

# Govt set to beef up Casino Control Act

IRs' licence renewal may be conditional on their performance as tourist destinations

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MORE must be done to discourage low-income gamblers from frequenting the casinos, fight casino crime and hold the two integrated resort (IR) operators to their agreement to provide sustained economic benefits to Singapore.

To that end, the government is proposing several amendments to the Casino Control Act that will, among other things, condition the renewal of the IRs' casino licences on their performance in terms of their attractiveness as tourist destinations.

That is to ensure that the IRs are not just focused on casino marketing and maximising gaming profits, but also committing more resources to responsible gambling and voluntary social safeguard programmes, analysts say.

"It's also in the interests of the IRs themselves to ensure their attractions remain compelling for visitors," Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Trade and Industry Minister S Iswaran said yesterday.

"That's not to say that's not been done up to now. In fact . . . the IRs have played an important role in the growth of the tourism sector here . . . It's not about the first two or three years, but about the next 10 years or 15 years, and how this will evolve," he said.

"And it's not just what's happening in Singapore because there will be developments around us in the region and globally, and we want to make sure that what we have here keeps pace with that. That's the key objective," Mr Iswaran said.

Among the proposed changes will be an evaluation panel ap-

pointed by the Minister of Trade and Industry to give its opinion to the Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA), which processes gaming licence renewals, on how the IRs' non-gaming attractions measure against international standards, and their contribution to tourism growth.

"What will be the composition, size and KPIs (key performance indicators) or the elements that will go into the evaluation – these are some of the things we will want to flesh out through the consultation process," Mr Iswaran said.

"We have to make sure that any assessment that is made is done in a holistic manner and fair to the (IR) operators while attaining the objectives we want from the public policy angle."

These, and other amendments, which come after a comprehensive review, are aimed at aligning the legislative framework with the government's original policy intent of introducing the IRs in Singapore – to ensure sustained economic benefits in terms of job creation, economic and tourism development.

Public consultation will start on Monday and end on Aug 6.

The government is seeking views from the public, industry and stakeholders before finalising the Casino Control Amendment Bill, possibly by the end of the year.

It is a good idea to establish a citizen-government panel to evaluate whether the IRs are operating primarily as tools for tourism development or just venues to offer casino gaming, Jonathan Galaviz, managing director of Galaviz & Co LLC in Las Vegas, said. "Unfortunately, over the last several years, the executive teams of both IRs have focused a good amount of their efforts on



FILE PHOTO

**MR ISWARAN**  
Says that things to flesh out include the IRs' composition, size and key performance indicators

enhancing casino gaming revenue and minimal effort in other areas."

A Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) spokesman said that it has created 14,000 jobs, draws over 16 million visitors a year, and has made significant economic and tourism contributions to Singapore. "RWS hopes to continue to bring success to Singapore in the long term, and will base its re-investment decisions on the same considerations that it based its competitive entry for the IR in 2006."

A Marina Bay Sands (MBS) spokesman said that the public consultation on the proposed amendments provides "a meaningful opportunity for all to provide constructive feedback".

One Singapore-based gaming analyst pointed out that both IRs could do more to boost tourism if they had more hotel rooms. "You can't have big MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) events at MBS or RWS without more hotel rooms. To drive the non-gaming

business, it has to be tied to the development of land around the resorts."

Mr Galaviz believed that the only hotels that should be "built near the IRs or on vacant land that is an easement into the IR land designation itself, are those that are not associated with either IR, financially or strategically".

Meanwhile, the new rules also give the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) power to limit the number of casino visits by frequent gamblers, especially those at risk of problem gambling.

And it will now be an offence for daily entry levy holders who overstay the 24-hour limit without paying the additional levy. There are, however, no plans to change the casino entry levy for now.

Another amendment proposes to assess substantially higher financial penalties against the casino operators by raising the limit to 10 per cent of the casino's total gross gaming revenues, from \$1 million now, should they be

subject to disciplinary action by the CRA.

Casino operators are also required to notify the CRA immediately of unresolved patron disputes.

Under the new laws, the penalties for illegal junket or International Market Agent (IMA) activity will also be raised, and CRA will have the power to set a cap on commissions payable by the casino operators to the IMA operators.

One of the new rules also require premium players to draw down the \$100,000 qualifying deposit for gaming before casino operators can extend credit to them.

Casino operators must also take steps to deter illegal betting or gaming. Casino crimes now include cheating at table games, and past posting or making a bet after the results of the game are known. The possession of counterfeit chips and carrying chips worth \$10,000 or more outside the boundaries of the designated site are also considered as casino crimes.