

Scenario 2: TV betting

Background and context: In 2008, Victoria became the first state to approve the proposed joint venture between Tabcorp, pay-TV operator Foxtel and technology provider Two Way, to allow people to place bets at home using their television remote control. NSW has rejected the same proposal, while Western Australia remains undecided.

This opinion piece was published in response to the Victorian government's approval of TV betting.

Note: see C15 in the colour insert pages for a colour version of the cartoon.

GROWN-UP GAMBLERS CAN MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES

By Bernard Frisch

Australia is a nation of punters. From the once-a-year flurrier on the Melbourne Cup to the weekly Tattsлото draw, there is a rich cultural tradition of gambling in Australia. Like the Sunday barbie and cricket on the beach, having a bet is one of our emblematic forms of entertainment. And for the vast majority of us, it's one we manage responsibly.

There's a lot of scare-mongering coming from opponents of TV betting. Let's sort out the facts from some of the frenzied fictions being bandied about.

For starters, there's nothing new or frightening about TV betting. Registered punters can already use the phone and the internet to place wagers. In a joint venture between Tabcorp, Foxtel and technology provider Two Way, the new system will simply allow punters to place bets by using their TV remote control while watching Sky Racing.

And why shouldn't Joe Average be able to have a few each way from the comfort of his lounge room, without having to trek all the way down to a noisy and uncomfortable TAB? Opponents of the new system who blather on about encouraging 'problem' gamblers, consider this: who do you think is likely to face greater

PAY TV GAMBLING A NICHE MARKET

Survey: Would you place bets via your TV remote control?

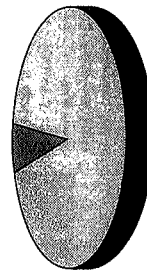
Yes - 6%

No - 94%

Total Votes: 235

Poll date: 20 February 2008

Source: *The Age*



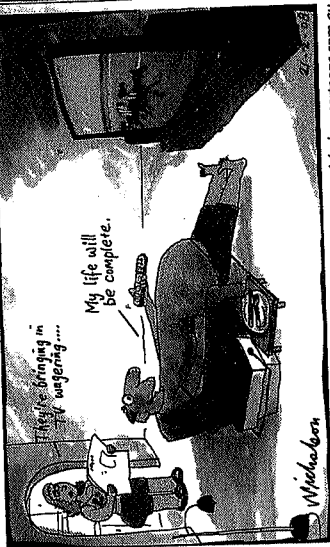
NO
YES

temptations - the man sitting at home, surrounded by his family, enjoying the racing with a bit of a punt, or the one down at the pub, surrounded by other gamblers, with his inhibitions lowered by grog? If you really care about the minority with a problem (and let's not forget, it is a minority), you'd have to welcome any technology that will free him from the need to be surrounded by temptation.

There's also been a lot of bleating about the effect this development might have on children. This concern is ridiculously misplaced for a few reasons. Firstly, the service will be available only to Foxtel subscribers and will feature optional safeguards such as PINs to make sure children can't gain unauthorised access. Secondly, let's face it - there's a lot of things kids see adults do that they know are out of bounds to them. We don't fear that having

a glass of wine with dinner in front of the kids is going to turn them into alcoholics. Nor that six-year-old Johnny will see us driving and decide he's going to borrow the Volvo.

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Cartoon by Nicholson from The Australian. www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

A study by Allen Consulting Group into the issue found that the benefits of interactive gambling exceed the costs. It was also the opinion of all stakeholders who contributed to the report that Australian participation in interactive gambling is low and that there have been very few reported incidences of problem gambling directly related to interactive gambling services. So what are we worried about? That a small percentage of the population might be having too much fun? Gambling isn't illegal. Like drinking alcohol, it's an activity grown adults have the right to choose to participate in. Do we really want to return to the wowsertism of the 50s, when shops were closed on Sundays and women were banned from

public bars? Even the puritanical US allows TV betting, as do many other countries. As adults, we ought to be allowed to decide how we want to spend our free time, without interference from an overprotective government. The Victorian government's decision is a welcome sign that at least some Australians might finally be growing up.

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