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1 Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the level of stakes permitted on fixed-odds betting terminals: [OQ.62/2019]

Will the Minister advise the Assembly whether he will propose that the reduction in stakes on fixed-odds betting terminals, which becomes law in all U.K. (United Kingdom) betting shops from next month, should be similarly introduced in Jersey?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

The gaming machine operations covering fixed-odd betting terminals is governed by the Gambling (Jersey) Law 2012 and licensed and overseen by the Jersey Gambling Commission. I meet regularly with the Commission and we are monitoring developments closely. The reality is, though, that as the content of these machines is driven by U.K. manufacturers, the changes will be rolled out covering machines in Jersey without a change in local legislation. Having said that, the Commission will be issuing a consultation with stakeholders locally, upon completion of which a change in our policy will be considered.

6.1.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Under the gambling commission law that you were mentioning, the Commission must give advice to the Minister on the evidence of gambling and the manner in which gambling is carried on and the effects of gambling. Will the Minister enquire of the Gambling Commission the effects that fixed-odd betting terminals have had on the gambling population and whether these results are comparable with those found in the U.K.?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I have enquired and, as I have said, I am in regular contact with the Gambling Commission over such issues. There is little evidence that there has been problematic gambling related to these machines locally. I am not saying there has not been but there is little evidence to date. But, in my opinion, there are far greater risks for gambling. What goes on in regulated betting shops could be seen to pale into insignificance compared to the risk with online gambling now, which is extremely prevalent. These are some of the challenges, which we face.

6.1.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:

I raised the issue of this when the proposals were first made in the United Kingdom and was told it would be monitored. If, for example, the Gaming Board have not been monitoring it, because I do not believe they have, and I would like the Minister to come back and say. But, anyway, coming to my question. Will the Minister try and get changes to existing machines - rather than waiting for new machines to come to the Island, which have been modified - during their maintenance cycle within the Island, will he have the changes brought in to mirror the U.K., because it is causing a desperate gambling addiction problem in the U.K.?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, we have somewhere in the region of 19 machines currently licensed and permitted on the Island and they will change relatively quickly as the machines are rolled out in the U.K. That will happen automatically, but I will ask the Gambling Commission to monitor the situation closely and keep me updated as to the progress of that.

6.1.3 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Obviously, with 90 machines and roughly £4,000 per machine, that is a huge amount of money that the Gambling Commission are receiving from these machines. Is it not true that the Gambling Commission are dependent upon the licence fees they receive from the F.O.B.T.s (fixed-odd betting terminals) and they have no intention of following the U.K. model of reducing the stakes to £2 a spin?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, it will have an impact on the funds that the Gambling Commission raise. Of course, a significant amount of the funds raised go into a social responsibility fund, which works to protect people with gambling addictions. That is an issue which they are looking at, at the moment. There might have to be changes in other fees as a result of this, but we are not sure yet.