. Whether that was part of the South Australian experience or not, I don't know. Mr Root -

Ms WEBB - Well, I'm keen to have the answer to that question. If it's not something you can answer at the table, we can frame it up for you to take on notice.

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

CHAIR - Just to get clarity, is it something that Mr Root could help to provide some information on?

Mr ABETZ - I was just about to pass. Yes.

Mr ROOT - The South Australian trip was a component of some policy work. One of the key outcomes from that was around the automated responsible gambling system option, which was one of the policy options that was being investigated. If you roll back to March 2024, the government made some announcements through that election of additional harm minimisation policies. The facial recognition, for example, came up through that period. Some work started out of that and flowed into the work that the Treasurer has spoken about. The primary output of the South Australian tour was looking at their automated responsible gambling system and their use of FRT, and those sorts of things, because a core of some of that

additional harm policy that the government announced was in alignment with the South Australian model, if you like.

Ms WEBB - The South Australian trip primarily looked at those two key areas you've identified there, the FRT and the automated gambling system?

Mr ROOT - They were the primary outputs that they had a look around generally.

Ms WEBB - What I'm interested in is anything that came through to the government, as described here in the submission, that findings from the discussions then were put through to government for consideration. Then it goes on to say:

> Treasury undertook policy development work and prepared a range of potential harm minimisation measures for the government's consideration.

I'm interested in when that piece of work referred to occurred, and when that range of potential measures was presented to government for consideration.

Mr ROOT - It was primarily through 2025, and I think the final piece - but some early advice would have gone through treasurer Barnett's time, and then I think the final advice came through to Treasurer Abetz.

CHAIR - When, sorry?

Mr ROOT - That would have been early 2026. I would have to get you exact dates.

CHAIR - Before the announcement, before 20 January?

Mr ROOT - Mm.

CHAIR - Very early 2026. Was that piece of work consulted with the Liquor and Gaming Commission? Was there engagement with Liquor and Gaming in preparing that work?

Ms WEBB - The gaming commission, not Liquor and Gaming.

CHAIR - No, the Liquor and Gaming Commission.

Mr ROOT - Well, the piece of work was advice to government. There wasn't a formal consultation process with the commission on that, which was -

CHAIR - Any conversation with them, any sort of touchpoint with them, given that they've got the statutory responsibility to minimise harm?

Mr ROOT -There would have been, I guess, general conversation, but there wasn't a formal consultation. Generally, there is some awareness of who's doing what in this space.

Ms WEBB - The commission has made it very clear they weren't aware that this suite of measures was being considered in its comprehensive totality, as the Treasurer would like us to understand them.

Mr ROOT - No, and that's true. There was no conversation about the package.

Ms WEBB - So, when did that suite of measures -

CHAIR - There wasn't a conversation?

Mr ROOT - About the totality of the package.

Ms WEBB - So, the piece of work that was provided to the government with this particular suite of measures in it, as recommended or as indicated, when did that come to government?

Mr ROOT - Well, I think as the submission states, there were a range of options put forward. Some of them were accepted and others weren't. It wasn't a package.

Ms WEBB - Was TITO in that list of measures put forward to government?

Mr ROOT - No.

Ms WEBB - The TITO wasn't in the list of measures put forward to government for consideration?

Mr ROOT - No, not in that options paper.

Ms WEBB - Not in the options paper. Was ATMs in venues in the options paper put forward to government?

Mr ROOT - No.

Ms WEBB - No, it wasn't. Two quite key things that have arrived in the apparent suite of measures that the government adopted weren't in the Treasury options paper?

Mr ROOT - That's correct.

CHAIR - What was in the Treasury options paper?

Mr ABETZ - Well, that's advice to government which -

Ms WEBB - Okay. Let's just check the rest of the measures in the suite. Facial recognition technology would have been in the suite of measures put to government, I'm imagining, because it's been under discussion for a while. Can you confirm that that was in the suite of measures put forward to government?

Mr ABETZ - We are now going down a track of asking advice to government, which is protected.

Ms WEBB - Where I'm going with this -

CHAIR - It's not protected, actually.

Mr ABETZ - No. Times, you can ask, about what went. But the actual advice -

CHAIR - It's not protected. How is it protected? It's protected from Right to Information to an extent. But you're at a committee table answering questions that impact on the whole community, so -

Mr ABETZ - And as a government, we are responsible for our decisions. We often get advice. You as a former minister, I'm sure as well, received advice from time to time which you said, 'Thanks but no thanks. I'm elected to make decisions and don't have to follow advice', or you reject advice, you refine advice, you have input. And that's how our democracy works.

Ms WEBB - I agree, Treasurer, and so that's where my questions are going. I'm trying to arrive at an indication, not of the specifics of the advice, but of the origin of the advice for the measures in your suite of measures. And I wanted to clarify - and we've clarified to some extent, that some key elements of that suite of measures were not provided as advice to you from your department. They must have arrived to you from somewhere, and I would assume that you would want to be considering evidence-based measures. And so, I would assume that they would have come to you as advice with a measure of evidence and argument behind them for you to be able to give them proper, responsible consideration before adopting them. Where was that piece of work done, and who did that for you?

Mr ABETZ - At the end of the day, Cabinet makes decisions. I'm the responsible minister. I, therefore, have to answer in relation to the actual decision. But any policy decision is always an iterative process, or nearly always an iterative process, and you seek to get as much information from your own personal experience, et cetera.

Ms WEBB - Did you make up the TITO adoption measure that's in them, or did you make up the ATM inclusion in venues measures? Did that come from you personally in your personal experience?

Mr ABETZ - Look, it is a government policy which has been adopted, and we can ask who sort of cooked up -

Ms WEBB - This is people's lives, Treasurer. Did you base policy on absolutely no evidence from any credible source other than your own mind and put it into your suite of measures?

Mr ABETZ - Ms Webb, before this committee was even started, I have read your media releases and your character assessment of myself et cetera. And so I must say, I come before this committee not convinced that myself and the government will be judged independently, given the apprehended bias that I have -

CHAIR - We're just here to ask questions.

Ms WEBB - Well, point to anything [inaudible 11.33.23] that isn't evidence-based -

Mr ABETZ - Before you asked the question, you accused me of hypocrisy, and that's the beginning.

Ms WEBB - No -

Mr ABETZ - You did.

Ms WEBB - I factually corrected you, I believe.

CHAIR - Okay, we'll go to Ms Glade-Wright now.

Mr ABETZ - I will show you where you said 'hypocrisy', and you might like to correct the record.

CHAIR - You might like to clarify why 'hypocrisy' is not a relevant word. But we'll go to Ms Glade-Wright now.

Mr ABETZ - It is 'truly despicable act of hypocrisy', 30 July 2026.

CHAIR - Did that sting?

Ms WEBB - And what was it referring to? Read the rest of the sentence.

Mr ABETZ - No, no, what it shows is an apprehended bias and a view of certain things before a single question was asked.

CHAIR - Yep, a long history in this public policy space and a lot more expertise, arguably, than yourself.

Ms WEBB - I'll go ethics to ethics with you on this any time, Treasurer.

CHAIR - Ms Glade-Wright, it's your question.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Treasurer, as you would be well aware, the objective of the *Gaming Control Act* is to take a public health and consumer protection approach to protect people, particularly people who are vulnerable from being harmed by gambling. You're well aware of that, aren't you?

Mr ABETZ - Yep, yep.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - The committee has heard from a lot of people and a lot of experts, including the commissioner, that the proposed package is not considered harm minimisation, and may even increase harm. I'm just wondering if you've had any legal advice to ensure that your suite of measures is not contravening the law?

Mr ABETZ - The suite of measures, as I understand them, do not breach the law and, you know, if they do, then let's have that advice. We have the rule of law in this country, in this state, and if that's the case, so be it. But if I may, briefly, in relation to ATMs, I understand the commission, at their hearing, that ATMs with FRT are better than the current EFTPOS system. So, let's get a few things correct. Anyway, back to you, Ms Glade-Wright.

CHAIR - The question was about advice.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Yes, I'm trying to gauge your level of concern. We've heard a lot of people tell us that this suite of package is not going to really reduce harm. I'm wondering if you had any level of concern when hearing those reports?

Mr ABETZ - Well, disappointment rather than concern, because the comparison, like Rev Costello and others, was from the precommitment card, as opposed to what we have at the moment. With great respect, how anybody can argue that having mandatory closures from four to seven hours, increasing it by 75 per cent - hardly something that the industry embraces, and then being told this is not a harm minimisation measure is astounding. Having a reduced load limit on machines to $100, as opposed to multiples of that - I think $500, is, I would've thought, in anybody's language, another harm minimisation.

We don't need the effect of laughter, Ms Webb.

The other aspects, the facial recognition for excluded participants is something that is vitally needed. Talk to staff, talk to venue operators. Having these photographs of people that are allegedly excluded and trying to figure out who's who is virtually impossible. There is one group that tries to the best of their ability, but it's exceptionally difficult. Facial recognition will be able to deal with that.

The self-exclusion, another very important measure, because I've been told, anecdotally only, but you leave the venue absolutely disappointed with yourself, and that's the time to exclude yourself. That's why the QR code, so you've got immediate self-exclusion rather than having to ring an 1800 number, get some appointment with, I think, it's Anglicare that's the provider of the counselling service, and then possibly get yourself excluded, is not as good a measure, I would have thought, in anybody's language, than the capacity for immediate self-exclusion when your personal remorse is at its height. And so, these are all the measures, when you do a compare and contrast to what is in existence now, to what will be or is now after 1 August, they are things that are clearly harm minimisation.

I get it that a lot of people would like us to have gone further. I accept that and understand that. But to assert that all the changes I've outlined somehow don't increase the capacity for harm minimisation, I think defies logic.

CHAIR - Well, Rev Jones described the harm minimisation effect as 'minuscule' repeatedly.

Mr ABETZ - And what does 'minuscule' mean? That it is a minimal change, but at least he accepts that it's not a negative change. It is a positive change, albeit -

CHAIR - My goodness.

Ms WEBB - No, no, we don't have the evidence for that. We'll come to it. I can't wait to talk about these things in detail. Let's go.

Mr ABETZ - And I fully accept that he would want us to have gone further. But even the good Dr Reverend Jones was willing to acknowledge that they were changes, albeit miniscule, but for the benefit, for the better.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - I think you're right.; a lot of people did want you to go further. So, we're just trying to work out why you've come to this decision.

The act also says that the functions of the commission is to foster the responsible service and minimise the harm from gambling. You're aware of that too, aren't you?

