

Singapore passes Bill on casino regulations

The Casino Control Bill passed in Parliament on Tuesday seeks to strike a balance between controls and ease of implementation.

Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng hoped it would provide an environment where the integrated resorts could thrive while keeping law and order.

The government will also continue to review and fine tune such regulations to ensure they stay relevant.

The Casino Control Bill is the first attempt at a broad policy framework for casino regulation, but operational details will be covered in subsidiary legislation down the road.

Best practices from other countries have been studied and adapted to deal with social, law and order issues that might arise with a casino here.

Said Mr Wong, „There are no right answers. Some MPs suggested limiting the number of times members can enter a casino, because when you pay SGD 2,000, maybe the maximum you allow is 20 times, 30 times. But I think we should not micromanage every measure, there is no end to the number of ways to stop people from visiting the IR. What we have done is to put in some barriers so Singaporeans can pause and think whether to cross it. We settled for SGD 100 for entry or SGD 2,000 for annual entry for 10 years, rather than chop and change and cause uncertainty to patrons and investors.“

Under the Bill, problem gamblers, bankrupts and those under government social assistance programmes will be excluded from entering a casino.

Families can also apply to prevent their loved ones from entering a casino, just like parents of foreign students here.

But Mr Wong cautioned that there will be limits on who can apply for such orders, as it will be a curb on a person's freedom of movement.

Mr Wong said, „If a person is bent on gambling, no measure will deter him. If he cannot gamble in Singapore, all he needs to do is to take a ferry to Batam, or to take a ride to Genting or to go on a cruise. No government, no NGO and no social do-gooder can stop him. Ultimately, the responsibility is his and the consequence is for him to bear. The unfortunate part is that his irresponsible behaviour will affect his family.“

Mr Wong also gave the assurance that undesirable activities will be kept in check with the new Bill as well as existing laws, including the setting up of a Casino Investigation Branch by the police.

Under the Bill, the government will not stipulate fixed opening hours for the casinos as Mr Wong said doing so will interfere with the casino operators' ability to run their businesses effectively.

This is also to ensure the casinos here will be of a comparable international standard to those in Las Vegas and Macau, which operate 24 hours daily, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Joanne Leow

Mr Wong also said the entry levy of SGD 100 would not apply to foreign domestic workers who wished to enter Singapore casinos.

He was responding to a query in Parliament on whether foreign maids would be charged the SGD 100 required for Singapore

citizens and Permanent Residents entering the casinos.

Mr Wong said as adults, foreign domestic workers would be responsible for themselves.

Other foreigners working in Singapore would also not be required to pay this entry fee.