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## Clubs bet \$1.2m on gambling research, Xenophon claims 'stalling tactic'



By [Sean Nicholls](#)

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The NSW clubs industry and leading poker machine makers have given \$1.2 million to the University of Sydney to fund a three-year research project into "real life" problem gambling.

But the donation has been criticised by gambling industry activist Senator Nick Xenophon as a stalling tactic designed to prevent governments undertaking poker machine reform while the research is carried out.



Clubs are spending money on researching gambling addiction. ARSINEH HOUSPIAN

Senator Xenophon has raised concerns about the project's independence and its lead researcher, Professor Alex Blaszczynski, who is a critic of the mandatory pre-commitment approach to problem gambling, which is fiercely opposed by the clubs industry.



As part of the project, the researchers will be given access to registered clubs in NSW to allow them to study gamblers in a "real life" environment.



Independent Senator Nick Xenophon. ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

"This type of objective and comprehensive research is something the club industry has wanted for some time," said ClubsNSW chief executive Anthony Ball.

"The clubs industry is committed to addressing this issue while still providing a great entertainment product for the vast majority of people without a gambling issue."

Mr Ball said that under the agreement with the University of Sydney, ClubsNSW will not be involved with the conduct or outcome of the research, and its findings would be published regardless of what they are.

An independent advisory board will be established to oversee the project, which a Sydney University spokeswoman said would include its own academics as well as "external parties with expertise in the gambling industry".

Part of the funding is coming from the Gaming Technologies Association, whose members include poker-machine manufacturers Aristocrat, Bally and IGT.

Senator Xenophon questioned why ClubsNSW and the association were funding the project, suggesting it could be a stalling tactic to prevent poker machine reform.

He said Professor Blaszczynski was the clubs industry's "pin-up boy" because of his opposition to mandatory pre-commitment, under which poker machine players must nominate how much money they are prepared to lose before they gamble.

"What is particularly sick about this project is it will be used as an excuse to stall any further poker machine reforms," Senator Xenophon said.

"This is a bit like the tobacco lobby funding cancer research."

But Professor Blaszczyński, who will be paid from the donation to work on the project for two days a week, rejected the criticism.

"Because of the nature of gambling, you do have to start looking at gaining access to data held by the industry, by patrons who are in industry venues and start looking at real life research that provides sensible, evidence-based information," he said.

Professor Blaszczyński said that unlike government-funded projects, the data can be published "without any approval from the industry".

A spokeswoman for the University of Sydney said the proposal was put to ClubsNSW by the university in 2012. She said it was "initiated by Professor Blaszczyński", who nominated himself as the principal researcher.

Mr Ball said Senator Xenophon "should probably wait to read the outcome of research by Australia's leading problem gambling researcher before making hysterical claims".



**Sean Nicholls**



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