

They're
rigged

They're
addictive

They're
everywhere



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POKIE NATION

Explosive documentary produced by Neil Lawrence and Mitzi Goldman
screens Tuesday 20 October, at 9.30pm on ABC



KA-CHING! POKIE NATION

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The pokies. They've gone from being illegal to being everywhere. Australia has rapidly become the Pokies capital of the world, with more machines per capita¹ and a higher spend² than anywhere else. "We're losing a staggering \$12 billion a year³, but everyone – players, industry and government – is hooked. What is it that makes these machines uniquely addictive?"

Ka-Ching! delves behind the flashing lights and spinning reels to find out what makes one expert call them the 'crack cocaine of gambling'. We speak exclusively to the masterminds behind the machine, who reveal how carefully they program pokies. What we find is a highly organised network of mathematicians, musicians and designers, working together on a single vision: to make the punters keep playing and the machines keep winning.

In addition to neuroscientists, anthropologists and game theorists, we hear from pokies victims themselves, who've fallen prey to what they describe as an 'unlawful hypnotism'. They let us in on the psychological lure of the machines, describing an escapist 'zone' where the stresses of the outside world disappear.

Together, these testimonies cast doubt on the industry's assertion that the problem is with a small minority of individuals who 'can't control themselves' with this otherwise innocuous past time.

Ka-Ching! takes us to the suburban backwaters of our capital cities, where pokies thrive, with five times more machines than affluent post-codes⁴. We see the impact extends far beyond the clubs and pubs – into divided households, struggling local businesses and under-resourced social services.

The film finishes by looking at the role of government in this situation. We chart the unsuccessful attempt to reel in the industry during the Gillard government, which met a vociferous campaign by Clubs Australia. With the government reliant on tax revenue to fill budget holes, our MPs hands are tied – but there's a significant social cost.

#kaching

Production Credits: 1 x 60 minutes. A Looking Glass Pictures film. Executive Producer, Writer and Producer Neil Lawrence. Producer Mitzi Goldman. Director Jane Manning. ABC Commissioning Editor Matt Scully.



¹ Vol 2 of the Australian Productivity Commission's 1999 report at p.N4 of appendix N.
<http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/gambling>

² <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/02/daily-chart-0>

³ Australian Productivity Commission report 'Gambling'.

⁴ See <http://www.responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au/information-and-resources/research/recent-research/modelling-vulnerability-to-gambling-related-harm-how-disadvantage-predicts-gambling-losses>



KA-CHING! POKIE NATION

IN MEMORIAM, NEIL LAWRENCE

Executive Producer and writer Neil Lawrence died suddenly on July 15, 2015, days after *Ka-Ching! Pokie Nation* was delivered to the ABC. Neil was the driving force behind the film, which stemmed from his long-held concern about the predatory and prolific nature of pokie machines. Neil devoted three years to *Ka-Ching! Pokie Nation*, his second documentary, which forms an important part of his legacy.

Some years ago, Neil, who worked in advertising, had an office in Pyrmont, Sydney. He walked past Star City casino on his way to work and – realising it was open at 7.45am – went in to see who was there at that hour. The only patrons were about a dozen lost souls sitting at the pokies: they'd been there all night, emptying their last dollars into the machines.

That miserable sight, and a longtime connection with Reverend Tim Costello, sparked Neil's passion for the issue of poker machine addiction. After becoming aware of the compulsive nature of pokies, and the government and business interests vested in the machines, he wanted everyone in Australia to become aware too. This documentary is the result.

It's only a handful of times in your life you meet someone as passionate and dedicated as Neil. He was determined to help those vulnerable to poker machine addiction, and it's our hope that *Ka-Ching! Pokie Nation* realises Neil's vision of creating awareness and change around this issue.

Jane Manning, Director

KA-CHING! POKIE NATION

PRODUCER'S STATEMENTS

Neil Lawrence, Executive Producer, Writer and Producer

This film came about through a long-term concern that I have had with the proliferation of poker machines in Australia. Two questions ended up dominating my thinking, and they are the central concern of the film.

The first is: if around 70% of the people in every survey that has been done want no pokies, less pokies or serious reform, why hasn't it happened? What is the nature of the power of the industry and its relationship with government?

The second: pokers machines offer the worst odds of nearly any form of gambling, and yet take six out of every ten dollars we lose. How does that add up?

These two questions have led to this film – a forensic investigation of both the machines, and the industry that profits from them.

Mitzi Goldman, Producer

Neil Lawrence brought this project to me and asked if I thought it was a story worth telling. I had no idea about the manipulative and predatory nature of the machines, nor did I understand the scientific research and intent that goes into, not only the design of the machine, but the business plans that locate the majority of machines in the poorest neighbourhoods. The more I learned, the more I deeply shared Neil's intolerance for the unfairness that is at the heart of this industry. I share the outrage and responsibility with Neil, shoulder to shoulder, to spread this story as far and wide as possible and to motivate people to appeal and agitate for regulation and reform. Our aim in making this film is to reveal the machinations behind the machines in order to minimise the harm to the most vulnerable in our communities.

I have been making documentaries for close to 30 years and this is one of the most powerful combinations of story, creativity, science, politics and passion of any project I've created. Filmmaking is always a collaborative art. Neil drove this piece and I worked alongside him, navigating the "human highway" to use one his favourite phrases. And it has been a busy, fast and at times dangerous highway.

Neil's untimely and sudden death has shocked and saddened us all. It has been an honour to create this film with him, his last work and a passion piece. It is important for all of us to think how we can work together to affect lasting change, decrease the greed and protect the vulnerable.

