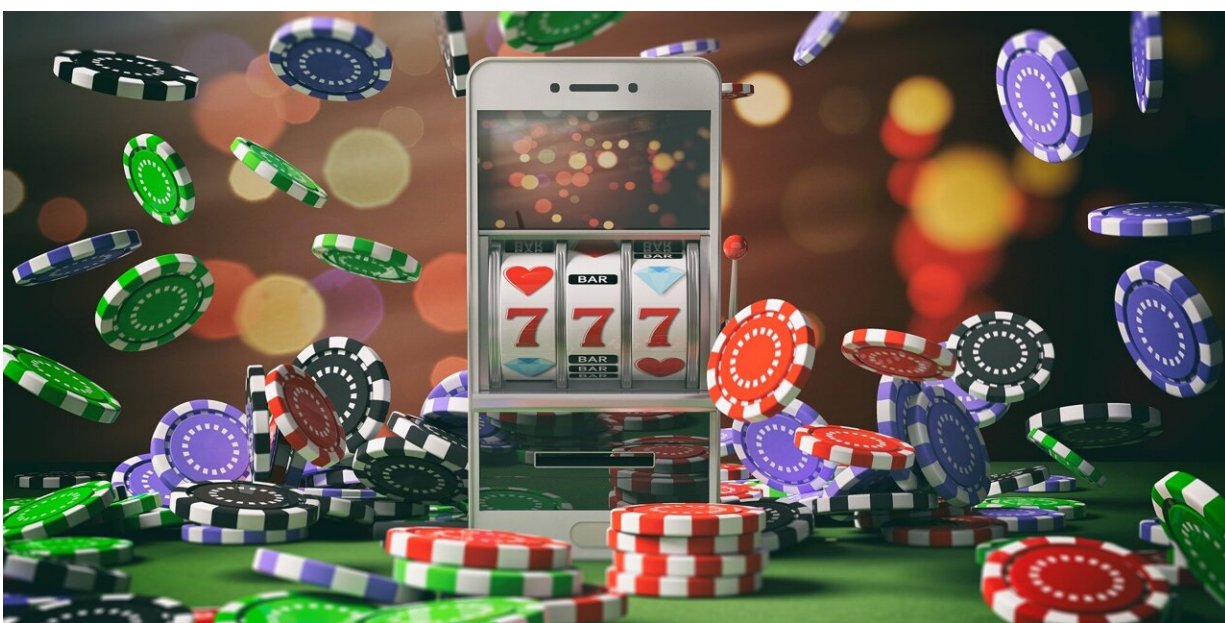


Opinion: Australian gambling industry is pulling out all the stops to prevent an ad ban, but the evidence is against it

August 13 2024, by Samantha Thomas



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With parliament sitting this week, the federal government is [trying to finalize](#) its proposed laws to limit gambling advertising.

The current proposal is a [partial ban](#), with limits to ads during general TV programming. Previously, a parliamentary committee, chaired by late Labor MP Peta Murphy, [unanimously recommended banning](#)

gambling ads entirely.

The betting industry, unsurprisingly, doesn't want a full ban. Speaking on [ABC Radio](#), the chief executive of Responsible Wagering Australia (the peak body for the industry), Kai Cantwell, argued bans push gamblers to illegal offshore services. He said this has already happened in parts of Europe. He also rejected suggestions [advertising](#) was normalizing gambling to children.

But is that true? What does the evidence say about ad bans like this?

Marketing is key

The gambling industry is one of the most innovative health-harming industries of modern times. The [evidence about the harms](#) from gambling is clear. They include relationship breakdown, physical ill-health, job loss, debt, crime, homelessness, family related violence and suicide.

Technological advances have enabled the industry to develop sophisticated and instantly accessible products. They promote these products using [novel marketing strategies](#) that are able to rapidly target individuals through different media channels, including TikTok. The industry is driven by highly profitable and powerful companies, including those who legitimize and facilitate gambling, such as broadcasters and sporting codes.

For the gambling industry to make money, people have to lose. This is also why a continuing customer base is necessary. Marketing is core to the industry's business model, creating pathways to new products and brands.

As companies compete to spruik their products, children and [young](#)

[people](#) are exposed to saturation gambling marketing in their everyday lives. Evidence from multiple countries shows that marketing is doing its job—contributing to the [normalization of gambling](#) for young people, promoting brand recognition and recall and shaping positive perceptions of gambling. It's also creating a perception that [gambling has limited risk attached to it](#). As one 11-year-old [told us](#):

"When kids get to 18, they will want to bet all the time."

Of course, the gambling industry disagrees with these conclusions. When [asked](#) if he thought that gambling had become normalized for children in recent years, Cantwell said no.

He agreed more could be done to ensure that children were not targeted by advertising, but went on to state that it was the illegal offshore market that was "advertising very heavily towards children and young people." Cantwell said Australian providers were working with the government to ensure that children were not targeted by advertising.

That work doesn't appear to be preventing children from being exposed to gambling marketing [everywhere they go](#). Sportsbet and the TAB are [commonly recalled brand names](#) among young people. Young people have also told us they would bet with a particular brand because of familiarity, they liked the advertisements, or that they had seen a company promote deals or offers. One said, "Sportsbet, because if you bet with them you can get your money back."

What did the inquiry find?

This is why the recent [parliamentary inquiry](#) unanimously recommended the need for strong regulatory action on gambling advertising. It proposed legislation to phase in a blanket ban on gambling advertising, with a fundamental aim of protecting children. These calls have been

backed by [numerous Australian politicians](#) and many others who have stressed that partial bans will only ever get partial results.

It is perhaps not surprising that gambling companies, and those that profit from gambling, strenuously oppose significant restrictions on gambling marketing. They use a range of strategies to delay, distract, and deflect calls for evidence-based regulation that would disrupt pathways to their products.

In his interview, Cantwell advocated for a "balanced, nuanced approach" and "sensible reforms": in other words, nothing that would cause the industry any discomfort. He also stated a blanket ban on advertising would "run the risk of driving Australian consumers into online illegal offshore providers."

However, experts have cast doubt on these claims. A focus on protecting young people overshadows any claims about the impact of advertising restrictions on driving people to unregulated markets. Financial counselors, who are at the forefront of helping those recover from gambling-related harm [have said](#):

"In financial counseling casework, we observe that the dominant harm comes from those licensed in Australia [who can advertise heavily]. We observe only a very small amount of gambling with the unregulated, overseas operators [...]"

The parliamentary inquiry also looked closely at illegal offshore gambling. They cited evidence from the regulator [in Spain](#). The gambling industry, television and advertising sectors lobbied against reforms there too. After implementing advertising restrictions, the regulator found:

"None of the dire predictions have occurred [...]. The TV stations said

that they would go broke without gambling revenue and this has not happened [...] Spanish sports teams said that they wouldn't be competitive if they were the only ones not allowed sponsorship, and this hasn't happened either [...] The threat of gamblers migrating to illegal operators had not occurred either."

The inquiry acknowledged that continued action on illegal offshore gambling was an important part of preventing gambling harm. It is worth noting that since November 2019, the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) [has actively blocked 995](#) illegal offshore gambling and affiliate websites.

While there will always be means for some determined people to access these sites, increased resourcing for the regulator would help ensure people are prevented from accessing them where possible.

In her [foreword](#) to the parliamentary inquiry report, Peta Murphy thanked those with lived experience of [gambling](#) harm who had testified to the inquiry. She stated, "It took incredible courage and strength for you to come forward, and it is your experiences, described in your own words, that have provided the foundation for this report and its recommendations."

We now wait to see if the government will show the political courage and strength to go up against powerful vested interests.,

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