Mr ABETZ - That I am.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - We heard the commissioner say, in her own words, 'it does raise questions about moving forward and our capacity to exercise our independent statutory functions'. She also says:

> There is an inherent difficulty in the way in which the direction's been framed, and our statutory independence.

Do you agree that the commission must function independently?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. And the commission and I have had discussions since the ministerial direction, and we are working cooperatively to enable the implementation of the ministerial direction. Whilst I accept that there is a degree of specificity around the ministerial direction, I would invite the committee to have a look at all the previous ministerial directions which, for example, tells the commission that on one occasion the cheques have to be cashed within five days - not four days or six days, but five days. You go through all the ministerial directions previously and the degree of specificity is very, very much there. If that offends the commission or offends the law, then that is something I'm more than willing to look at and consider because to make all this work you need a good working relationship, and that is what I seek to achieve.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - The commissioner seemed very concerned that their obligations to comply with your direction is going to conflict with their statutory functions.

Mr ABETZ - I did - and somebody might be able to assist me, there is a letter from the commission to myself, where they indicated their willingness to implement the - just bear with me.

Ms WEBB - Actually, they need to legally comply and implement a direction. The question is whether there's a legal validity to the direction, and whether advice on that is being sought?

CHAIR - Is this correspondence from the Liquor and Gaming Commission to you, Treasurer?

Mr ABETZ - I will have to have a look.

Ms WEBB - Is it the bit you quoted in your submission to us? We could quote it out of the submission.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, it's in the submission, exactly, correct. Yes.

Ms WEBB - Perhaps we could quote it for you out of the submission, Treasurer, help you out?

Mr ABETZ - My goodness, my goodness.

CHAIR - Just back to your question, Clare.

Mr ABETZ - Right, yes. My submission, quite rightly, and thank you for that.

Ms WEBB - It's at page 4 you'll find it, I think.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you. That indicates that the commission has indicated its willingness to work through the ministerial direction and implement a government policy which is - and as I said, I want a good working relationship with them. We have had meetings and continue to meet, and we'll work things through.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - You don't seem very concerned. It was quite alarming for us to hear that.

Mr ABETZ - No, I'm not concerned about that. There are, I suppose, learnings for both sides. I have spoken with the commissioner about her analogy of money laundering, for example, about $10,000 to which you refer to. But, of course, with the new system, to launder $10,000, you'd have to put $100 note in, have one gamble, press the button, get your ticket out. You'd then walk up to the counter with 100 tickets, and say, 'Can you please cash that in?'. I think any person at the counter would be saying, 'I think this might be an exercise in money laundering'.

Can both the commission and I learn how to do things even better? Yes, we can, and we are working well together.

CHAIR - Can I just check, on the Liquor and Gaming Commission, and it's quite encouraging to hear you say you want to have a productive working relationship with the commission. In the commission's submission we've got a timeline here of engagement with government from the announcement of the mandatory precommitment card to the ministerial direction. At numerous touchpoints along the way when you think that your independent expertise in the Liquor and Gaming Commission might be consulted on measures or a change of position, the Liquor and Gaming Commission has been shut out. How do you explain - I don't know if you've seen the timeline in the Liquor and Gaming Commission submission, but it doesn't paint the government's commitment to hearing from the commission and the expertise in the commission on harm minimisation, because you seem to have avoided those conversations.

Mr ABETZ - The policy advice to government comes from Treasury and that was the interaction that was had. And then when certain things were sort of resolved in the government's mind - yeah. Could we, should have we consulted more with them? Happy to accept that observation.

CHAIR - So it wasn't a deliberate decision not to consult the commission? Because the commission may have said to government or to you, 'TITO for example, is not an effective harm-minimisation measure. Having ATMs in venues potentially risks greater harm'. I mean, the commission might have challenged government on the suite of measures that it was considering, and it feels like it was deliberate not to ask them.

Mr ABETZ - Look - deliberately, definitely not. Definitely not. If you're saying possibly, could we have done, should we have done things better, look, always willing to be on the side of improvement and seeing how things can be done better, and always willing to accept that the day that you think you've done everything perfectly is the day we ought to give up doing what we do.

CHAIR - Look, if you really wanted to do things better, you probably would have consulted with the commission.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Just a quick follow-up: was it only Treasury advice then that you've based this whole suite of measures on?

Ms WEBB - Well, no. We already heard at least two of them, no.

CHAIR - Hospitality Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and individual venue owners. That was in relation to the new direction that for me was important and the commission acknowledges. With respect to them, and I have high regard for them and confidence in them, but I think they accept that they might have been able to do a bit better with the consultation of all the venues, because they accept that they didn't consult all the venues in relation to the mandatory or proposed mandatory closing time from 2 till 9.

CHAIR - We'll get to that.

Mr ABETZ - Yeah, which impacted a few venues and only a handful of venues, but you know, to be told 11 days before that your whole rostering and business model has to be changed was something which -

CHAIR - One venue arced up, we were told and then the whole policy change from a fixed period to a non-fixed period, but I'll just check. Are you satisfied with that?

Mr ABETZ - Might I add, Chair, if I might, for 18 years - for 18 years - it has been flexible without any complaints about the flexibility. Therefore, the government and the businesses assumed that that flexibility would continue. That's what I was anticipating and when there was that mandatory closure between 2 till 9, and given that the evidence is overwhelming, the lot more problem gambling will occur, let's say between midnight and 2 a.m. rather than 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. Different venues, and it's only a small handful of venues, have a business model of providing breakfast to shift workers, and you know, people make investments on that basis.

Ms WEBB - Can we just clarify here, though, that the restriction is on the opening hours of the gaming room in the facility. Nothing about their business model other than the opening of the gaming room is affected by what the commission proposed. They would still have been able to serve breakfasts for shift workers. The only thing that they would have had to do is close their gaming room.

I'm presuming they're not reliant on losses from poker machines between the hours of 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. in order to be a viable business.

Mr ABETZ - Every single venue, I assume, that has poker machines makes money from those poker machines. It's part of their business model. And you see, that is where, and I think your question indicates, that you would like to see all the poker machines banished -

Ms WEBB - Well, that's a very stupid sort of assertion from you, Treasurer, because there's no basis on which to say that. Nothing about my question implied that. Nothing.

Mr ABETZ - What is the difference between venues that say, 'We don't serve breakfast, therefore we're happy to be closed till 9 o'clock' and closes at 2 a.m. -

Ms WEBB - Closed for the gaming room.

Mr ABETZ - Whereas the other venue was saying, 'We will close two hours when there is the most danger, namely midnight to 2 a.m., in exchange for 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., where the likelihood of losses is going to be a lot less' and, with respect, as I understand it, the problem gamblers are less likely to abound -

Ms WEBB - On whose evidence do you say that? It's interesting because all the evidence base for this, you could have had the discussion with the commission about this evidence base and explored it with them. Did you do that?

Mr ABETZ - I think it is undisputed and the commission, I think, indicated that as well, but I stand to be corrected, may have been in a discussion with them, but the sort of problem hours for the gaming machines often is post-midnight into the early hours -

Ms WEBB - The worst intensity.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and I think that is accepted. So, cancelling that out in favour of breakfast for shift workers, whose normal life is not like ours -

Ms WEBB - There's no impact. No impact on breakfast for shift workers, no impact at all. They can still have breakfast during those hours. It's the gaming room that's closed.

Mr ABETZ - But you are denying them the agency -

Ms WEBB - So, for one venue, one set of shift workers.

CHAIR - Oh, the right to have pokies at 7 o'clock in the morning.

Ms WEBB - Can I move on to a separate issue on this?

Mr ABETZ - People are allowed to make life choices for themselves. And the parliament - right, wrong or indifferent - has allowed poker machines as part and parcel of the suite of offerings that licensed premises can offer. That's the situation that we're dealing with, and that's the reality of life. And some of the venues clearly, as I understand it, as part of their business model, their capacity to pay off loans, et cetera, of course they rely on the profits made from poker machines.

CHAIR - They're raking it in.

Ms WEBB - Seventeen hours of the day, a two-hour period between 7 and 9 a.m. for one venue, is not the basis for setting policy, and I'm sure that the commission also knew that.

Mr ABETZ - But wait a minute, wait a minute. It goes from a closure of four hours to seven hours -

Ms WEBB - Indeed.

Mr ABETZ - A 75 per cent increase, and somehow that's not harm minimisation? Really?

CHAIR - No, the issue here is the role that the industry had even in changing that.

Ms WEBB - Yes, we're talking about process here now. Can I ask you some questions about that because it links back to the questions that Ms Glade-Wright was asking before about potential legal conflict here with the act. When you make a ministerial direction, do you check, get legal advice on whether it is legally compliant with the act?

Mr ABETZ - No, I don't, but one assumes right, wrong or indifferent, that should there be any suggested or proposed illegality in what's being proposed, that the department would say, 'Look, minister, good idea, but there might be a legal problem if you go down that track.'

Ms WEBB - So, you expect the department to identify any potential legal jeopardy about the nature of the ministerial directions that are drafted?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms WEBB - In terms of this year - and it relates to the topic we've just been talking about - when we saw the Liquor and Gaming Commission make a statutory rule, publish that in the new rules, it was going to come into effect. Then just before it was going to come into effect in relation to the closure hours, you issued a substitute ministerial direction that had more specificity in it about that aspect of closures. Did you get legal advice about that? Because that's quite an extraordinary - I think that's the first time that sort of event, where a substitute direction to overrule a decision by the commission where they had already made a statutory decision about a rule being put in place, it's the first time and only time I think that's ever happened. Perhaps you can correct me if that's not the case. And I would've thought that sort of extraordinary first would have warranted a legal check. Did you have a legal check done of whether that was compliant with the act?

Mr ABETZ - Well, the department did not provide any indication that it would be illegal.

Ms WEBB - Is it possible to check whether the department sought legal advice as to whether that ministerial direction was compliant with the act?

Mr ABETZ - Well, what the department does or doesn't do - what I can say to you is that, and as you might imagine, do you honestly believe, any one of the three of you, if I was given advice that this might be illegal that I would have proceeded with it? You know, give me some sense of credibility, please.

CHAIR - Depends whether the question was asked -

Ms WEBB - I absolutely accept that if you were told it wasn't legal, you would not have gone ahead with it. Absolutely believe it.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you.

Ms WEBB - My question is around whether you've gone ahead with it without having checked whether it was illegal in the first place. That's where my question goes. Establishing legality.

Mr ABETZ - In relation to issues of that nature, I think every minister is entitled to believe that unless there is information coming from the department that something might be illegal, that they can proceed.

Ms WEBB - Can we have a confirmation from the department about whether it was determined that that ministerial direction that was issued to substitute the prior one, and therefore invalidate the rule made by the commission, whether legal advice was sought on that? I'm not asking for the detail of the legal advice, just whether it was sought on that.

