[‘Callous exploitation’: NSW losing $1 million an hour on pokies](https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/callous-exploitation-nsw-losing-1-million-an-hour-on-pokies-20241217-p5kyww.html) SMH - [**Michael McGowan**](https://www.smh.com.au/by/michael-mcgowan-p536tc)December 17, 2024

Poker machines losses have reached a grim new benchmark, with government data revealing NSW gamblers lost a staggering $1 million dollars per hour in a three-month period.

The latest figures, from the NSW Department of Liquor and Gaming, reveal $2.25 billion dollars was lost to pokies in the 92 days between July and September, prompting renewed calls for the government to respond to recommendations from a long-awaited report into the state’s gambling system released earlier this month.

The record losses were felt most keenly in suburbs in Sydney’s west, which made up eight of the top 10 LGAs in greater Sydney. Canterbury-Bankstown, where $2 million dollars a day was lost to the almost 5000 poker machines in the local government area, topped the list ahead of Fairfield and Cumberland.

Stu Cameron, the chief executive of Wesley Mission, one of the organisations calling for the introduction of a mandatory cashless gaming card, said the scale of losses was “staggering”.

“This is not entertainment. It is callous exploitation, pure and simple. Pokies are a recession-proof industry. Cost-of-living crises don’t impact the pubs and clubs,” he said.

“It’s the poorest postcodes paying the biggest price.”

Earlier this month the Independent Panel on Gaming Reform, which [**convened a year-long trial of cashless gaming technology**](https://www.smh.com.au/link/follow-20170101-p5k8ja), called for the government to introduce a central database for poker machine players to mitigate money laundering. The expert panel also recommended default time and spend limits, although these would be non-binding and players could elect to opt out of them.

The government is yet to respond. A spokesman for Gaming Minister David Harris said the government was “committed to addressing gambling harm through evidence-based policy that gets the balance right”.

Despite the panel resisting calls from reform advocates for mandatory cashless gaming with a binding daily limit, the recommendations were still[**slammed by the powerful pubs and clubs lobby**](https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/embarrassing-not-credible-why-pubs-and-clubs-won-t-back-gambling-scheme-20241203-p5kvhe.html).

[**After a trial that pleased no one, NSW’s biggest gambling loser is clear**](https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/after-a-trial-that-pleased-no-one-nsw-s-biggest-gambling-loser-is-clear-20241203-p5kvj0.html)

The Australian Hotels Association (AHA) and Clubs NSW savaged recommendations made by the Independent Panel’s three-person executive committee earlier this month. Despite sitting on the trial’s advisory panel, the AHA said the findings were “embarrassing and not credible”, while Clubs NSW claimed they could lead to thousands of job losses and venue closures.

At the same time, the industry enjoyed a record quarter of profits.

Despite hosting only a quarter of the state’s poker machines, the new department figures showed $1 billion dollars was lost in hotels in the three-month period. It is the first time poker machine losses in the hotel sector have reached seven figures in a single quarter.

The clubs sector recorded $1.2 billion dollars in profit in the same period.

Cameron said he was “not surprised” by the pushback given the profitability of the industry.

“I completely understand the pubs squealing about it because they’re protecting their super-profits,” he said.

NSW Opposition Leader Mark Speakman accused the government of being “paralysed by indecision” over gambling reform and said the much-hyped cashless gaming trial had proven to be a “debacle”.