

Gambling industry brings £2 FOBT stake into force

Submitted by: ABPC Ltd

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On Monday, all 32,000 Fixed Odds Betting Terminals across the country will have their stakes slashed from 100 GBP to 2 GBP, after a review by DCMS last year found that the machines caused problems for punters who in some cases ended up getting into serious debt through addictive gambling.

Adam Bradford, 26, is the co-founder of the Safer Online Gambling Group. Adam has been campaigning since 2014 for changes in the gambling industry after his father David, 62, went to jail for stealing 53,000 GBP from his employers to gamble with.

David hid his online gambling addiction from his family, racking up hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of debt in secret, remortgaging the family home and leaving the family penniless. The family only heard of his devastating news as he was in the back of a van on his way to jail. Since being released from prison, he has turned his hand to lending his story and experience to improving the chances of safer gambling for others.

FOBTs, which saw punters lose up to 300 GBP per minute or 18,000 GBP an hour, are poised to become a loss making pursuit for the betting industry after many leading firms last year declared they would have to cut jobs and possibly close stores due to the Government's clampdown.

What campaigners fear though, is a rise in online betting - an area of the industry which they feel is still under regulated and potentially dangerous, especially for young people.

Adam comments: 'Monday is a historic day for betting in this country. We are effectively closing the door on gambling addiction on the high street, but quickly transferring the addiction to online betting. Over 50,000 young people are reported to be addicted to betting, many of whom do so online. More young people bet than drink or smoke and online gambling is becoming a pastime of choice for under 30s. A sharp increase in advertising, sports sponsorships and the seemingly unregulated stakes and prizes on online betting are positioning it as the fastest growing betting market in Europe and the Government's legislation goes nowhere near far enough to close the gateway into addiction for those who are going to move from the terminals to digital games on Monday. This will also provide a headache and regulatory confusion for operators, who will feel an increase in pressure if proper measures are not taken now to ensure safety across the betting industry.'

We need to take action now, in collaboration with the industry, to improve safeguarding measures, provide adequate support and treatment and crackdown on pervasive advertising.'

The Safer Online Gambling Group is working with GVC (owners of Coral and Ladbrokes,) Sky Bet, GAMSTOP (the online self exclusion scheme) and the Labour Party to bring about urgent reform in the online gambling industry.

In the Group's letter to Sports Minister Mims Davies MP today, Adam and David say:

'I think we can all agree that the Gambling Act of 2005 is outdated. A set of policies designed in the

analogue age has outlived its purpose and requires reform.

Whilst we are not in favour of a predominately regulatory shake-up, we know that meaningful collaboration with gambling companies, the health and social care sector and addicts themselves can provide a powerful conduit to bring about progressive changes.

Partners of the Safer Online Gambling Group are investigating the effectiveness of algorithms and patterns of play behaviour to provide support and a parachute to risky gambling behaviour and are investing in better awareness campaigns and innovative treatment methods to ensure the dangers inherent with gambling, like any other addictive substances, are mitigated with the safety and wellbeing of players in mind.

We urge the Government to put its weight behind this multi-stakeholder approach and bring about sensible, evidence-based policy to underpin the efforts currently being made in the online gambling arena. This starts with an increase in the levy gambling companies must pay to support research and treatment, a thorough investigation into the effect of advertising on the most vulnerable and recommendations about preventative measures such as affordability and ID checks which all operators making themselves available in the UK should adopt.'

Grainne Hurst, GVC's Director of Responsible Gambling, today said: "We are leading the way on safer gambling and were the first operator to call for the restrictions on TV advertising around live sports, as well as the extension of the 2 GBP stake on FOBTs in Northern Ireland from 1 April 2019. We are pleased to see the industry has followed our lead on these important issues. In addition, we are the only operator that has committed to doubling our donations to research, education and treatment for problem gambling. Safer gambling is a non-negotiable part of the way we do business and we are proud to have launched our Changing for the Bettor strategy which will increase the research, education and treatment of problem gambling, in partnership with organisations like SOGG."