

# Pre-commitment: Is the Smart Card that Smart?

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# Outline

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- 1. Political trigger for mandatory pre-commitment**
- 2. The rationale of pre-commitment**
- 3. Main results**
- 4. Philosophical issues and conclusions**

**The following results are based on a paper**

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Pre-commitment in Gambling: A review of the empirical evidence

Robert Ladouceur , Alex Blaszczynski , & Daniel Lalande  
(*International Gambling Studies*)

# Political vs scientific issue

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In the 2010 parliamentary Australian election, Julia Gillard negotiated with Independent Senator Andrew Wilkie to gain power in return for a promise to introduce **mandatory** pre-commitment system on all poker machines in country.

and....

Julia Gillard was elected as Prime Minister....

# Political vs scientific issue

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- Created a fantastic controversy in Australia
- Government established a series of meetings with experts in industry and research
- Some were strongly **for** and some were strongly **against**.

# Political vs scientific issue

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Interestingly, in our review on this issue, using a broad definition of Pre-commitment (many key words), we found

- A total of 218 papers,
  - 201 (92 %) were opinions based papers
  - 17 (8%) were based on data

# Rationale of pre-commitment

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This interesting concept was first introduced by Mark Dickerson in Australia.

*His studies indicated that the majority of the gamblers “lose of control” **WHILE** they gamble*

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**Furthermore, Dickerson believed that while gambling, the gambler's emotional and cognitive states "blur" rational decision.**

**What do we find?**

**Dissociations**

**Erroneous perceptions (Can I disagree with this?????)**

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Therefore, the decision on the amount of money and time spent gambling should be taken **BEFORE** rather than **DURING** the gambling session.

# Main Question

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**Do we have sufficient evidence to implement a mandatory pre-commitment system (smart card) to all inhabitants in a given jurisdiction?**

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**The main studies I will review here are**  
**Empirical studies**  
**Designed for EGM**  
**(I will exclude the online gambling)**

# Empirical studies related to precommitment

## Norway prevalence study

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- In 2007, all gaming machines were removed, eliminating access to legal land-based gaming machines.
- In 2008, new low intensity machines with **mandatory precommitment** were installed
- Paradoxically, the prevalence of adult problem gambling rose from 1.3% to 2.1%.

Why? We don't know but possible explanations may be

- Migration from low intensity machine to internet..
- A rise in illegal gambling

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: NS-1

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- 70 modified machines distributed in 10 different venues in NS
- 121 regulars gamblers (once a month) Response rate ?
- Participants were not required to use the card every time they gamble.

## Results based on self report

- 45% used the card every time they gambled
- 87% used the summary statement and 52% limit-setting options
- 80% played more responsibly with the card
- 44% removed the card and continue gambling

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: NS-2

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## Main characteristics of the study

- Card was mandatory
- Study conducted in a laboratory
- Use of RG features was optional
- Participants did not use their own money

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: NS-2

## Main results

- 75% supported precommitment
- 60% played more responsibly and spent less
- 51% of participants used at least one RG features
  - Most popular: summary expenditure

## **But**

- Card swapping commonly reported
- No actual expenditure was recorded
- Summary of losses triggered chasing in some participants
- Gamblers did not use their own money

*“We cannot at this stage state that specific RG policies caused any specific behavioral changes”*

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: NS-3

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## Main characteristics of the study

- 161 regular VLT players, after attrition 137
- Study carried in the natural environment
- Card used was mandatory but RG features were optional
- Self report and behavioural measures were collected over time

## Main results

- 60% reported occasional or regular used of 1 type of RG
  - Mainly summary statements
- 70% reported that the system helped them play more Responsibly, with 57% reported spending less time and money

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: NS-3

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## Main results (continued)

- 50% borrowed cards
- If we take only the gamblers who used only their own card (N=88),
  - 55 reduced their expenditure
  - 6 no changes
  - 27 **increased** their expenditure

## Limitations and conclusions

- Card swapping was frequent
- About 30% increased their expenditure

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: Australian Qld trials

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Two trials were conducted in two metropolitan venues, Redcliffe and Sandgate. We will discuss Redcliffe first

## Main characteristics

- 52 gamblers recruited on site (response rate unknown)
- The design included a 35-min telephone interview and 3 focus groups with gamblers who used SimPlay for up to 6 mo

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: Australian Qld trials

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## Main Results

- Use of RG features was low (28%);
- 79% reported no impact on expenditure
- Only 10 participants reported that they were spending less with the card
- Pre-post analyses showed that
  - 42 % spent less
  - 5% no change
  - 53% spent more

In the second arm of the study Sandgate of 66 eligible participants, only 22 agreed to participate. No results will be discussed

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: SA 3 studies

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## Study 1

- Due to a very small sample (N=26) no conclusion can be outlined

## Study 2

- Difficulty in recruitment; 135 with no incentives 137 with
  - But only 91 completed the telephone survey
- 6 Hotel venues participated in the trial
- Patrons were able to play with or without use of their card

# Empirical studies related to precommitment: SA 3 studies

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## Main results

- 62 % increased their awareness about their expenditure
- 47% expressed more confidence playing the EGM
- 33% rated the RG device as useful
- 60% reported setting a limit at a **higher** amount than typically spent

# Main conclusions

**Taking into account the overall results, unfortunately, meaningful conclusions cannot be drawn due to**

- Small and unrepresentative samples
- Reliance on self-report data
- Failure to control for non-card use and gambling at other venues
- Card swapping behaviour
- Some gamblers increased with their expenditure
- Chasing losses in response to player information
- Setting higher limits and reaching those limits

# Conclusion

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Although the notion of **mandatory** precommitment appears very compelling and possibly useful, its implementation appears to be dictated by a **political** rather than a **scientific** agenda.

**As someone said,**

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**I don't like **data**, they make me insecure  
because they are changing all the time,**

**I prefer **opinions**,**

**my opinions,**

**they are**

**stable,**

**permanent and**

**resistant to any changes....**

**An famous unknown man**

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# Thank You

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