

Crisis brings pokies record

EXCLUSIVE

Daryl Passmore

RECORD losses on poker machines in recent months have underlining warnings from researchers and campaigners that some of the Federal Government's pre-Christmas economy-boosting cash handouts will be blown on gambling.

Queenslanders lost \$327 million on the pokies in August and September, figures from the Queensland Office of Gaming Regulation reveal.

The intense gambling came during the darkest days so far in the global financial crisis, with recession and high unemployment widely predicted.

One-off payments of \$1000 or more will go to millions of pensioners, carers and low-income families on December 8 in a bid by the Government to stimulate spending and fend off recession.

Those who qualify for the cash bonuses can spend the money as they see fit.

"For some people, instead of being spent on the basics of life or on Christmas presents, it will be lost on the pokies," anti-pokies Senator Nick Xenophon said.

Monash University researcher Dr Charles Livingstone agreed: "It will be intriguing to see what the December (gambling) figures are like.

"With all that cash being injected into the economy, there's no doubt that some of that will find its way into poker machines."

The \$173 million which Queenslanders lost on poker machines in August was a monthly record, exceeding

BIGGEST LOSERS

Regions with highest pokie losses in August and September:

● Brisbane	\$72.5m
● Gold Coast	\$49.9m
● Logan	\$16.8m
● Ipswich	\$12.2m
● Cairns	\$11.8m
● Maroochy	\$11.7m
● Caboolture	\$11.1m

ENTIRE STATE \$327m

July by \$7 million. The figure dipped slightly to \$154 million in September — still higher than most months of this year.

Queensland Treasurer Andrew Fraser said the August high was just part of a normal annual cycle.

But Senator Xenophon said it was more than coincidence that it happened when people were starting to get jittery about finances.

"This is an industry that preys on people's insecurities and vulnerabilities," he said.

"When times are tough there's a mistaken belief that somehow playing the pokies can get you out of a jam when, in fact, the opposite is true."

Dr Livingstone said some people might see gambling as a means of escaping their worries as difficult times loomed.

Those who could "take or leave" gambling may cut back if money was tight, but people with a problem were likely to stake even more when in financial stress.

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