

Response to Question on Notice

Dr JOHN KAYE: You are not alleging that the poker machine manufacturers are deliberately building in near misses; you are proposing that we bias the randomness to reduce the probability of near misses?

Mr ZAMMIT: No, not necessarily. I cannot speak for what gaming operators do or do not do but the near miss comes about purely from chance. If you took away the pictures that are on the screen you would have numbers. If you were to see the numbers themselves you would not think this is a near miss or anything, this means nothing to me. One aspect possibly is reducing the amount of near misses that occur but, again, you cannot stop them from coming up altogether because it is random. If you start altering that you have a game that is no longer random.

Dr JOHN KAYE: I have run out of time but perhaps you might like to expand on that on notice.

Response:

For a poker machine there are only two outcomes: a win and a loss. Both are determined randomly. A near-miss is a loss, like every other combination that causes a loss. However, with near-misses, people attribute a special meaning to them (i.e. "I almost won"). I am not aware of any games that provide encouraging messages when people obtain near-misses. This message is purely in the mind of the player. Furthermore, this is just a normal process of the way that our minds work. We are always looking for patterns in the environment to help us predict what is going to happen next. We cannot change this; but what we can change is the interpretation that we put on the pattern.

What we do as part of treatment, say for poker machines, is educate people on how the machines really work. I will go in to a lot of detail with a client to explain concepts like randomness, probability, near-misses, and return to player, in order to change the way that their minds interpret what they see in front of them when they play a poker machine. The theory is that if a person has a completely functional understanding of how a game works then they can learn to override any faulty cognitions (e.g. that a near-miss means that a win is close) that come up during the course of play. Once they can do this they will see a near-miss as just another loss and no longer give it any special meaning. Thus, the frequency of near-misses would not be an issue.