

**Submission to Call for Evidence -
Review of Gaming Machines and Social Responsibility Measures**

I have been helping constituents in Glasgow North since September 2015, who have addictions to FOBT machines. The following submission is based on the evidence that they have presented to me during this time, and since the issues my constituents are facing are widespread, I believe the UK Government has a responsibility to take into account the evidence presented here.

I also note that many of the questions posed in this call for evidence ask for intricate and complex answers. I would therefore be grateful if the Government would consider investing in funding for independent social research in order to find meaningful answers to the questions being posed in this call for evidence. Furthermore, in order to ensure impartiality, research funding needs to be given to responsible researchers with a track record of independence from the gambling industry.

It may be helpful to know that I have signposted my constituents to various organisations and charities for gambling addiction support, written to the Scottish Government and UK Government, the Gambling Commission, and also advised my constituents to also open a complaint directly with the Gambling businesses (such as William Hill and Ladbrokes) they normally frequent.

My constituents feel that FOBT machines are too accessible. They are worried about a lack of regulation, and are angry that there is not more being done to protect vulnerable people.

In particular my constituents inform me that the financial limit on FOBT machines is too high. It is supposed to be £50, then the machines are supposed to cut out and stop you from playing. However, in their experience, you can still go on to play them if you reply 'yes' to the onscreen prompt, if you switch to the machine next to the one currently being played, or if you simply walk across the street and visit the next gambling business with FOBT machines. The accessibility of machines and the frequency of gambling shops in close proximity is an issue that has also been raised.

I understand from my constituents that one of the biggest issues with the FOBT machines is the way in which they constantly make you feel that you have almost won. This draws the player into a false sense of hope that they are very close to winning, and therefore compels them to spend more and more money.

One constituent is still playing the machines and doesn't want to self bar because then they would not be able to play the horses. This is important for them, as it is only the machines they have a problem with. They propose that a more selective self-bar option, based on the individual game rather than business as a whole, should be considered.

Finally, my constituents inform me that the complaints procedure within gambling businesses is poorly administered on the ground. They call for more stringent and independent regulation, including frequent testing of machines to ensure they are fair. Further more, after going through the complaints procedure of the individual gambling business, they also want to know why the onus is on the customer to prove the complaint and not on the regulator to prove the machine is fair and random.

As you may be aware, the Scottish Government is concerned by the changes in the UK gambling environment over the years. These encompass liberalised gambling laws that allow for television

advertising, technological advances such as internet gambling, mobile phone gambling and fixed odds betting terminals (FOBT), and the arrival of new gambling mediums such as exchanges and spread betting. As a result of these changes it is possible to gamble 24 hours a day and gambling is much more pervasive than a generation ago.

I am, of course, aware that certain powers related to gambling regulation may be devolved to the Scottish Government in the Scotland Bill, such as the number of gaming machines allowed, however it is unclear what the final power will entail. As currently drafted the Scotland Bill would not allow the Scottish Parliament to reduce the number of machines already in betting shops, or allow the regulation of how the machines operate e.g. limiting stakes, prizes or speed of play. Along with my Scottish Government colleagues I therefore call on the UK Government to take firm action to ensure that problem gambling is reined in.