Mr ROOT - No, it wasn't. I think the direction, as per the Treasurer's previous comment, was in a similar form to past directions. And the form of it, as a consequence of that, appeared to be in the right form.

Ms WEBB - Have we ever had a ministerial direction issued before in such a manner that overruled a statutory rule that the commission had just made?

Mr ROOT - No. What I was referring to, I guess, was the degree to which the ministers past have specified particular outcomes in the commission's decision-making process. So, for example, a $5 bet limit, probably a good example.

Ms WEBB - Sure, because as we've established, the commission always works within the parameters it's directed by ministerial directions, which is based on government policy. In this instance, the commission obviously believed it had done so, made a statutory rule. That was issued and was publicly available. The industry had been informed, it was about to come into effect, and I think about three days before it came into effect, the substitute ministerial direction was published in the *Gazette*, which overruled, essentially, the statutory decision made by the commission. That's the element that's new and different, and what I would've thought warranted legal advice to ensure that that wasn't, in some sense, contravening the act, given both the objectives of the act but also the statutory role of the commission in the act, and whether that in fact is in contravention of the act in that way. So, there was no discussion about legal advice to ensure that that ministerial direction was actually within the minister's powers in relation to the act?

Mr ROOT - In regard to that particular ministerial direction, we didn't seek legal advice on that direction.

Mr ABETZ - And I understand - just been advised - that Treasury has not in the past sought legal advice on any ministerial direction.

Ms WEBB - No, but I don't think you've ever overruled a statutory rule just made by the commission in their statutory role. I think that was your first time ever doing that. So, yeah, extraordinary.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and look, I've indicated the reason why, and I think the commission acknowledged in their submission that they hadn't consulted everybody in relation to the situation. And I was concerned, as I've said many a time, big business, big unions can look after themselves. Small business and individual workers is what I, as a Liberal, seek to try to look after and protect -

CHAIR - Oh, my goodness.

Mr ABETZ - And on this occasion -

CHAIR - You're looking after big gambling, though.

Mr ABETZ - No.

Ms WEBB - I accept that's true, Treasurer.

Mr ABETZ - And on this occasion, it was, I think, two small businesses that indicated that this would severely interrupt their business model and without saying - yeah, I'll leave it at that.

Ms WEBB - On that though, if that was your concern, surely the next step is to go to the commission to say, 'Commissioner, I don't think you've undertaken this consultation appropriately. We're aware of some concern from particular businesses that you may not have taken into account. Could you redo your statutory role in this instance, reconsider the full available information here, including these two businesses and the impact on them, and then reconsider the rule you're making?' Because in that case then they could have reconsidered it. They may have arrived at the same point. The businesses still wouldn't have been happy. You would still probably have heard from them and gotten an earful, but the commission could have undertaken its statutory role. Instead, you imposed your view of what the outcome should have been onto the commission through your second substitute ministerial direction. You imposed your view on what the best harm minimisation was. Did you have all the information available the commission had when they considered this and made the rule? Did you have all that available to you?

Mr ABETZ - Without the aggressive finger-pointing, allow me to respond to you. It is funny that you should have mentioned all those things because you know what? That's what I was about to say and then I stopped myself from saying. You've now asked the question, and I will tell you I did ring the commission and say there are a couple of venues, and I said can we grandfather them or put them in the direction by name just to protect those two?

CHAIR - Do you mean in the commission's direction or the rule?

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, in their rule, Chair. Yes, thank you for that clarification. And I suggested to them, this might be a nice way out because the sector was of the view - and I think quite rightly after 18 years of experience - that there was flexibility in relation to the closure of four hours, extending that to seven hours, there would be that flexibility. So I put

that proposition as what I thought was a pragmatic way, and the accusations of the 'big lobby', et cetera, I can let you know that Federal Hotels were happy to abide by 2 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Ms WEBB - Yes, they were consulted and they provided input.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and there was my genuine concern for a couple of small businesses - when the commission came back to me and said, 'No, we're not prepared to do that', despite the fact I hadn't consulted all of them. Look, I don't criticise them for we all make mistakes, we can all do things better, but it was then that I determined with Cabinet approval to make the -

Ms WEBB - To impose your view of what was the right outcome. You could have asked the commission to remake the consultation, consider all factors, including the ones brought to you by those two businesses and then come to a decision. They may have changed the decision they came to, they may not have, but they would have undertaken their statutory role without being directed specifically by you on a very clear matter of their role.

Mr ABETZ - Look, this was, I think, 10 days out from when the new system would come into play. That is all that they were given, 10 days' notice, for rosters, et cetera, for staffing. And you've got to think of the workers as well. You know, for a venue to have a full complement of staff, they're looking at not only the kitchen and the dining area, but also the gambling area, the poker machine area, whatever, and what areas of the hotel are going to be open, closed, what makes the commercial reality of their business stack up. I had sought what I thought was a relatively, if I might say so, pragmatic, elegant solution. Just grandfathering a couple of venues. I put that suggestion to them that they could change their -

Ms WEBB - It would be hard to defend that exemption, wouldn't it? Very hard for the commission to defend that, on any evidence base, I think.

Mr ABETZ - Well, they admitted that they hadn't taken that consideration into account.

Ms WEBB - That would have been fair to and then rethink it through. Did you give them a chance? No.

Mr ABETZ - They determined to proceed anyway and out of concern for couple of small businesses, not the big lobby, a couple of small businesses. The government did what it did, and I don't apologise for that because that could have been a substantial disruption to a family business.

Ms WEBB - How many venues -

Mr ABETZ - Keep in mind that when family businesses have difficulties, they sometimes go bankrupt and then there are victims there as well, so with all this -

Ms WEBB - Two hours of poker machine revenue, 7 a.m. to 9 a.m., that's a pretty dicey business.

CHAIR - Not many pokies venues go bankrupt.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Treasurer, I really want to understand your decision-making about abandoning the precommitment card. The government's own Deloitte Access Economics

report estimated that the precommitment card with loss limits would reduce EGM expenditure by 23 to 46 per cent, with the greatest effect among moderate and high-risk gamblers. It also found positive economic and employment outcomes. How was the decision made to abandon a policy with demonstrated benefits?

Mr ABETZ - First of all, can I correct you - it is just terminology - we didn't abandon, we put it on hold, not progressing it further, but it is still our policy in the event that we can get national agreement. If you like, it's on hold, but in fairness, from what I can gather, on fairly permanent hold because I do not detect any appetite elsewhere in Australia to come on board.

Ms WEBB - The ACT.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Why is that necessary?

Mr ABETZ - Well, you can see what the Greens have said about the ACT reforms and it's very similar terminology to what's being used in Tasmania, that the reforms don't go far enough, that everybody's beholden to the lobby, et cetera, so I'll leave that at that point. Suffice to say, the government and previous colleagues went looking at that, made a determination and that is what I inherited when I became Treasurer. I had a look at where are we now, precommitment card having been parked, minister Barnett saying that we would develop a suite of harm-minimisation measures, and then developing the work that had already been undertaken by minister Barnett who came out with our suite of policy.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - But if a precommitment card has demonstrated benefits, why is it necessary that we follow the nation? Why can't we be nation-leading?

Mr ABETZ - Look, it's in relation to the cost of it, and also to the venues. I think we have about 2 per cent of the machines and the reconfiguration - I'm not across all that detail but the reconfiguration of the machines, having specific machines just for the Tasmanian market, as opposed to being able to buy off the shelf, having bespoke machinery for Tasmania may well be exceptionally costly.

Ms WEBB - Do you have the cost of that? There are plenty of card-based machines around in casinos. Do you have the cost of it?

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - You also criticised Deloitte for not counting gambling taxation revenue in the same way as the SEIS, but taxation revenue is transferred from gamblers to government. It is not necessarily new economic value. Deloitte expressly found that reduced EGM activity would be more than offset by gains elsewhere in Tasmania's economy. Do you accept that money not lost on poker machines can instead be spent on housing, food, energy and local businesses generating activity elsewhere, while also reducing health, justice and productivity costs?

Mr ABETZ - Look, in our world we allow people the freedom to largely spend their money where they want to and would I encourage people to use poker machines? No, I wouldn't. But do people have the freedom to do so? Yes, they do. And as a Liberal in particular, I'm not sort of going to be going about telling people what they can and can't spend their money on, given that we have a parliamentary decision that allows poker machines as legal activity within the community.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - I do have a question on personal agency, but before I get to that, you didn't really answer my question, which is do you accept that money not lost from poker machines can be of benefit to the broader Tasmanian economy?

CHAIR - As Deloitte found.

Mr ABETZ - Look, I read the Deloitte report, albeit not commissioned by Treasury, but by State Growth at the time. I've also read the SEIS report, which sort of indicated that the benefits from poker machines might be a minus something figure to a positive figure, the majority of which they thought was in the positive area. Look, at the end of the day, the sort of question that you are asking Ms Glade-Wright is a valid question to ask, but people have the agency, the capacity to make those decisions for themselves. It'd be like if they spent less in a pub drinking, would it be more beneficial in the community? Would it be more beneficial rather than going on an overseas holiday to stay in Tasmania and spend the money in Tasmania? Yes, it would be, and we can go through a whole host of examples of how not spending in one area might be beneficial in another area.

But of course, keep in mind that without the poker machine expenditure, there would be quite a few hotels in particular, as I understand it, that would find it hard to survive. As a result, they would have to put off staff. There is always the sort of counterfactual what would happen if - there's always the other side of that equation as well. As a hypothetical, of course, if people don't spend money in one area, it's likely they'll spend it in another area, that stands to reason. Unless they're willing to put it under the bed, which I doubt many of them would.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Just back to the precommitment card, because you've placed a considerable amount of emphasis on personal agency. But how does a binding default loss limit remove personal agency when people would still be free to gamble but within a limit intended to prevent catastrophic loss?

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it the discussion at the time was about whether people would actually get a card and a lot of the poker machine activity is, what's the term, ad hoc - something people just do as they're walking through after dinner. But if they had to go through the bother of a precommitment card, they may well not get such a card. That's one side. The other side was the capital cost. Look, I don't know all the detail of that. Suffice to say when I got into the portfolio it had already been determined that a precommitment card would be parked until a national approach was achieved and that we would embark on another harm-minimisation program, and that is what we've delivered.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - It's just that I heard you say at the very beginning that you have a personal commitment to harm minimisation and there was a policy with demonstrated benefits and you, in your new role, had the ability to advance that policy.

