

City seeks to widen pokies cap

By Mark Smith

WHITTLESEA Council will push for a stricter cap on the municipality's pokies machines as total losses near \$1 billion.

The council will write a personal letter to Premier John Brumby seeking an expansion of its pokies cap to cover the entire municipality after "promising" discussions with him on the issue last week.

Whittlesea Responsible Gaming Forum chairman and East Ward councillor Sam Alessi said council had to strike while the iron was hot. He said the premier admitted to being sympathetic to the problem at an Interface council roundtable at Treasury Place on October 6.

The council has strongly advocated an anti-pokies push for the municipality since the early 2000s, backing not only the expansion of the present cap but a cut in pokie machines.

An existing cap, introduced in 2006, put a freeze on additional poker machines in urban parts of Whittlesea including Epping, Lalor, Mill Park, Bundoora and

Thomastown, but not growth areas such as South Morang, Doreen, Mernda and Whittlesea Township.

The council fears these areas could become the target of pokie operators.

In August, the *Whittlesea Leader* reported that gamblers had lost about \$953 million on the municipality's nine pokie venues in 16 years and had the highest losses-per-machine ratio in the state.

The municipality's 621 machines took an average of \$140,740 away from punters in the past year, at an average cost of \$885 an adult.

Earlier this year the council refused a Mernda hotel's application for 60 new pokie machines.

Cr Alessi said that, unless the cap was expanded, there would be an ongoing threat of operators wanting to open in new areas.

"We need to protect the people that are vulnerable," he said.

"A lot of people are under mortgage stress."

State Government spokesman Michael Sinclair said they looked forward to receiving the letter from the council.

Draper makes cut for karate cup

BUNDOORA karate instructor Brad Draper will take on the best martial artists in the world this month after qualifying for the International Sport Karate Association World Cup in Sydney.

The second-dan black belt, 36, earned his spot at the prestigious tournament after claiming the state title in the black belt open division for point sparring of the ISKA Victorian Championships.

In his first competitive fight in three years, Draper blitzed his way through the black belt division, finishing the day undefeated and without a point being scored against him.

The win will now see Draper take on martial arts masters from across the globe in a full-contact event.

Draper said the win was one of his most satisfying since starting karate with his brothers as an eight-year-old.

"Back in those days there were no separated classes so I was in there with the adults," he said.

Draper left the dojo a year later, but found his love for the art form rekindled when enlisting in the army in 1988.

"I was stationed in Cambodia with some marines who would use me as a fall guy to practise their locks and holds," he said.

"Eventually they started to show me some of the moves."

Upon leaving the army in 1993, Draper re-enrolled in the traditional Sho do Kan style under seventh-dan master Keith Geyer, the father of *Australian Idol* Dean Geyer.

Draper also joined a Korean style known as Hapkito which incorporated the locks and holds



Brad Draper blitzed the black belt division in the recent ISKA Victorian Championships. N16WP607

he had been taught. He reached black belt in both karate styles before deciding to combine the approaches in his own academy, Martial Arts Combative Education, in 2000.

Draper instructs more than 150 students at the Mill Park academy.

Brad Draper is this week's Whittlesea Leader senior sports star nominee. Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony at Telstra Dome next February. To nominate a sports star phone 9432 1844 or email whittlesea@leadernewspapers.com.au

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