

Report

The Gambling Review process was put on hold on 22 May 2024 when the General Election was announced. According to most observers, it's unlikely that any significant movement to bring the UK's gambling laws into the 21st century will take effect before next spring. An industry in limbo since December 2020 - what is the real impact of waiting an estimated five and a half years before it can even start planning for its entry to 'the digital age'? This week Coinslot courts the views of trade bodies and the multi-nationals.

The new Government must pick up where the last Parliament left off and get these reforms across the line, urges Bacta

JOHN BOLLOM NATIONAL PRESIDENT BACTA

It's fair to say that frustrations are mounting at amusements and gaming trade association **Bacta** whose members are increasingly fearful that the current impasse with the Gambling Review will set their businesses back years. In a forthright response, Bacta has sent a message to government both loud and clear: get the gambling review reforms over the line urgently. The absence of certainty, it says, is punching confidence and stifling investment - and as for the government's creed of growth - you can forget it if you don't drive the review through now.

Coinslot: What impact is the delay in the Gambling Review having on your members and the industry in general?

John Bollom: In short, paralysis. The delay we are seeing in the introduction of the Gambling Review reforms are preventing the sector from fully bouncing back from the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, in stark contrast to many other sectors.

The uncertainty on the direction of travel has gone on for too long now and continues to stifle the growth that our industry is capable of.

The new Government must pick up where the last Parliament left off and get these reforms across the line.

Coinslot: Four plus years of talk and consultation and still no definitive date for implementation: how would you rate the mood and confidence levels around the industry as a result of the delay?

John Bollom: The mood in the industry is one of frustration. We were bitterly disappointed to see

the White Paper paused during the wash up before the July election and Bacta is making the case everyday to the Government that the recommendations of the Gambling Review need to be adopted as soon as possible.

We've met with the new Minister and while I can, on some level, understand her desire to take stock of the proposals before proceeding, we in the industry have waited long enough to see the review enacted.

Coinslot: Can you highlight some of the practical implications your members have faced because of the delay - notably on investment, technological development, employment and growth prospects?

John Bollom: To put it simply, the industry does not know the direction of travel that regulation will take.

This is having a tsunami effect from manufacturers to operators and ultimately to customers who are all losing out because of the Government's inaction.

We now have an environment where manufacturers are unable

to invest in new systems, operators do not know where to invest in new machine stock and ultimately the entire industry is being held up by a lack of clarity.

Coinslot: What about the customer. What affect do you think this is having on the player offerings and entertainment value?

John Bollom: The lack of certainty is leading to a lack of research and development for new games. We need clarity on what the new rules will be.

This is alongside delays to SR measures, such as the legal ban on under 18s from playing Cat D fruit machines, a measure that Bacta members already introduced some years ago.

We also have an economy where fewer and fewer people are using cash and yet the Government's indecision means that gaming machines remain the only industry where contactless payment is legally prohibited.

This means that fewer and fewer players are able to play and customers are migrating to on-line.

This is holding back the land-based sector, creating an uneven



It's time to deliver

Bacta said...

"The uncertainty on the direction of travel has gone on for too long now and continues to stifle the growth that our industry is capable of..."

playing field where more customers are nudged to the online space.

Coinslot: From your members' perspective what are the most pressing issues that still need be addressed in the Gambling Review?

John Bollom: There are two key reforms that were set out in the White Paper, that come up time and again when speaking to members.

Gaming machines remain the only sector in the economy that are prohibited from adopting cashless play.

In a period where cash payments fall year on year, it is essential that this anachronism is corrected and that this sensible step, which had enjoyed cross party support, is taken.

The second key reform is changing the machine allocation in Adult Gaming Centres, with the introduction of a 2:1 ratio of B3 machines to other machines. This will ensure that the industry is able to reflect what the customer wants.

These are very small steps that that would stimulate growth be of great benefit to the sector.