

Memo: proposed changes to casino control act



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As you have requested, this report discusses the analysis and results of research on tackling social issues of gambling and Casino Control Act. This report details the effectiveness of enacted measures, the possible policy gap and the recommendations. The Government has set up a national framework to tackle problem gambling. Casino Regulatory Authority (CRA) and National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) are formed. CRA monitors and regulates Casinos according to Casino Control Act (CCA) as well as engaging with Government and public to formulate and strengthen the existing regulatory framework to enhance the social safeguards.

On the other hand, NCPG engages more directly with public to formulate educational framework to reduce problem gambling as well as gauge effectiveness of programs, such as treatment, counseling etc. NCPG works with National Addiction Management Services (NAMS) to gauge level of treatment and counseling needed, especially for gambling addiction. CRA has censured and fined both casinos for violating social safeguards within the frame-work. NCPG has also embarked on advertising and educational materials to public- focusing on harmony and security of family as core reason to stay away from problem gambling.

The strongest social safeguards, however, sit in sections of CCA, which targets the patrons and gamblers themselves. The focal point will be the exclusion orders, which can be self-applied or family applied or automatically excluded for residents obtaining social welfare. As of May 2012, there are 93,000 people have been prescribed under this law and are barred from entering the casinos. This is very helpful in preventing vulnerable person,

may it be financially or psychologically to gambling, as well as protecting families from experiencing the consequences.

Next strong prevention is the requirement of entry levy of 100 for local residents to enter into Casino for 24 hours. This makes Singaporeans think twice before entering into a casino.. The effectiveness of these educational outreach and slews of these measures can be seen in drop of overall gambling participation in 2011 survey done by MCYS and NCPG. With the exception of online gambling, other gambling activities are not recognized as leisure activities by more participants than compared to 2008 Survey.

This is a heartening indication of lesser people are being drawn into gambling. However, there is an increase in average bet size. This means that gamblers are taking more risky and larger bets than 2008. This is also mentioned in an article " The biggest losers" in The Economist May 2011 print. Singapore is the second in world in terms of bet size measured proportionally to resident population. This may indicate that vulnerable group, the problem gamblers, is engaging in higher risk.

This could also be a consequent of the very CCA, which has allowed more affluent residents to take larger bets and with minimal control. Hence, the results are skewed into larger monetary values. Even though the laws are ensuring maximum protection to the low-income gamblers, there are obvious areas of opportunities to further enhance the framework. For individual who are able to afford 2000 levy fees, they can be in casino anytime. The only protection for them is the exclusion order, which they or their family member must apply. This group of people could be better protected.

The social safeguard has been very much focus on gambling in casino but these alternatives, such as TOTO and 4D, are not given much consideration. They are very much accessible to anyone and problem gamblers can always run to without any barrier to indulge themselves. Moreover, the more damaging impact is the images of long queue to bet in easily accessible shops. This should be regarded as very larger influence on mindsets of our youth to view such activities as norm and the solution to get rich. The next gap is the identification of problem gamblers.

Currently, there is no system to identify problem gamblers unless they are triggering the authorities or social help group to be identified and put onto counseling. It should be better managed through alternative solution rather than letting them involved to trigger as it is already too late by then. These 3 issues are the most important areas to be improved and possibly tackle in Amended Casino Control Act. The safeguards are adapted and implemented from best practices in global gaming industries such as New Jersey and Nevada in the United States, New South Wales in Australia and Macau.

The enhanced policy that we develop now should look further into local context and culture to close the loopholes that are created from following global best practices. The first policy change should be the levy fee and entry into casino. It should be further tightened by having higher levy rates. The limit on visitation should not be based on voluntary application but it should be based on tax return declaration or guarantee of 300, 000 dollars or more and this should apply to every residents.

These visitation limits should be administered and registered under the NCPG or CRA. The definition of local residents should also be further widened

to include anyone who is holding valid pass to reside in Singapore. This is because foreign professional who gamble into debt will impact Singapore economy negatively as much as a Singaporean professional. Stricter legislation similar to CCA should be done to include all gaming places, such as TOTO outlets or horse racing. This is an ambitious plan and thus should be implemented over next 5 years.

With such legislation, such outlets should not be in heart of our community and should be with limited accessibility and more inconspicuously. All purchases should be register and monitor to a person, comparable to entering into casino. Lastly, national gambler database should be built with these measures in place. With such database, it will easier to monitor and track activities of problem gamblers. This may be infringing on privacy and personal rights but it could be managed with transparency to public and undertaking by the gamblers.

Moreover, this database can be used by casino to monitor and updates information about gambling habits. Hence, commitment is needed from casinos to train their personnel to proficiently identify problem gamblers. With this information, NCPG and national help-group can better strategize to engage and educated involved parties effectively, besides doing general educational campaigns. Having gambling database also offers opportunity to monitor by financial institutions on identified gamblers if credit should be extended.

In conclusion, Singapore does have legislative and national framework mirror which is the best of gambling industrial practices around the world. However, this has not stemmed gambling in general. There are clear needs in

protecting people of certain income, in regulating more accessible form of gambling and systemic identification of gamblers. These could be resolved by further strengthening of current legislation as well as enhancing national framework through building more tools and authority for NCPG and CRA.