

Written submission from the Bingo Association

The Bingo Association is responding to The Scottish Parliament's call for Evidence on enquiry on Fixed-odds Betting Terminals. The remit of this call for evidence is based on Clause 45 of the Scotland Bill and gaming machines in licensed betting premises.

The Bingo Association also notes the four amendments tabled to Clause 45 of the Scotland Bill on 6th July 2015.

Bingo and Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) – Category B2 Machines

B2 machines, or FOBTs, have been identified as a source of concern for The Scottish Parliament. Retail Bingo clubs including Holiday Parks, Working Men's Clubs, and High Street Arcades do not have, and are not permitted to have, B2 machines. The maximum stake in licensed Bingo premises is just £2 on a permitted Category B3 Machine.

Bingo at the heart of Scottish communities

Retail Bingo in Scotland plays an important part in local communities with over 50 clubs spread across the country. Over 150,000 people play bingo every week and half a million are members of a local club. Typically 80% of Bingo Club members are female and over 50 years old.

Machines in Bingo Clubs

Bingo is very much the key attraction of Bingo Clubs, with members enjoying the social aspect of the game. The machines present in bingo clubs (Category B3, C and D) are low stake, but they do support the revenue of clubs and are an important part of the sales mix.

Unintended consequences

The Bingo Industry would ask The Scottish Parliament to consider any unintended consequences that the proposed amendments to the Scotland Bill may have, particularly amendments 31, 32, 146 and 163. The original intention of the Smith Commission Recommendation 74 was that "The Scottish Parliament will have the power to prevent the proliferation of Fixed-Odds Betting Terminals or B2 machines in licensed betting premises". If the proposed amendments are accepted, this would also severely impact all other licensed premises with any category of gaming machine including low-risk, social gaming environments too, like Bingo Clubs.

Last year in Scotland, bingo players and MPs alike backed the Boost Bingo campaign to help the industry achieve a tax reduction which is now enabling a kick start to investment in bingo clubs around Great Britain. It would be a great shame for the industry and the communities that bingo caters for, to get caught up in a wider concern around the public confidence issues against FOBTs, just when bingo is starting to flourish once more.