

Scope for greater consolidation of casino regulation: Josephine Teo

Piecemeal approach won't be adequate to deal with the growing complexities of gambling landscape, she says

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Given the increasingly complex gaming landscape in Singapore, there is scope to consider greater consolidation of casino regulatory functions, said Second Minister for Manpower and Home Affairs Josephine Teo.

Today, Singapore has different regulations and agencies governing gambling products such as casinos, remote gambling and fruit ma-

chines operated by private clubs, she noted at the annual Workplan Seminar of the Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) yesterday.

"This piecemeal approach will not be sustainable or adequate to deal with the growing complexities of the gambling landscape and products," said Mrs Teo at the seminar held at Biopolis in Buona Vista.

The seminar, held in conjunction with the CRA's 10th anniversary, outlined the agency's history and highlighted its future challenges.

One challenge, she said, is that Singapore's casinos face increasing regional competition.

"Competition for tourism revenues will get more intense. Many jurisdictions are keenly studying our integrated resort (IR) concept. Our IRs will be anxious to stay ahead of the competition."

The next challenge is technological disruption. New machines, game types and modes of payment have implications on how casino regulators establish controls, she added.

For example, casinos here use new technology to ensure honest gaming, a key focus of the CRA, said Mr Chan Wei Siang, 37, assistant director of gaming technology, who has worked in the CRA since 2009.

Technology includes using electronic card shoes, which reduce dealer mistakes, and automated card shufflers, to prevent card counting.

To keep up with rapid technological changes, the CRA has been sending its officers to conferences and courses to sharpen their skills, said Mrs Teo. However, more should be done to ensure the officers keep abreast of technology and its impact.

The CRA was formed as a statutory board in 2008, and had to develop and put in place regulations and standards for the casinos. It began as a three-person division under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and has since expanded to a staff of over 160.

Since 2010, when the integrated resorts started operations, casino-related crime has remained a small



Casinos here use new technology to ensure honest gaming, said Mr Chan Wei Siang (far left), assistant director of gaming technology at the Casino Regulatory Authority, seen here with Ms He Shujia, head of inspection and compliance. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

proportion of overall crime in Singapore – less than 1 per cent.

"We have not detected organised crime linked to casino gambling taking root here," said Mrs Teo.

Problem gambling is also under control, at below 1 per cent, she added. This is lower than problem gambling rates in other places, like the US, Canada and Macau.

Measures to keep the problem in check include a casino entry levy – the first of its kind in the world.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development and the National Council on Problem Gambling also introduced a scheme in which vulnerable individuals can be barred from entry into casinos. Another scheme which limits casino visits

has also been introduced.

All these innovations have attracted keen interest from foreign regulators, said Mrs Teo.

She added that regulations can evolve to allow a more holistic and coherent system to maintain the fine balance between leeway for innovation and effective regulation.

This must be a bilateral process, however. Ms He Shujia, 34, head of inspection and compliance, described the trust and shared ownership between casino operators and regulatory bodies like the CRA, in which the CRA regularly engages the operators to assess their inputs on new regulations.

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