

Call to stop pokie machine tricks

By Catherine Hockley in Canberra

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TRICKY features on gaming machines that persuade gamblers to spend more are being targeted in a campaign.

Legal action is being flagged against gambling regulators in South Australia and Victoria, with other parts of the nation to follow, to force them to crack down on the gaming machine loopholes.

But getting rid of the features could cost the gaming machine industry millions of dollars.

Federal Independent Senator Nick Xenophon and Victorian pokies critic Tim Costello urged gambling regulators to crack down on the "sneaky" features. Those include:

"TAKE win" button, which speeds up gambling by cutting breaks after a gambler has won. If this button is pressed there is no pause for a credit count and gamblers immediately place their next bet.

"LOSS disguised as a win" where lights and sounds and messages, which usually indicate a win, are triggered when the gambler has actually lost.

WEIGHTING of jackpot symbols to create near misses so it appears the gambler is close to a win, prompting them to continue gambling.

Senator Xenophon also called for regulators to release gaming machine probability accounting reports - documents that showed how the games worked.

"This is the DNA of poker machines," he said.

Senator Xenophon said the features were in breach of legislation that regulated gaming machines.

In a letter to the Liquor and Gaming Commissioner and the Independent Gambling Authority, Senator Xenophon calls on both parties to advise within 14 days on how the breaches will be fixed.

"These little tricks can mean big losses for players," Senator Xenophon said

"This is an opening salvo in what could be a protracted legal battle. Regulators have an obligation to protect South Australians."

IGA director Robert Chappell said yesterday he would confer with the Liquor and Gaming Commissioner over the claims.

"The issues raised by Senator Xenophon are certainly serious and deserving of a thorough analysis before we can respond in detail," Mr Chappell said. "However, if he is correct there would be a significant cost to remove these machines."