

Wilkie lays down pokies law to PM

PAUL OSBORNE

KEY Tasmanian independent Andrew Wilkie has given Prime Minister Julia Gillard until Budget day in May next year to put gambling limits on pokies, or he will withdraw his support for the Government.

Mr Wilkie has given his strongest indication yet that he won't budge from his main election pledge for a mandatory electronic pre-commitment card which sets limits on how much gamblers can spend. He says this will cut the number of problem and at-risk pokies users, which has been estimated at almost 300,000 Australians.

Australia accounts for half of the world's poker machines, with losses for players estimated at \$5 billion a year.

Mr Wilkie said the Federal Government was showing "goodwill" and he believed he had the numbers to get legislation through the Lower House as early as the second half of this year.

"My agreement with Prime Minister Gillard is absolutely carved in stone," he told the National Press Club.

"My support for her and her Government hinges on it and I will withdraw my support from the Gillard Labor government if that is not progressed in accord with my agreement with the Prime Minister."

Mr Wilkie warned the key milestone will be the passage of pokie laws by Budget time in 2012, with the scheme introduced in 2014.

"If legislation has not passed both houses of parliament by then I will withdraw my support," he said.

Mr Wilkie said he may then support Coalition leader Tony Abbott or "no one, and obviously and regrettably the country would enter uncharted political waters".

Mr Wilkie said a parliamentary report on possible models for the scheme would be released within weeks.

He said two options were a "national technical solution" or state-based solutions.

Campaign to halt farming of puppies

LUSH Cosmetics in Hobart will be part of a national campaign today against puppy farming. Staff at the 20 Australian stores will collect petitions to be presented to the Federal Government. A soap in the shape of a puppy paw will go to lobbyists Animal Liberation.



CHECK-UP: Finalists Heidi Modrovich and Nick Modrovich, of Kingston, say their audiology business benefited. Picture: RAOUL KOCHANOWSKI

Business awards offer couple sound advice

KINGSTON audiologists Nick and Heidi Modrovich say entering the Telstra Business Awards was a boost for their business.

Entries for this year's awards close next Monday and businesses are being urged to take the chance to be recognised and to also get a "business health check".

The Modrovich's business, Audiologic Tasmania, was a finalist in the MYOB Small Business Award category of last year's Telstra Business Awards.

The couple bought the small Hobart clinic in 2007. It has since grown to five permanently staffed clinics serving hearing-impaired Tasmanians.

Mrs Modrovich said the free business health check offered to award entrants had helped her and her husband to improve their business.

"Being a family business, we don't get to talk to other business owners very much, so it's difficult to know how you are doing," she said.

"We knew our marketing wasn't as strong as we wanted it to be, and the business health check pointed to areas that we needed to work on."

This year a people's choice award will be offered for the first time in the awards, with \$2000 in prizes on offer.

To enter the awards, visit the telstrabusinessawards.com website or call 1800 262 323.

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