

# Casino regulation to replace prohibition

Casinos are to be regulated rather than outlawed under new government proposals.

There are presently around 20 gambling clubs in the State and, although technically they are illegal, the 50-year-old laws covering the area make it difficult to close them down.

Minister for Justice Michael McDowell signalled his intention to enforce outright prohibition of casinos only last month.

Ireland is one of only two out of 25 member states in Europe to outlaw such clubs.

The minister told the Dáil he had prepared new provisions to copperfasten the thrust of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 and shut down casinos.

But after a meeting with his fellow Cabinet members yesterday, Mr McDowell conceded the Government is now preparing for a regulatory commission.

“We’ve had a discussion on this matter in Government at the moment and the Government has asked me to come back now with the proposals for a regulatory approach rather than an outright prohibition approach,” he said.

“The fact is, the Government’s position is changing on this issue,” he told RTE Radio.

“What I did was generate proposals to make the Gaming and Lotteries Act philosophy effective but what I also decided was to consult with my colleagues in Government to whether that was the path they wanted to go – was it too nanny state-ish, was it illiberal, was it unrealistic at this stage to simply say that that kind of activity could never happen in Ireland?”

“But we’re not going to turn Ireland into a Las Vegas-type gambling centre for Europe or anything like that,” he insisted.

Tánaiste Mary Harney denied that Mr McDowell was forced to do a U-turn on his plans.

I think the Minister for Justice brought forward his proposals to Government, he wanted an open discussion at Government, he wanted to take soundings from his Cabinet colleagues and the Minister for Justice accepted it,” she said.