



Gaming policy on the cards

By Eugene Benson

CAN Moonee Valley Council do anything to curb problem gambling?

The council has resolved to investigate the possibility and worth of creating a responsible gaming policy.

Chief executive Rasiah Dev has been charged with the role of investigating what process the council can adopt to develop a responsible gaming policy and have parts of the policy incorporated in the Moonee Valley Planning Scheme.

South Ward councillor Rose Iser, who as president of the Victorian Local Governance Association has been elected as chairwoman for the Local Government Working Group on Gambling, said many Victorian councils were investigating how they could bolster their influence in planning decisions affecting electronic gaming machines.

Cr Iser said: "If you have a clear policy it can be taken to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to support an argument when there might be, for example, an application to move EGMs from one location to another, particularly from one area to another area of lower socio-economic standing.

"If you have a policy indicating where the machines should be spread across the municipality then you have got something to take to VCAT.

"There are really two prongs to a strong policy: the social health and wellbeing element, but also it's got to have a planning arm linked to planning policy."

Until April in the current financial year, more than \$65 million had been spent on gaming machines in Moonee Valley, well on track to surpass the \$76 million revenue generated in 2007-08.

Outside of Crown Casino, Airport West's Skyways Taverner Hotel is the state's biggest earner with its 100 gaming machines sucking in an average \$19 million a year.

Victorian Interchurch Gambling Taskforce chairman Mark Zirsak said the efforts of councils to have a bigger say were worthwhile.

"Councils should try to do as much as they can within the limited framework the State Government gives them. Collectively, councils have been doing some great work on areas of high vulnerability."

Mr Zirsak said a Supreme Court decision regarding an application for EGMs in Romsey in the Macedon Ranges took great weight from a plebiscite on the issue.

He said it showed that councils had a valuable role to play in facilitating and relaying community opinion.