

Don't gamble with jobs and tourism

The closure of Ireland's fledgling casino sector would mean the loss of 500 jobs, cost the economy millions of euros a year in tax revenues and discourage tourism, an industry lobby group has warned the government.

The Gaming and Leisure Association of Ireland, which represents top casinos including Dermot Desmond's Sporting Emporium and Fitzwilliam Card Club, wrote to Michael McDowell, the justice minister, and three of his senior cabinet colleagues on Friday, warning that an outright ban would be nonsensical.

„If, without any consultation, the Irish government closes all gaming clubs in Ireland, there is little doubt the activities encapsulated by some of these clubs, will go underground,“ the letter said. „Completely prohibiting casinos merely denies the state of any tax revenue from this sector. We would welcome the clarification as to whether the effects of taxation, employment and tourism were taken into consideration when taking the unilateral decision to propose an outright ban on casinos.“

Department of Justice officials have scheduled a meeting with the group for Thursday.

According to a European study undertaken in April, the Irish gambling market is worth EUR 1.14 billion.

Casinos are currently outlawed in Ireland, but get around this prohibition by operating as private members' clubs.

Citing concerns over money-laundering and criminality, McDowell wants to close this loophole and has put forward amendments that are due to go before a Dail committee soon.