

# Province to increase aboriginal casino take

Toronto – Ontario's First Nations communities have won a bigger share of the provincial gaming jackpot in a deal that could end years of litigation over the government skimming proceeds from a popular aboriginal casino.

Starting in 2011, aboriginal communities will get a 1.6 per cent share of nearly CAD 6 billion in gross revenue collected annually from all provincial gambling, including casinos, lotteries and racetracks.

That's a windfall believed to be worth about CAD 100 million a year, and will come on top of revenue already earned from another Ontario casino.

Previously, Ontario's aboriginal communities received net revenue from just one casino – Casino Rama, located near Orillia, north of Toronto – worth roughly \$ 92 million in the 2004-05 fiscal year.

First Nations also will get CAD 155 million in „bridge funding“ over the next six years before the deal kicks in.

The deal between the province and the Ontario First Nations Ltd. Partnership, which still needs to be ratified by year's end, effectively will end a decade of court disputes over how much money aboriginals should get from the province's commercial casinos.

In 1998, First Nations launched a court challenge of the former Conservative government's decision to grab 20 per cent of gross gaming revenues from Casino Rama – a so-called „win tax“ that adds roughly CAD 100 million a year to provincial coffers.

The province collects the same 20-per-cent take from its three other commercial casinos – Casino Windsor, Casino Niagara and Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort.

That percentage still will flow to the government, but the new deal compensates aboriginals who, for years, have argued the province takes too much from Casino Rama, which sits on native land.

„Any time we can sit down with the province and work out some kind of agreement ... it's an achievement," Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse said at a signing ceremony at the legislature. „It shows that both parties are sitting down and listening.“

Aboriginal funds from Ontario casinos are split between more than 130 native communities , where they pay for health care, education and other needs.

„This is ... a wonderful precedent that we're establishing," Premier Dalton McGuinty said.