

Written submission from Colin Ross

With reference to the over provision of FOBT's in Scottish betting shops.

Hand in hand, with the campaign for fairer gambling, I have been an advocate of trying to reduce the number of these machines and also the spend capability that they generate. Despite support and limited success the laws and the rules for these machines and provision has basically remained.

As a country, Scotland has always had a tendency to association with a modicum of gambling culture. This unfortunately has led to hardships and problems over many years. What has gone before is done and history.

What we are seeing in the past few years is current and massively damaging to our country, dramatically changing the face of our gambling culture and replacing it with devastation, huge social problems, unsafe high streets and betting shops that have lost their appeal to the many thousands of regular punters who formed the culture Scotland had.

As an-ex Bookmaker, I feel I am reasonably qualified to speak about these machines, certainly qualified enough to see wide ranging problems they are causing and definitely qualified to criticise the attempts being made by the industry to address the negative impacts.

I vividly remember the good old days, when Bookies were FOBT's less and the bookmaker had to beat the punter by fair means with lots of fun, joviality and great atmosphere. Sadly they are long gone, many staff have left the industry, good staff, experienced and valuable to their employers.

The attempts by Bookmakers to educate FOBT players is awful, pitiful and simply not good enough.

FOBT profit and turnover now accounts for a greater proportion of revenue than anything else a bookie generates. In such a short space of time this cannot be healthy. The losers, who have attributed to this massive new bookmaking wealth are forgotten, beaten, broke, devastated and contribute less to the economy all over Scotland.

The hard facts will always be hard to prove as these top firms employ the best of accountants, lawyers and media persons. Will the day come when common-sense and normality prevails over fast profits and share prices.

The bookies say they are tackling the problems and installing --- pop ups, time limiters, stake warnings and take a break notices on these machines.

The massive recent Gamble-Aware week was to showcase how much the industry was doing to raise levels of concern. !!! It was a damp squib and many managers and senior staff received little preparation or literature.

The Scottish Parliament needs to get involved, it needs serious answers from industry chiefs, the campaigners against these machines must also be heard. High streets cannot be dominated by betting shops, each having 4 of these addictive machines. Countless numbers of individuals and families have had their lives ruined by FOBT'S, the addiction levels they possess are enormous. As a parliament, something can be done in our country, and quite quickly. Now may be the correct time.