Mr ABETZ - No, because Cabinet had determined to park that policy and that was announced by minister Barnett. Believe it or not, ministers can't go on frolics of their own. Most of our decisions have to be checked by our Cabinet colleagues and that is why we have such a thing called Cabinet solidarity, that even if you didn't agree with a decision, you are bound by Cabinet solidarity and if you find it sufficiently uncomfortable, then your duty is to resign.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Given your commitment to harm minimisation though, did you raise that at Cabinet and make a case for it?

Mr ABETZ - Well, look, any discussion in Cabinet is not something I'm going to go into.

CHAIR - Can I just check with you, I mean, there's sort of the elephant sitting in the room here - well there is, and that elephant is the Tasmanian Hospitality Association or Hospitality Tasmania. You'd be well aware, you'd have observed the 2018 state election where the federal deed was coming up for expiry and a new framework was to be put in place, and the gambling lobby poured millions of dollars either through direct donations or in-kind support into supporting the Liberal Party and targeting Labor, targeting the Greens, because the policy was to get poker machines out of pubs and clubs. Since then, we've just seen that the industry, on EGM policy in Tasmania, has got exactly what it wanted. It's got no mandatory precommitment card -

Well, you can sit there, and you want to talk about Ms Webb's laughter - oh well, you know. I guess - it is so obvious that Hospitality Tasmania has had direct input and involvement into the development of this suite of measures and the decision to walk away from mandatory precommitment. Are you able to confirm, Treasurer, what the relationship is with Hospitality Tasmania and this government? Given that, first of all, the Liberal Party, and Labor, have accepted tens of thousands of dollars in donations, hundreds of thousands of dollars over the journey, from Hospitality Tasmania - isn't that why we're here?

Mr ABETZ - With respect, the reason we are here is because certain people moved in the Legislative Council for this inquiry, and here we are. I'm not going to -

CHAIR - Well, when I say 'here', we're in an area of public policy now which is a very substantial departure from the mandatory precommitment card that was announced by your predecessor, minister Ferguson, and where we are now, which is a framework which has been described by Anglicare, Alliance for Gambling Reform, as having very, very modest harm-minimisation effect. That's Hospitality Tasmania's influence on government, isn't it? And the Gaming Commission, thanks, Ms Webb.

Mr ABETZ - Courtesy of all the press releases that at least two of you have issued, it's quite obvious that that which you've just said, Chair, is what your view is and was prior to this hearing.

CHAIR - Well, no, well, hang on a minute. Can I just confirm with you, the Tasmanian Hospitality Association: didn't it donate something like $217,000 to the Liberals during the state election campaign last year?

Mr ABETZ - That may well be the figure. I'm not aware of what that figure is or was. Suffice to say -

CHAIR - Big donation.

Mr ABETZ - Well, look, as a Green, the biggest donation ever in Australian political history was from a Mr Graeme Wood to the Greens of over $1 million, so please, if we want to -

CHAIR - Don't, I mean, yes, but that wasn't actually to buy public policy that would exploit and harm people.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, well -

CHAIR - That's because Mr Wood believes in a greener Australia.

Mr ABETZ - Are you giving evidence now, Chair?

CHAIR - No, I'm just not having you sledge the Australian Greens at this table to deflect from the facts, and the fact is Hospitality Tasmania has been looking after the Liberals ever since 2018. That's why we have a framework in place now, which will have a minuscule or modest harm-minimisation effect, isn't it? It's got a fair bit to do with $217,000 in donations to the Liberals last year, and that ongoing relationship between the Liberals and Hospitality Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - I think you've already made up your mind in the relation these matters.

CHAIR - I'm just looking at the facts.

Mr ABETZ - And you're now asserting it as fact, and therefore you are giving your own evidence to this committee, and you are not seeking answers from me, as to the basis of which a decision has been made.

CHAIR - No, that's not true. I'm trying to work out what the connection - we've all been trying through our various questions here, to work out the role of Hospitality Tasmania in determining public policy here, and I think we're close to establishing it.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, well, look.

CHAIR - I will go to Ms Webb now.

Mr ABETZ - Right.

Ms WEBB - Would you like to respond to that? I'm happy for you to respond to it.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it would be nice -

CHAIR - We haven't had an answer.

Mr ABETZ - It would be nice to be allowed to respond. As any government would, we listen to peak bodies, and Hospitality Tasmania does represent the vast bulk, if not all, of those venues that have poker machines. Therefore, it would be negligent, remiss of any government not to consult with them when you are putting forward harm-minimisation proposals which clearly will impact their viability, and their profits. So, did we consult with them? Yes. Do you think that certain people jumped up and down with joy when they heard about the time extension from four to seven hours? I think not. Without the -

CHAIR - You're zeroing in on a tiny part of the policy suite.

Mr ABETZ - If I can continue? Maximum loading of machines being reduced to $100, another tiny part, no doubt, Chair -

Ms WEBB - What evidence? [inaudible **12.19.56 - 12.19.59**] get to me -

CHAIR - Hang on.

Mr ABETZ - and immediate self -exclusion, undoubtedly another tiny part. So, we can go through each of the measures and you will say and determine that they are all tiny parts, but when you add up all the tiny bits, you know what? You get a suite of measures.

CHAIR - It's miniscule.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - It's still tiny.

Mr ABETZ - Your get a suite of measures.

Ms WEBB - That all experts say will make a minuscule difference.

Mr ABETZ - Look, that was one witness's view.

Ms WEBB - The commission's view, too, and any expert you speak to. How many did you speak to?

Mr ABETZ - Speak to, sorry?

Ms WEBB - How many independent experts on harm minimisation did you speak to in developing this suite of measures? And did any of them - can you point to any independent expert that told you this package of measures would deliver any meaningful harm reduction?

Mr ABETZ - As a government, we make decisions on the basis of all the evidence that we've got together, including from Treasury. We stand by our decision as being a sensible, middle-of-the-road type decision which enhances harm minimisation. If people want to say it doesn't go far enough - you know what? - with respect, I can understand that. But to try to suggest and assert that this is somehow at the behest of the industry and they somehow wanted this package, all I can tell you is no. Can I say to you that I did consult, of course, with Hospitality Tasmania, because what we didn't want to see was business disruption to the extent that it would prejudice the viability of businesses, and that's what you have to balance up with all these things. And I think we've landed in a good space.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Treasurer, consultation isn't evidence, though, is it?

Mr ABETZ - No. And see, that is where I've often found, both as a lawyer but also as a parliamentarian, you can go on the Deloitte report or you can go on the SEIS -

Ms WEBB - They're not in conflict.

Mr ABETZ - Some may argue otherwise and point to other factors. You know, you can avail yourselves -

Ms WEBB - Eentirely different pieces of work; they're not in conflict at all.

Mr ABETZ - Well, if they're entirely different pieces of work, they may be coming to different conclusions, which are so often the case when you determine your term of reference or what you're looking at, as opposed to the whole picture, the totality of the picture. If I might say, I think the SEIS was somewhat broader in its range rather than the Deloitte report.

Ms WEBB - Completely different piece of work for a different purpose - entirely different. The SEIS isn't asked to model and assess the impact of particular reforms proposed, which is what the Deloitte report was asked to do. The SEIS does point to a range of potential impacts from the current suite of measures that are there and what that looks like, and including potential economic benefit or activity. That's fine, but SEIS doesn't ask itself: if we took out the worst harmful losses from the gamblers most harmed by this activity and redeployed that spend elsewhere in the economy, would it have more benefit? That's what the Deloitte report looked at and came back with a resounding 'yes'.

Because the Deloitte report found that the card would, in a very targeted way, not disrupt most normal use of poker machines that isn't harmful, but would be very effective in addressing the very harmful losses onto poker machines from people who are addicted, and that would then both save the state money through services not being required to support those people and their families and communities, and also allow for that money to be redeployed elsewhere in the economy. Where, quite frankly, almost any other economic use of a community member's finances in any industry or business other than a pokie machine will give you a better economic return.

So, that's what the Deloitte report modelled. Is that your understanding, Treasurer? They're very separate pieces of work looking at very separate things.

Mr ABETZ - Thank you for all of that. Clearly, once again, from all that, you've made up your mind in relation to your assessment of these things. But the Deloitte report doesn't consider the impact of gambling on the state in the totality, and I've set that out in my submission and the -

Ms WEBB - Was it asked to do that? When it was commissioned, was it asked to do that?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but if that's not in the consideration, for whatever reason, but another report does consider that, isn't it appropriate to compare the two and say the Deloitte report, for whatever reason, was deficient? It may be because of its term of reference that it didn't look at the totality, but the SEIS report did look at the totality. That is why, with respect, with these expert reports it is often not the case of comparing apples with apples, but often apples with oranges, because different things are being considered and contemplated. That is why if you just jump on one report and say, 'this is wholly rigged because' without considering the other reports that indicate -

Ms WEBB - I'm trying to understand - I agree that entirely separate reports, they look at separate different things, and both have value. The Deloitte report, though, which you seem to be criticising - in fact, you just used the word 'deficient' a minute ago about it. I think that's an interesting choice of words, given it's a government-commissioned report and presumably the government provided the parameters and worked with Deloitte in undertaking that report and

providing information through to them. So, it's interesting the government would find the report deficient at the end of it. We'll come back to that, perhaps.

The Deloitte report didn't not consider the totality of the state in order to somehow be deficient - it looked at what impact would the card have if it was implemented in the state. We can agree that's what the Deloitte report looked at: what impact would the card have?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, in comparison to -

Ms WEBB - The current situation. That's right.

Mr ABETZ - The current situation, and that was with a proposal which still didn't have the full flesh on the bones. And so, that is why - interesting study, and that is why I read it word-for-word to inform myself, as I did with the SEIS report, to inform myself.

Ms WEBB - The Deloitte report very clearly indicated that a card with pre-commitment limits on it, as was proposed, was likely to be, indicated to be, incredibly successful at delivering the very specific outcome we're looking for here: harm minimisation for those who are being harmed in the community, without any meaningful substantial disruption to regular use of the machines, if we can term it that way. That's what they found. So, it wasn't interrupting people's agency. It wasn't taking away recreational use profits that would be gained by the venues. It would have interrupted, the report said quite clearly, it would have interrupted the profits being accrued from people who are overtly addicted and are being harmed by poker machines. That's what the card would have delivered, according to the Deloitte report.

You're rejecting that, even though the Deloitte report said that would save the state money in all the services that are required to mop up that harm, and it would be a benefit to the community, boosting our safety SP, contributing around 200 jobs net to the community. You're saying that that's not a valid assessment of the card that was being looked at by Deloitte?

