

Opinion

The price of a bet on pokies

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BIT by bit, we're having to reconsider our decision to let pokie machines loose on the poor of Victoria.

It was a Labor premier, Joan Kirner, who lifted the ban on these grasping coin suckers, hoping her cash-strapped government would hit the jackpot.

Bingo. The people in Maribyrnong, our second-poorest municipality, now lose more than a \$1000 a head each year to them, and the losses in hard-times towns in Gippsland are almost as bad.

What a waste. What a terrible example to children, too, to see slack-jawed mums drop the family cash into slots.

Yet the philosophy for ending our ban on pokies was so refreshingly libertarian.

Hey, what right did governments have to tell people how to spend their money?

Now we can see -- surprise -- that not all adults can handle that freedom, and governments do have a duty to protect the foolish.

And so the Bracks Government yanked some poker machines out of the poorer suburbs, and made players have a break for a cigarette rather than light up and play on.

But if governments can now tell us where, when and how to gamble on pokies, haven't they a right to tell us not to gamble on them at all? And what benefit have these mindless machines brought that is worth the hammering they've given the weak and poor?