

McDowell to shut casinos

Mr McDowell said they were operating under the guise of private members' clubs, but were essentially casinos.

„Casinos are illegal in Ireland. All commercial clubs where unlawful gaming takes place are illegal in Ireland,“ he said.

„A number of places now are posing as casinos, under the rubric of private members' clubs, and it's my intention to make sure the law is fully enforced against all of them. They are all illegal.“

He added: „I'm going to close them all down, by using the law and amending the law if necessary; the Gaming and Lotteries Act of 1956.“

He was responding to a question in relation to a report on money laundering in Ireland by an international expert body.

The Financial Action Task Force said it was „a matter of concern“ that private gaming clubs, which operated „casino-like facilities“, were not included in anti-money laundering legislation.

The 1956 act effectively prohibits the types of gaming carried out in casinos. An inter-departmental review of the act completed in 2000 backed the position that casino-type gambling „should not be provided for“. The minister's plans will come as a shock to private gaming clubs.

„We are a private members' club, and, as such, we are happy we operate fully within the law,“ said one club owner, who wished to remain anonymous.

However, he said he would prefer to see legislation regulating the area.

Gaming clubs operate as members' clubs, under which everyone

entering them becomes a member. Most do not charge a membership fee. There are estimated to be more than 10 such clubs in Dublin and at least two in Cork.

Licensing barrister Constance Cassidy SC said that, as she understood it, these clubs operated on a profit basis and not for the mutual benefit of the club itself or the members.

„The control of the club is not vested in the members, as I understand it, nor are the committee elected on an annual basis, therefore they are not private members' clubs under the Intoxicating Liquor Act.“

She added: „If gaming as defined by the 1956 act took place on such premises, prosecutions can take place and the gardaí are entitled to prosecute.“

She said it was „open to the minister“, if he wanted, to amend or update the 1956 act and bring it into line with the National Lottery Act 1986.