Mr ABETZ - Look, all the reports have their own degree of validity and importance. Government's responsibility is to come up with a package that is reasonable in all the circumstances, trying to balance things up, and the decision had already been taken to park the precommitment card. It was on that basis that I embarked and followed on from what minister Barnett or Treasurer Barnett at the time had said, that whilst parking it, we were going to embark on a package of harm-minimisation reforms, and that is what we've done.

Ms WEBB - Just two quick questions, factual ones to check in with you about. Did either the draft or the final Deloitte report go to Cabinet for consideration?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I'll have to take that on notice.

Ms WEBB - Thank you.

Mr ABETZ - I know we were made aware of it, but the basis of it -

Ms WEBB - I'm interested to know, so if you could take it on notice, that would be appreciated. Just another quick factual one before we have our break. Who owns the Deloitte report now? Where does it sit? And in fact, where practically is it locatable now, given that it was on the State Growth website and that's now gone.

Mr ABETZ - I assume it's now Building Tasmania.

Ms WEBB - I can't find it readily, so I'm wondering if you can inform us, maybe after the break you could inform us where it's actually located now.

Mr ABETZ - I will try, but it's not in Treasury. It's not my responsibility, but we will see.

Ms WEBB - Who does it sit with now, then? Who owns it?

Mr ABETZ - Building Tasmania, I assume, but we will see what we can find.

Ms WEBB - Which minister?

CHAIR - We are going to have a short break now, and perhaps if there's any information you can provide on that when we get back, that would be good. We'll just have a short break.

The committee suspended from 12.30 p.m. to 12.40 p.m.

CHAIR - Welcome back, Treasurer and Mr Root. We've got some follow-up from questions that were being asked before the break about the home of the Deloitte report, where it sits now and what its status is in government.

Mr ABETZ - We will need more time, but it's been taken on notice.

CHAIR - You can't find it?

Mr ABETZ - We know that it exists and we have read it. We'll provide you the information in due course.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. Is there any clarity on who owns it now, who's responsible for it in terms of ministers? Where would we go to ask questions about it, for example, if we were asking questions in any forum?

Mr ABETZ - Look, I would have to get back in touch with you as well, given the changes in machinery of government and State Growth no longer being with us and Building Tasmania, et cetera.

Ms WEBB - But initially it was the Hospitality minister at the time who commissioned it?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, she asked for it as I understand it.

Ms WEBB - And presumably staff in the hospitality area of what was then State Growth were the ones who interacted with Deloitte about it?

Mr ABETZ - Look, that is beyond my knowledge. I'm sorry.

CHAIR - Can we just move on now to measures? In the submission from the Alliance for Gambling Reform, there's two specific measures that are in your government's suite of

harm-minimisation policies. So, the Alliance for Gambling Reform says that the government's package:

> introduces ATMs into gaming venues and a ticket-based system that makes machines easier and faster to feed, while dropping the mandatory limits that Deloitte found were needed to offset the resulting increase in spending. In effect, the package retains the elements Deloitte identified as likely to increase losses and removes the element it found did most to reduce them.

These are the experts in gambling reforms - Rev Tim Costello, Mark Kempster with a lived experience of addiction, long time in this policy space, and they identify ATMs and ticket-in, ticket-out as potentially harmful measures, not minimising harm.

Mr ABETZ - Look, with the ATMs and with the change, and I think in my submission I indicated how the use of cash has diminished considerably within the community. Back in the day people would and could walk in with their pay packet because they had cash in it. Nowadays most people don't get paid in cash; it's done electronically and therefore if you want cash, it's appropriate to get an electronic mechanism to avail yourself of cash. That is why with facial recognition technology keeping it limited to $400 was in my mind a modernisation but also a harm minimisation.

CHAIR - Sorry, I'm just a bit unclear on how making access to cash more readily available to venues could be a harm-minimisation measure.

Mr ABETZ - Given, as I said, the change in community attitude to cash, whatever - as I said in the past, people could walk in with their whole pay packet of $1000 and put it through the machine. People no longer are paid in cash. It's electronic and therefore - and most of us, I don't know how many around this table are carrying cash on them at this very moment, but chances are we've got some sort of debit card. And with a debit card - and it's not going to be a credit card ATM, a debit card with a $400 limit, and the commission may well have views that that should be reduced, but yes.

CHAIR - You would acknowledge, wouldn't you, that someone can still go into a venue and blow their entire fortnight's salary?

Mr ABETZ - If they have converted it to cash prior to entering the facility? Yes, of course, they can. Of course they can, and it has always been thus.

CHAIR - Notwithstanding -

Mr ABETZ - Including, might I add, the racetrack or the roulette wheel, or Keno or wherever.

CHAIR - Sure. Are you aware that it's estimated, and this is confirmed to us by Rev Costello, that about 50 cents in every dollar that's put through the poker machines comes from people who are addicted to the machine. The business model relies on addiction.

Mr ABETZ - Look, that depends on people's definition of 'addiction'. And that is one of those things. People have their choices in life. What we seek to do is minimise the harm for those who are problem gamblers. There are those who you might call, let's say, 'addicted' who

go once a week to spend their $20, and that is part and parcel of their social life and wellbeing, and they just do it religiously, if I can use that term, to go there once a week to spend. You could argue that they have an addiction. Is it an addiction of concern? Chances are not. The problem gamblers - and that is where, I think, we should be concentrating on the problem gamblers and how we can assist them, that this is a suite of policy.

CHAIR - You introduced religion, so I'm going to ask the question. When I asked Rev Costello the other day - it was personal to you because he had knowledge of you and worked with you and knew you knew his brother - what his view was about the suite of measures that you are now promoting and part of, he said he was very disappointed and that it is the responsibility of a Christian person to look out for the most vulnerable people. He didn't point to you and sledge you in that way, but he drew the inference that it's a Christian philosophy to care for vulnerable people, and he couldn't see that this suite of policies fitted within that. What's your response to that?

Mr ABETZ - Look, the good Lord can determine between Rev Costello and myself in relation to our degree of Christianity or otherwise but, as I indicated to you earlier, my concern is harm minimisation. That is how I have approached this issue, given the policy position which I inherited. I've had a personal discussion with the Rev Costello. I think it went for about 30 or 45 minutes over the phone. I've known Rev Costello and his brother for, I would imagine, four-plus decades.

CHAIR - Yes. Did he tell you in that conversation that he thought these measures were window dressing, which is what he told us?

Mr ABETZ - As I said earlier, like his brother, he is a great wordsmith and uses all sorts of flowery language that helps get headlines, et cetera, and good luck to him.

CHAIR - Well, that's a pretty raw statement of observation, 'window dressing'.

Mr ABETZ - He may well have said that to me, along with other things. We, as always, ended the conversation friendly but having different points of view. All I would say is men and women of good faith can disagree.

CHAIR - Of course. I'll just go to Ms Glade-Wright now. There are some specific measures to inquire about. And then to Ms Webb.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Specifically on the ATMs, apart from the improved enforcement through facial recognition, what evidence shows that giving a person faster access to twice as much cash in a gambling venue will reduce gambling harm?

Mr ABETZ - As I said, it is a modernisation of where we are as a society, and allowing venues to catch up, because the vast majority of us now don't deal in cash.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - That aside, though, the actual access to cash is easier.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but you can’t say 'that aside', because it is so fundamental to the way society now operates. If you are going to have legal poker machines, and that's what parliament, right, wrong or indifferent, has determined, the question then is: how do you deal with that and just say, you know, twice the amount of cash, and that amount was set in 2012?

Ms WEBB - 2012.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, 2012, thank you. My memory served me correctly. So, if you take sort of compounding inflation into that, I dare say you'd be tickling about $300 in any event, or $280, so that is one of those issues. But the -

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Why should a harm minimisation limit rise with inflation?

Mr ABETZ - Well, if it is determined as an appropriate figure at a time, then indexing it, in my respectful view, makes sense, unless your purpose is to drive poker machines out of the place completely.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - I think the intention and the objective of the act is to prevent harm.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, and if it was determined in 2012 that, let's say $200 ought to be the limit, because that is the current figure that's determined, then wouldn't it make sense to CPI it across the years so that harm minimisation is maintained throughout the years? If you don't adjust for inflation, what you are doing is reducing the capacity below the harm minimisation threshold that was determined all those years before. This is, yet again, if I might say, Ms Glade-Wright - and I can understand where you're coming from, that trying to get rid of all this might be a nice thing, and that is what you would like to achieve. But we do have on the other side -

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - I never said that. I didn’t say that.

CHAIR - I don’t think you need to judge Ms Glade-Wright’s line of questioning. It’s perfectly reasonable.

Mr ABETZ - It is indeed, as I would like to think my answers are, Chair, and so -

CHAIR - I’m sure you do think so.

Mr ABETZ - Good, good. Be assured I do. And unless you can make the argument that the threshold in 2012 was too high, then indexing it so it remains relevant to that $200 seems to me to be a sort of relevant consideration.

Ms WEBB - So, you're happy with the CPI increase for that measure, you're happy with that as a reasonable way to go forward?

Mr ABETZ - Aside from the fact that because people don't carry cash on them, they will, in going to a venue, want to buy a drink, have a meal or whatever, and if they don't have that cash on them, then getting $400 out of the machine is, when you consider the other issues, I don't think unreasonable. But look, if people want to argue that it should be $300, so be it. I'm not going to die in a ditch over those sorts of issues, but it seemed to me to be a fair, reasonable -

CHAIR - When you say 'people', do you mean the Liquor and Gaming Commission?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, because, ultimately, they can make those determinations.

Ms WEBB - When you make the CPI argument, it's interesting because that takes into account the fact that all products increase with inflation. But, of course, we know that with poker machines, the cost of the product, the spin being the product - you pay money for the spin each time and there's only a certain amount of spins that can happen because every three seconds you're able to do it. The cost of that product per spin has remained the same since 2012. So, when we think about harm as a factor of how much product you can buy at the machine, i.e., how many spins you can purchase, that's remained entirely the same since 2012. We haven't increased that. So, it's interesting, when you're trying to make an inflation argument for increasing harm minimisation levels of anything, because in fact, they're still playing the same product cost from 2012.

Mr ABETZ - I'm not exactly sure what you're -

Ms WEBB - Well, we are allowing people to buy much more of the product with the $300, say, than the $200. Whereas, if it had increased in inflation as well, we would be thinking, okay, well the $300 will buy about the same amount of product that we would have had for $200 in 2012.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but see, in 2012 people were coming in with their own cash from their own pay packets.

Ms WEBB - They can still do that though, right?

Mr ABETZ - Yes, exactly. They can do that, still continue to do that.

Ms WEBB - There's not really any correlation between that story that you tell us and the need to increase it.

