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GBG calls for stakes and prizes review in the wake of a 25 per cent Gambling Commission fee increase

STAKES & PRIZES

The **Gambling Business Group** has called on DCMS to commit to a review of stakes and prizes after approving a 25 percent rise in Gambling Commission fees, noting the similarity in arguments justify the increase. In this instance, the arguments for the goose are almost identical to the gander, and yet it appears the industry actually has to explain why an absence in a stakes and prizes review of 13 years is too long. Well, if the politicos think a week's a long time in politics, try 13 years of enforced stagnation in the amusements, gaming and gambling industry.

The Gambling Business Group has responded to DCMS' decision to increase Gambling Commission fees by highlighting the fact that "the exact same arguments" would justify a long-awaited review of stakes and prizes, the last change of which now dates back 13 years.

With the department announcing last week that licence costs would jump by 25 percent in October to reflect the Commission's increased outgoings, the trade body has written to the Government urging ministers to revisit an uplift in stakes and prize limits.

It was a speedy response following strong disenchantment expressed across the broad based sector to the DCMS' decision to ignore the industry's consultation responses for a hold on Commission fees.

GBG chief executive Peter Hannibal told Coinslot:"It's very clear the industry - in all sectors, from small family business arcades to national high street AGC groups, pubs, WMCs etc - are feeling anxious, and angry, at the static position of stakes and prizes. It's been 13 years since any Triennial Review uplift. And in that time, our businesses have endured a recession, Covid, post lockdown supply issues, the introduction of the Gambling Levy Fund, and now, a 25 per cent increase - and more in many cases - in Gambling Commission fees."

A FAILURE TO JOIN THE ECONOMIC DOTS

Hannibal expressed his concern that the industry's legitimate arguments against a fee rise were not listened to, but it's the state of the economic landscape and a specifically targeted restriction imposed on the gaming and gambling sector that most concerns him.

"When it comes to gambling costs the government has never managed to join the economic dots. Our businesses are hit by the same inflationary costs as every one of their neighbours. Business rates and energy cost rises apply to our operations in the same way as they do to every other business. The only difference is that our members have additional regulatory costs applied to us - and crucially - an antiquated government controlled system where we cannot raise our prices to offset these costs."

ONE RULE FOR THEM..

And this point was made most glaringly in the decision to raise Gambling Commission fees in four months time by a headline 25 percent - to reflect GamCom's increased outgoings. All the while suppressing stakes and prizes for the industry to 2013 levels and dismissing their ever growing increased outgoings.

Frustration barely touches the sentiment dial around the industry, not least because the DCMS has already declared its hand in a letter to Bacta earlier this year, that a stakes and prizes rise was not on their radar at least until next year.

A 'D' FOR EFFORT?

However, in its defence, it has expressed a less militant line with Category D machines, which it will report back on in its bingo consultation.

Even so, however, it's still small beer for an industry compared to the champagne charlie fee rise for the Gambling Commission.

Meanwhile on the streets, frustration is nearing tipping point and many smaller, single site operators - most of whom have been running their operation for decades with support from their family - will not be impressed by the GC fee increase.

SO WHAT WILL A 25 PERCENT RISE BE SPENT ON AT THE COMMISSION?

When Coinslot added some context to the fee discrepancy - somewhat mischievously, albeit deliberately to show just how little the Commission is committed to cutting its outgoings by £8m - we asked one long standing arcadian if he was aware that the Commission's chief executive basic salary has increased 50 percent to over £200,000 since 2013 - and that's excluding very generous pensions and benefits.

There was an extended silence. When asked again, he slowly answered: "And we're the ones that need to be regulated?"

WHEN A 25 PERCENT HEADLINE RISE DOESN'T MATCH THE REAL LINE RISE

It may not be that salient, but it is definitely a temperature check on just how tone deaf working people in this industry believes the government is.

The GBG is taking a more evidential route, as is its mantra throughout the GAR debate. It is currently gathering the evidence of the actual financial impact on its members from the GC fee increase, with Hannibal learning from initial enquiries that the actual financial impact appears to be "far higher" than the headline 25 percent.

"We have received one case where the increase is +93 percent," he advised this paper. "We know through the consultation documents that the rebanding of the fees affects each member differently and that some will be affected more than others."

DID YOU EVEN CONSIDER HOW A 25 PERCENT WOULD WORK OUT?

"But what we are seeing up to now is everyone being impacted by far more than the purported 25 percent increase, but then of course, anyone affected below the 25 percent may feel as compelled to complain. Because of the fees structure, no one is going to understand whether the 25 percent is an accurate number unless they look at the industry in the round."

As a result, the group has now called on all members to submit details as to what the increase means to their businesses in percentage terms, so as to assess the true cost to the sector.