



Submission to Statutory Review of BetStop – the National Self Exclusion Register

Introduction

The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the statutory review of BetStop – the National Self Exclusion Register (BetStop).

The development and implementation of BetStop by the Australian Government was supported by DLGSC and other stakeholders in Western Australia (WA). DLGSC acknowledges that, since commencing operations on 21 August 2023, BetStop has provided many Western Australians with a mechanism to temporarily or permanently cease their online gambling and reduce their risk of experiencing gambling harm.

BetStop is a key measure of the National Consumer Protection Framework for online wagering (NCPF), which has delivered ten consumer protection measures to reduce online gambling harm by providing consumers with tools and information to manage and reduce their gambling.

The WA Government continues to work with the Australian Government and other State and Territory Governments to support the NCPF, and DLGSC is an active member of interjurisdictional forums to contribute to national initiatives to reduce the harms associated with online gambling in Australia.

Overview of WA context

DLGSC is responsible for supporting the integrity of lawful gambling activities in WA, as well as developing and implementing initiatives to promote the minimisation of gambling-related harms.

Key DLGSC activities include providing regulatory services and supports to the gambling regulator, the Gaming and Wagering Commission of Western Australia (GWC), which is responsible for administering laws relating to gaming and wagering in WA.

The regulatory landscape for gambling in WA is unique among Australian jurisdictions. A key factor in the nature, prevalence and potential risks associated with in-person gambling in WA include the restriction of casino-based gambling to a sole casino licensee, which operates a casino located in Perth, and the long-standing ban on electronic gaming machines (EGMs) outside the casino. The licensee maintains a program to support safer gambling at the casino, which includes options for self-exclusion and/or exclusion by a third party.

In addition, WA has the only government-owned lottery operator in Australia, the Lotteries Commission, which trades as Lotterywest. The racing regulator, Racing and Wagering Western Australia (RWVA), is a government trading enterprise that also provides wagering services through its operation of the WA Totalisator Agency Board (WA TAB) and its online service, TABtouch.

Both Lotterywest and RWVA offers self-exclusion options through their retail networks, and RWVA also offers self-exclusion pathways through its online wagering accounts.

Recent reforms to the legislative and policy framework in WA have been shaped and informed by the implementation of the NCPF measures, including the establishment of BetStop, and the findings and recommendations of the Perth Casino Royal Commission which was conducted from March 2021 to March 2022.

Online gambling in WA

DLGSC and other WA regulators recognise that, while there are significant points of difference between WA and other States and Territories, a central point of commonality is the challenge of addressing harms associated with online gambling that adversely impacts individuals, families and communities across Australia.

Sports betting and other forms of online gambling is the fastest growing gambling segment in Australia and an emerging area of concern. Recent research indicates that many community members and other stakeholders believe more could be done to strengthen the Australian Government's regulation of the online provision and advertising of gambling services. Of particular concern is the risk that online gambling advertisements pose for young people, who are vulnerable due to their age and due to their extensive use of digital devices.

In September 2024, the first significant research into the prevalence of gambling and gambling-related harm in WA was commissioned by DLGSC on behalf of the Problem Gambling Support Services Committee (PGSSC), a cross-sector group made up of WA Government agencies and industry members. The research report is due to be finalised later this year.

While the research is not yet concluded, emerging observations indicate that overall, gambling behaviours and risks in WA are comparable with national trends; with lottery products and online sports betting the most prevalent forms of gambling.

The initial research findings also indicate that the risk of gambling harm is highest among young people in WA, especially younger men between 18 and 44 years of age. These findings are consistent with recent statistics published by the Australian Gambling Research Centre.

It is anticipated that the research findings will inform evidence-based strategies, policies and programs aimed at reducing gambling-related harms in WA, that will be complemented by broader approaches to support services and interventions.

Feedback on BetStop

A range of support service providers are funded by DLGSC on behalf of the PGSSC, to deliver gambling harm support services in the WA community. These service providers promote BetStop to their clients as part of their counselling and referral practices.

The service providers have reported that BetStop has positively supported individuals in WA to reduce or eliminate their gambling harm. The break afforded by self-exclusion was perceived as beneficial, particularly for motivated individuals who were willing and capable to change harmful gambling behaviours at that time. However, it has also been noted that individuals who have experienced significant gambling harm require additional support beyond BetStop.

Individuals with lived experience of gambling harm who participated in a recent survey as part of the WA research project have advised that they were able to bypass the BetStop exclusion by withdrawing cash and placing manual bets at a gambling venue.

It has also been widely reported that the BetStop registration process allows individuals to circumvent their self-exclusion by creating alias accounts. It is recommended that the Australian Government examine ways in which this issue could be addressed.

Individuals have also noted that when registered with BetStop, gambling promotions are reduced but not entirely removed, such that vulnerable individuals continue to be exposed to gambling advertisements across numerous social media platforms which may trigger the resumption of gambling. DLGSC urges further consideration be given to the promotion of gambling and its impact on cohorts at risk of gambling harm.

Discussions with DLGSC stakeholders, and recent research published by the Australian Gambling Research Centre, indicates that there is a disconnect between the aims and design of tools such as BetStop and consumer perceptions that these tools are a reactive measure rather than a preventative strategy.

This is further complicated by the misperception of many gamblers that the tools are not applicable to them, given many individuals do not recognise their gambling behaviour as harmful or risky. In addition, there is evidence to indicate consumers perceive the gambling harm messages delivered under the NCPF as part of the online sports betting advertisement, rather than the provision of government information and linkages to support services.

In light of this, DLGSC supports the development and rollout of a new evidence-based public education program that offers practical advice on how to make safer choices online and provides information on the early signs of gambling harm, as well as the supports and consumer protection measures available, such as self-exclusion via BetStop, reviewing gambling activity statements, setting spend limits and gambling blocks on bank accounts.

Conclusion

The WA Government is committed to reducing gambling-related harms in WA, recognising the profound impact such harms have on individuals, their families and friends and the broader community.

DLGSC acknowledges and supports BetStop as an important part of the consumer protection toolkit that aims to minimise and reduce gambling-related harms. Where an individual elects self-exclusion, BetStop functions as an effective gateway and referral pathway for other supports and services that assist individuals to manage and reduce harmful gambling.

DLGSC and other WA Government agencies seek to continue collaborating with the Australian Government and other State and Territory Governments to develop and deliver gambling harm minimisation initiatives.

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