Mr ABETZ - No, other than, in our community - and I hope this is a given and accepted, that the vast majority of us don't carry cash on us that rely on our debit or credit cards. And for complete clarity, it'll be debit cards for the ATMs.

Ms WEBB - But the product you can buy with $300 now is more product than you could buy with $200 in 2012, because the product actually is the same price now as it was in 2012. Each spin costs the same amount of money now as it did then because we haven't changed that. It hasn't been subject to a normal economic influence of, you know, your loaf of bread or your car, or whatever that's attracted those increases over time in inflation and CPI. So, we're actually opening it up. The cost of the product is the same, so allowing people to have -

Mr ABETZ - But the value per spin. A dollar in 2012 was worth a lot more than it is today.

Ms WEBB - To the person, it was, but not in terms of purchasing the product. The harm minimisation comes into the limit it puts on people being able to purchase the product and, therefore, potentially be in harmful categories. So, in terms of your ability to purchase the product, $200 in 2012, $200 in 2026 is exactly the same amount of product you can purchase, so you are increasing the availability. Whether it's $300 or $400, you're actually allowing people to buy more product with that because it's the same cost to the product.

Mr ABETZ - Well, if the product is the number of spins but the actual cost per spin has been eroded by inflation, if you were to keep it at $200, the figure that we've jumped on at $300, if that is the compounding inflation, would be exactly the same as the $200. So, I can't see the argument, with respect.

Ms WEBB - I think we have a different view on it. We can move on.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Can we move on to TITO, please? Your submission describes the $100 machine loading limit and $200 ticket limit as the strictest in Australia, but these are transaction limits. There's no limit on the total losses. How many $200 tickets may one patron obtain during a day or gambling session, because is it not the case that you can, once your ticket's been all used up, just go and buy more tickets?

Mr ABETZ - I will have to get absolute clarity on that, but that is the current situation with money.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - So, you're accepting that there's no harm minimisation?

Mr ABETZ - Well, limiting it to $200 is, I think, considerable, given what the total load at the moment is allowed on a machine.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - But there's no loss limits. You could just get another card and then another card and then another card.

Mr ABETZ - Regrettably, it has always been thus in relation to money -

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - So, it's just status quo.

Mr ABETZ - Unless you want to have a precommitment card, that clearly you want, but that is not government policy. And absent that, that is why we have this suite of measures.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - So, this is one of the measures that doesn't attribute to anything, really, when you're looking at your overall package of -

Mr ABETZ - It is modernisation and getting rid of coins and money - or not rid, sorry, limiting money, et cetera, I think is a good thing for safety, security, staff, et cetera.

CHAIR - What about minimising harm?

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Minimising harm, it's not really ticking that box, is it?

Mr ABETZ - Look, people can argue that. Does it exacerbate? I would argue no, given what the current status quo is.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - We heard that the TITO system is about $3000 to $4000 per machine. It seems quite a big investment for something that isn't actually going to minimise harm.

Mr ABETZ - But those investments will need to be made, if I'm correct, by the venues.

CHAIR - Well, with $208 million in losses in the past year, there's probably a bit of money in those venues to do that sort of upgrading.

Mr ABETZ - If I can talk about those losses, from my perspective, it is good news that our population, since the last time - and I've got the figures in my submission, that if you do the annual expenditure on nominal or annual expenditure real, that, in fact, has gone down in circumstances where the population has increased by about 10 per cent. So, in genuine real terms there is less being spent on poker machines, and I noted somebody -

CHAIR - Well, that's semantics.

Ms WEBB - I'd like to comment on that because it's actually incorrect.

CHAIR - Just hang on a minute.

Mr ABETZ - I noted that somebody said that the month of July was the highest spending on EGMs in a year. And, you know what? Absolutely right. But do you know what? Each and every year, July is, for whatever reason, the highest expenditure. June seems to be, I think, the lowest expenditure. To say in a 12-month period July was the highest, that's one of these things with statistics: absolutely true until you do the comparison with a previous July and in real terms it's gone down.

CHAIR - I'm sure Ms Webb is now going to give you some comparative numbers because we've got $208 million in losses in this past year, a huge jump from the previous year. But maybe there's another line of questioning.

Ms WEBB - I think the fundamental question has to be - and I will talk numbers in a minute. But regardless of any numbers we talk, do you genuinely believe that there is less pokies harm in our community than there was in 2012?

Mr ABETZ - I haven't done a comparison between 2012 and 2026 as to the extent of pokies harm as to that which is reported, that which is coming forward. I suspect there's a lot more willingness to report and self-report possibly now than there was one-and-a-half decades ago.

Ms WEBB - There's no evidence for that, I don't believe. But the upshot is you don't have an evidence base on which to be making these claims about level of harm connected to losses? You have no evidence base for that?

Mr ABETZ - Sorry, for what?

Ms WEBB - When you're saying, somehow, in real terms, losses have gone down, you seem to be implying that that means a lower level of harm across our community. I'm just checking if that's what you mean, and do you have an evidence base for that?

Mr ABETZ - Yeah. The graph is -

Ms WEBB - No, no, that's a number on a page. Do you think there's less pokies harm in our community? Do you have an evidence base for less pokies harm in the community?

Mr ABETZ - It stands to reason that, given the evidence from the Department of Treasury and Finance that is in my submission showing that, in real terms, there has been a decrease in expenditure on EGMs by financial year, that that has gone down, I think it's pretty safe to assume that the harm occasioned by it has, therefore, reduced.

Ms WEBB - That's an interesting comment. Do you know what proportion of Tasmanian adults utilised poker machines in 2012?

Mr ABETZ - I'm sure those figures are available somewhere. Do I have them in the back of my mind? No, I don't.

Ms WEBB - Because all experts, I think, would agree that when we're talking about gauging harm and who's being harmed by poker machine use, it's irrelevant really broadly to talk about per capita. You really have to talk about based on the number of people actually using the machines in any given year, for example, to compare. For your information, in case it hasn't been provided to you to help inform your thinking on it, in 2012, one in five Tasmanians - 20 per cent, just over, utilised poker machines, for example. Any losses we're talking about from 2012, it's one in five Tasmanians who are that group that it's coming from. From 2024 to now, we're looking at 9 per cent of Tasmanian adults. When you talk about population growth - irrelevant, unless you actually go to the relevant figures, which is who uses poker machines and what is that number, half the proportion of Tasmanian adults use them now compared to 2012, and all the losses - which is our highest ever, $208 million, are coming from a much smaller pool of people. I'm wondering about the basis on which you're making a claim about harm, unless you have looked at the full evidence base. I'm just wondering why you haven't?

Mr ABETZ - Have you adjusted the $208 million for inflation and CPI?

Ms WEBB - Have you adjusted the losses for proportion of Tasmanians playing the machines?

Mr ABETZ - I think it makes a point for both of us that there is a lot of evidence around, and statistics quoted and matters quoted, which may be worthy of further examination and investigation. I'm not going to be able to provide you with information on 2012, just as much as you aren't able to tell me what the inflation adjusted figure should be for $208 million. They're the sort of things where we can talk past each other. But you can be assured - and I understand where you're coming from in relation to poker machines, but I remind you it is a legal product that the state parliament has agreed to. We have certain harm minimisation measures and we are now introducing more measures. I would have thought in anybody's language, that will - and even to adopt somebody who is not necessarily friendly, it's at least minuscule. It is at least some benefit.

Ms WEBB - That may be true, Treasurer -

Mr ABETZ - Oh, good.

Ms WEBB - except for the fact that we had a proposition on the table which all evidence, including a very comprehensive report from Deloitte, tells us would have been gold standard. It would have achieved literally all the outcomes we wanted around harm minimisation, would have been protective against money laundering, would have incorporated the self-exclusion

system within the card and would have genuinely delivered on a public health approach which the act mandates. Your government, instead of choosing that, has chosen to go down a path of minuscule at best improvement. That's the issue. That's what you've chosen to do.

Mr ABETZ - That is why, at the very beginning, I indicated that a comparison between that which has been parked and that which has been proposed and now partially implemented is an exercise you can get into should you wish. But that proposal that you described as the gold standard has been parked. A promise was made for other measures. These are the other measures.

CHAIR - A subsequent promise. A promise after the original promise?

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms WEBB - From a Tasmanian community member's point of view though, Treasurer, 'parked' is just a political choice. What any Tasmanian out there now knows - and at least 57,000 of them are being harmed by problematic use of poker machines, pokies addiction, what they understand now is you had an option in front of you, developed to the point of a government just saying, 'Yes, let's implement it, we will invest in it and go', and the government turning its back on that. That's not an imaginary choice; that's a real choice. The government at that time said, 'We won't go down the path of this card, although we're poised and ready to do that because the design work's in place. We will turn our back and we will go down another path which all evidence tells us will be minuscule in its impact in reducing the harm being felt by at least 57,000 Tasmanians.' That's the choice that you have made, is it not? How do you explain that to Tasmanians out there who are being harmed?

Mr ABETZ - It is very clear that the government has said they're parking the proposal subject to the rest of Australia coming on board. That is a decision which I inherited that I accept, being sort of practical, pragmatic. That is what I was asked to do. That is what I have done with my Cabinet colleagues.

Ms WEBB - Can I put it to you that the Cabinet of your government over the last, let's say, six years, in 2021 didn't have a policy for a pokies card. In 2022, it did have a policy for a pokies card. In 2024, it had a policy for a pokies card, but it was on pause for a period of time. In 2025, it was shelved, that policy for a pokies card. This Cabinet has repeatedly, over the last half a dozen years, changed its mind on its position on a pokies card. The only element here is political will and choice of your government, your Cabinet that you're in, about whether or not this pokies card could go ahead. That's the only element here, and that choice has changed over time. It could change again. Are you open-minded to the fact that just because the Cabinet decision at this point in time has been to pause and put on the shelf this card, the Cabinet entirely has available to it an opportunity to pick it back up again?

Mr ABETZ - Look, you state the bleeding obvious that a Cabinet can change its decision in a whole range of matters. This is one of them where it could, should it wish to. The Cabinet, in considering the matters, embraced the card, then determined that possibly it wasn't such a good idea after all -

CHAIR - After a conversation with Hospitality Tasmania.

Mr ABETZ - and have parked that issue subject to the rest of Australia coming on board. That was the policy parameter with which I came to the portfolio and have now sought to implement a range of policies, which I'm glad to hear from the table is now acknowledged as minuscule. So, rather than going backwards and being negative -

Ms WEBB - I think we said 'miniscule at best'.

CHAIR - Miniscule at best.

Mr ABETZ - We are now accepting it's minuscule, so I think I've won something today.

Ms WEBB - It's not for Tasmanians being harmed by pokies, though, is it? Not their win.

CHAIR - Well, miniscule, although we might just point you back to the Alliance for Gambling Reform, which has found that the ATMs in gaming venues and the ticket in, ticket out system potentially will create more harm.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - The commission said that too.

CHAIR - Yes. Can I just check something with you? I asked you earlier when was the last time you met with Steve Old. Do you have any further information to add on that?

Mr ABETZ - No, I don't. If one goes to, you know, what, be it a JackJumpers game or whatever, whatever, there is a very real likelihood that you're going to bump into Steve Old. As in a sit-down with him to discuss issues for his members, I will have to get back to you on that.

CHAIR - Did you bump into Steve Old for a coffee this morning?

Mr ABETZ - No, I, in fact, bumped into my favourite constituent at the airport this morning.

CHAIR - Oh, your lovely wife.

Mr ABETZ - Namely my wife. I was sending her off.

CHAIR - Okay, because Steve Old was seen in the Parliament Square precinct, so we're just trying to understand who he was chatting to.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, my goodness, the conspiracy theories abound.

CHAIR - No, it's not a conspiracy. Well, you're at the table, so it's a good opportunity to check, given that Steve Old has an open door.

Mr ABETZ - Thank goodness I have a wife that is my alibi.

CHAIR - To give you your alibi.

Mr ABETZ - I was wondering why you were asking so consistently about when I'd met with Mr Old. But no, it was not this morning. Albeit if I would have bumped into him in Parliament Square, of course, I would have said hello to him.

CHAIR - Of course. I think all of us would have.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - I want to ask about facial recognition technology. Why is it being presented as a central harm minimisation reform, given that your submission acknowledges that facial recognition has no predictive capacity and does not protect people at risk who have not already excluded themselves?

Mr ABETZ - The facial recognition is for those that are excluded. I think the vast majority are self-excluded. I think there may be one or two that are police-excluded, and others through family matters, whatever, have been excluded. The capacity to police or monitor might be a better word, monitor those that are excluded is exceptionally difficult for the staff. They have photographs on a sheet in front of them at the counters and try to determine whether the photograph matches people coming in and out.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - So, it's a procedural improvement, but it's not actually a harm minimisation improvement.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, it is a harm minimisation improvement, because those that are excluded-

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - They're already excluded.

Mr ABETZ - But regrettably, Ms Glade-Wright, they nevertheless get the urge and then go back into the venues. And for staff with faded photographs or whatever - if I would've been excluded 20 years ago, I may have had a full head of hair, and trying to identify myself now - they're the sort of difficulties that the staff have. And facial recognition - and I got a bit of a view of it at the Kingston Hotel, which was interesting, where a fellow walked in and they had the gear set up for exclusion and then he walked in with a cap on, big black glasses and I think a fake moustache, if I remember. Nevertheless, the facial recognition picked him up. So, that is genuine harm minimisation because those that are the problem gamblers that should be excluded are still able to get in from time to time.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - But this won't help those people become excluded at all. This is just looking at people already excluded. Do you accept that that's a very small percentage of the number of gamblers?

Mr ABETZ - Of course, it is.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - So, again, a very minuscule little improvement.

Mr ABETZ - It is, I think, fundamentally important for those that are already excluded for them to know that they are going to be very likely picked up and asked to leave the premises. That said, and that is why it's got to be a suite of measures that you look at. One thing that I saw straight away was the immediate self-exclusion, that when I've lost my day, I'm at my lowest point, and I say 'I can't keep doing this', I can get on a QR code and exclude myself before I leave the premises. And I think that is that genuine bit of it. Then once excluded, even

if I get - 'buyer's remorse' isn't the correct term - exclusion remorse the next day and try to sneak in, the buzzer will go off and say, 'Escort that man out of the premises, he's excluded'. So, combined, I think it's going to be exceptionally helpful.

If I might say, from a staffing point of view, those that - and I have no doubt all of them take it exceptionally seriously - the capacity to overlook somebody because you've got this array of photos in front of you, it eases the burden on the staff because they'll be able to hear the buzzer, whatever it is, go off and know that an excluded person has entered the premises.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Are you concerned about the number of problem gamblers that there are in Tasmania who haven't been able to self-exclude? Did you ever consider anything that could assist those people, like potentially a precommitment card, for example?

Mr ABETZ - Look, we've been there with the precommitment card. In relation to the number of problem gamblers, from my perspective, one problem gambler is one problem gambler too many.

CHAIR - It's easier to say, though, isn't it? Unless you've got the policy that helps people, because by the time people get to self-exclusion - I'm sure you understand this Treasurer, I hope you understand this. By the time people get to the point where they have the point in themselves to self-exclude, they're so desperate, they've got to deal with the shame, the stigma. So, it's a very small percentage of gambling addicts who end up on the self-exclusion register. And I take on board what you say and I'm sure at some level you feel it, right? That one is one too many. But there's a lot of people who will not be helped by the framework that you've put in place.

Just on that, we had Mark Kempster in, who's a lived-experience advocate, and he said he doesn't think that you've got a true grasp of addiction. People don't reach out for help until they're completely broken. He was disgusted by the policies. I guess I'm trying to see if you understand the nature of this addiction. Tim Costello called them dangerous, addictive, predatory products. We've got this particular product that is highly, highly addictive and designed to be so, so these people who are able to self-exclude, they're just one small part of the harm-minimisation challenge, aren't they?

Mr ABETZ - The exclusion bit, I think, is an important part -

CHAIR - Yes and?

Mr ABETZ - but does it deal with the whole picture? Of course it doesn't. Loading the machines with only $100 at any time rather than the higher limits that exist at the moment, that is another part. But going back to - and I think you've hit something here - the shame people feel, that was the anecdotally and look, everybody's lived experience is different, quite often substantially different. If you can self-exclude on a QR code, you don't have to ring an 1800 number, you don't have to go to counselling and walk in a door somewhere. You can just do it, and nobody needs to know that you've self-excluded, that helps or makes it more likely that people will engage in self-exclusion, knowing that they don't have to report to anybody. They don't need the counselling, which some people will find either shameful, humiliating or whatever. That is why the immediate self-exclusion will be helpful for those that are - and you're quite right, and the lived experience witness quite right, they'll exclude when they're at the very lowest, but being able to do that immediately, I think is going to be of great benefit.

CHAIR - Do you accept that when you and in fact your colleagues - and we've heard this argument put on the Floor of the House, that people have the freedom to spend their money as they choose? On the flip of that, we have here a product which is designed to draw people in. It hypnotises people. It compels more money going into the machine. It's a particularly addictive product. Do you accept that for people who have an addiction, it's not about the freedom to spend the money as they choose, it's the fact that these machines have been designed to addict them.

Mr ABETZ - Some people clearly are addicted to them courtesy of noises and lights or whatever, but you know, there are other addictions within our community. Dare I mention one where once you're hooked, you're hooked and it's very hard to give up, but people are entitled to buy the product.

Ms WEBB - On that though, and given that you've said one person addicted is too many, essentially, what you've got is a situation where we know exactly how to make these machines safer to use in a way that's recreational and non-harmful without impacting on that use to any meaningful degree, but which both prevents the development of addiction and assists people who are already in stages of addiction, and is particularly helpful for people who are at the urgent end. It also builds in correlation with our self-exclusion system and is very simple to use in relation to that as well - all in the one. Plus, it prevents money laundering as well, just for the cherry on top. And that's the card.

The card in fact delivers greater personal agency, many would argue, to people utilising a card with these machines who can also adjust limits, choose for themselves to adjust limits on the card, who can be informed by data provided to them via use of the card about what they're spending and where, who can effectively give effect to their choices in a much more empowered way using the card. Personal agency is delivered by the card plus all the outcomes we're seeking to, particularly prevention, not just response. How can you on the one hand say one person too many and we should prevent every one if we could, and yet you've turned your back on the measure that we know would best deliver that.

Mr ABETZ - Well, look, that is what you assert. That's your argument, I get it.

Ms WEBB - Are you asserting it's not true?

Mr ABETZ - I get it. I understand it. But I am dealing with a situation where the card has been parked and given that, where do we move forward and how do we minimise harm? That is what I've turned my mind to and the difficulties with the card were explained at the time, and I deal with the reality of what is in front of me.

Ms WEBB - Just to be clear though, you're not disputing anything that I just said there about what can be delivered by the card?

Mr ABETZ - We would potentially spend the rest of the hearing of me going through absolutely every word. That's one of the difficulties with exceptionally long questions, with respect, that a lot of assertions are made and then a question tacked on to the very end, which I'm seeking to answer. It is a hypothetical discussion given what the government's position is.

Ms WEBB - Do you dispute that the card is gold standard in preventing and addressing harm from poker machines?

Mr ABETZ - If it were to be able to be fully implemented, and Tasmania being a small market, I think that's one of the considerations that were taken into account at the time that it was parked. Wouldn't it be a good thing if all the states and territories were to get together and come up with a proposal?

Ms WEBB - Could I ask a question about how you're going to be evaluating the impact of your suite of measures? Because you don't have a piece of work like the Deloitte report that would tell us about what we might expect about impact from your measures, because you haven't taken the time to have that work done, I don't believe.

Mr ABETZ - When's the next SEIS? That's about -

Mr ROOT - There's one that'll be published in December.

Mr ABETZ - In December.

CHAIR - This year?

Mr ABETZ - Yes. So, every five years.

Ms WEBB - Just to be clear, in terms of evaluating the impact of your measures, you're going to regard the soon-to-be-delivered SEIS as a baseline from which to then gauge impact of your measures?

Mr ABETZ - Depending on what the study finds and says, et cetera, it may well become a baseline - so yeah, open to that.

Ms WEBB - What will you look to to inform you as to whether or how well your measures are delivering the outcomes that you're seeking from them?

CHAIR - Yeah. What will success look like?

Ms WEBB - How will you measure success? How will you measure it?

Mr ABETZ - What will success look like? Having less problem gamblers within our community.

Ms WEBB - How are you going to measure that? Just with our SEIS regular piece of research?

Mr ABETZ - Yeah.

Ms WEBB - There's no other way that your -

Mr ABETZ - With our research we will see. The idea of a QR code for self-exclusion - I personally think it's a good idea.

Ms WEBB - That's not going to be a measure of less problem gamblers, though, is it?

Mr ABETZ - If I can finish. The QR code, I think, is a good idea for immediate self-exclusion. We might be back here within a year and not a single person having self-excluded. That is when I will need to raise the white flag and say, 'Eric, it was a damn good idea at the time but, you know what, of no practical impact'.

CHAIR - And then what will you do?

Mr ABETZ - Then we will have to have a look at other measures as to what else we can do.

Ms WEBB - Treasurer, can you come closer to your mic?

Mr ABETZ - Oh, right. Of course.

CHAIR - We wouldn't want to miss a word you're saying.

Mr ABETZ - I can understand that.

Ms WEBB - You picked out the one thing we could all agree is going to be potentially useful.

Mr ABETZ - Keep my tie straight, too. Good. Thank you.

CHAIR - I was just trying to understand, then, if after SEIS comes out, there's no measurable reduction in the number of people who would be identified as problem gamblers, there's no measurable change to losses, what do you do then as Treasurer responsible for gambling harm minimisation?

Mr ABETZ - You always have to be open for change and consider what may or may not work. That's something that I'm always open to. The suite of measures I think are worthwhile being given a go; let's see what they do. I can understand the frustration of people that wanted the precommitment card, but it has been parked. That is the policy position with which I was confronted, if you like, or the Cabinet decision was parked that beget that policy suite in place. My predecessor, Mr Barnett, started on that and I have the task of finishing it off, and that is what we see in the ministerial direction.

CHAIR - No government, no treasurer has ever been able to withstand the THA here in Tasmania. What makes you think that you could take them on?

Mr ABETZ - I will have to do a word search to see how often you have made that assertion during this hearing.

CHAIR - Well, the evidence of Hospitality Tasmania calling the shots in government is overwhelming. Do you remember Steve Old after the 2021 election, laughing because he had that letter with the Labor Party in his back pocket where he got them to withdraw their policy on getting pokies out of pubs and clubs? They haven't said a peep since, the Labor Party.

Mr ABETZ - It is an assertion that you can make, and Labor can speak for themselves, but for us policy has never been and never will be subject to those sort of considerations.

CHAIR - $217,000 in donations, anyway, sorry Ms Webb.

Mr ABETZ - One million from Graeme Wood, please, let's do a compare and contrast.

CHAIR - Yes, and what did that buy?

Ms WEBB - Sorry, was that delivering some particular specific vested interest that Graeme Wood had, in relation to public policy, was it?

CHAIR - No, nothing.

Mr ABETZ - Yes.

Ms WEBB - To be in government, and delivering policy, was it?

Mr ABETZ - Look, Graeme Wood said it was the best investment he had ever made.

CHAIR - Yes, that's right.

Ms WEBB - That's because he probably wanted outcomes from a party he supported. In this case, we're talking about vested interest.

Mr ABETZ - Exactly, he wanted outcomes from the party he supported. Thank you very much, I love that.

CHAIR - He wanted a greener Australia. Well, it depends, because if your outcome is all about money and influence, sure, but this is actually about a greener country.

Mr ABETZ - Well, you've derailed the discussion, I think, somewhat.

Ms WEBB - Yes, sorry, that's true. Can I come back to evaluations, so SEIS is going to come out this year. It'll be five years before it's repeated. So, you're quite happy for these measures to come into play and be completely unclear or unevaluated until five years down the track? In that case too, could you give us a clearer understanding about what you expect to change? Apart from the one measure of problem gamblers that's delivered through the SEIS, what else do you expect to indicate the degree of success of these measures?

Mr ABETZ - We will monitor them as we go, and see what the circumstance is. It's like the current suite; what has that done or not done, how can it be improved? The 75 per cent increase in closure time one suspects will have an impact.

Ms WEBB - How will we know, Treasurer? This is what I'm asking you. What will you look at to tell you that?

Mr ABETZ - If I can finish the sentence - will have an impact, one imagines, on the money going through the machines.

Ms WEBB - Do you think? Have you got modelling to say that, and what that - I'm just trying to understand how we'll know.

Mr ABETZ - It is, I think common sense tells you, that the longer the machines are available for the public to use, the more money will go through. The more restricted the hours, the less money will go through. If for some reason that proves to be incorrect, then we'll raise the white flag on that, and say we'll go back to four-hour closure, and see what your comment is.

Ms WEBB - Is that what you're intending to do? Potentially reverse it?

Mr ABETZ - Of course not.

Ms WEBB - Right, because I absolutely predict -

Mr ABETZ - But that is why I'm saying to you that some of the assertions that are being made, if you think seven hours is not going to make any difference, then issue a press release and say, 'Seven hours is a waste of time, stick with four hours'. You won't do it, nor should you do it. I don't encourage you to do it -

Ms WEBB - I just think there's no plan to be made. No plan to be made.

Mr ABETZ - but I'd just encourage you to accept that there are some aspects of this that are positive in the harm minimisation, and -

Ms WEBB - Not if you can't demonstrate it.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Just in regards to the gaming care officers, how adequate do you think three is going to be?

Mr ABETZ - One in each region is the idea, and we will see how adequate they are. We believe that that would be about right, but we shall see.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - And we shall see how? Are you going to measure their impact somehow?

Mr ABETZ - We will see how that works out, but we believe that with gaming care officers going round the various venues, talking to staff and also to patrons, et cetera, we might get a better understanding and hopefully deal with those that have issues, and help staff to identify behaviours that might indicate that people have issues.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - How is the number three determined? We heard that in other jurisdictions they have a considerable amount more, and working permanently in venues.

Mr ABETZ - That I will need to check.

Mr ROOT - I could probably shed a little bit of light on that. There are different types of gaming care officers in different jurisdictions. For example, in New South Wales, there's a requirement to have people in the venue all the time when there are more than a certain number of machines. That's not the model here. The model here is based on regional coverage of these individuals who will be assisting venues to comply with their obligations. There's a three-year trial, I think, initially and then it'll be reviewed. But its intention is not to duplicate the New South Wales model in having them in every venue.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - It sounds a bit like it's one of those procedural improvements rather than a harm-minimisation measure. It's really there to assist staff.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, but if it assists staff for them to be able to identify behaviours, how to approach people - you know, 'We think you've been sitting there for a bit long' - the right words, how to encourage people to have a break or to leave the premises, that clearly has to be harm minimisation.

Ms GLADE-WRIGHT - Would you consider increasing the number of gaming care officers in the future?

Mr ABETZ - Look, that is something that I am always happy to look at the proposals and suggestions. Let's see how they work, let's see how effective, et cetera. Yes, I am open to those sorts of ideas.

CHAIR - This was the industry's proposal, though, wasn't it - the gaming care officers?

Mr ABETZ - I think it was.

Mr ROOT - They'll be delivering.

Mr ABETZ - Yes, they'll be delivering it.

CHAIR - It was the industry's proposal, and they'll be funded to deliver it.

Mr ABETZ - I'm not sure if it was their proposal.

CHAIR - I think Mr Root indicated that it was, but if you want to clarify that.

Mr ABETZ - We will take that on notice as to the detail. But I think the commitment to gaming care officers was a policy that was already in place when I became Treasurer, I think.

CHAIR - Thank you, but that doesn't answer the question. The gaming care officers was a proposal that was put to government by Hospitality Tasmania, or the THA, as they might be known.

Mr ABETZ - That may well be right, and I'll take that on notice, but my recollection of it is limited, because I think that was a policy proposition before I got the portfolio.

CHAIR - We've only got another few minutes and I will go to Ms Webb, but it sounds like, from the evidence that you've given today, that the policy elements of the package that's been put forward as harm minimisation that have been guided by industry: gaming care officers, ticket-in, ticket-out and ATMs at venues. Would that be a fair assessment?

Mr ABETZ - No. Incorrect.

CHAIR - And facial recognition technology actually, too, thank you Ms Webb. So, four elements of the package have been put forward by industry?

Mr ABETZ - Well, I think you'll find that the commission indicated something in relation to facial recognition as something they had worked on, so don't over-egg it.

Ms WEBB - They chose the card. They indicated the card was a far, far better option because facial recognition had marginal impact.

CHAIR - Industry was talking about facial recognition in 2021 and '22.

Mr ABETZ - I can understand the commission's disappointment, having done a lot of work on an issue and then having it parked. I can understand that.

CHAIR - And then not being able to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. We're about to close out with Ms Webb's question.

Ms WEBB - A tiny clarification on gaming care officers. Who will they report to and what will their KPIs be? Because for example, if we're going to measure whether they increase the appropriate responses, for example, by staff in venues, we don't currently collect any data on that. So, will we be starting to collect data on those things? Will they be attached to KPIs and will they be reported back?

Mr ROOT - The process will be as per normal grant funding for these sorts of things, so there'll be a deed which will set out what they are required to do and the KPIs on that. That's under development at the moment.

Ms WEBB - Will the KPIs be related to the sorts of things the Treasurer indicated are the things that we would expect to change as a result of these officers being in place?

Mr ABETZ - Look, it's still being developed, as I understand it.

Ms WEBB - Does it report through to Liquor and Gaming branch?

Mr ABETZ - That will also be determined, but I would assume so.

Ms WEBB - Thank you. I have a final question. Treasury do forward Estimates on revenue from gaming in every state budget. You're introducing a range of measures which your assertion is that they will reduce harm, and by definition that would have to reduce revenue coming through from poker machines. So, what is Treasury modelling in terms of its estimate about revenue in future state budgets in relation to these measures being brought in?

Mr ABETZ - As I understand it, and I might have to take aspects of this on notice, but Treasury do modelling on the legislative and regulatory framework as it exists at the time. So, for example, without taking a scab off another little sore in this budget, we did not have money set aside from the anticipated short-stay levy because it hadn't been legislated as yet, so it wasn't in the budget. I assume that the budget that was delivered in May has not taken into account changes.

CHAIR - This is the last question.

Ms WEBB - I think that's really interesting because the one measure from your suite that will be in place when assessments are being made for the next state budget is the longer closing

hours. I presume that Treasury, in their modelling, will have to model something about the expected change from that to put into their forward Estimates. Could we take that as potentially indicative in the next state budget when we look at those forward Estimates that Treasury has modelled based on expected change from closure hours?

Mr ABETZ - I'm not sure whether Treasury is going to model that, but happy to have a look at that and see what Treasury advice is. Treasury does not model absolutely everything and every change.

Ms WEBB - Presume it to be an insignificant change. Mm.

CHAIR - That brings us to the end of today's hearing.

Mr ABETZ - Oh, what a pity.

CHAIR - Thank you both for taking the time to provide evidence to this committee. The evidence that you've provided today is, as you know, protected by parliamentary privilege. I need to take this opportunity to remind you that any comments you make to the media or others outside of this room, even if you repeat what you've said in here, will not be protected. I'm sure you understand that, but just to clarify. Yes? Thank you again for your time.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee adjourned at 1.41 p.m.