

# Public denied information on gaming licences

The public will not be shown basic information about a review into the state's new multibillion-dollar lotteries and gaming licences because it is too „secret“, Victoria's gambling watchdog has ruled.

The gambling regulator said it would also be „contrary to the public interest“ to release even edited documents related to the licences' reviews that are likely to determine the shape of gambling in the state for the next two decades.

The executive commissioner of the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation, Peter Cohen, said the documents could not be released because they might be called by a parliamentary committee set up to examine the gaming licence review – an argument branded „astonishing“ by the head of the committee.

„I think this is a stalling tactic. I am just amazed that the commission would attempt to use a parliamentary inquiry as a reason not to release documents under FoI (freedom of information) – I have never heard anything so absurd,“ Liberal MP Gordon Rich-Phillips said.

Three separate freedom-of-information requests to the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation seeking documents related to the lotteries licence and gaming licences' review were rejected by the commission, with not one document released.

The commission did not even bother to look for the documents. „I am satisfied on the face of your application, this is without having identified any or all of the documents to which the request relates, that any relevant document which may exist would be an exempt document. Furthermore, I am satisfied that there is no obligation to grant access to an edited copy

of a document," Mr Cohen wrote (*italics added*).

In replying to The Sunday Age's freedom-of-information requests, Mr Cohen said documents were exempt from disclosure if they were „internal working documents containing opinion, advice or recommendation and would be contrary to the public interest to release such documents“.

„This would apply to a number of documents, including reports by the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation,“ he wrote.

The lotteries licence and gaming machine licence reviews have been embroiled in controversy, with the lotteries licence review delayed and the State Government forced to set up a gambling licences review panel.

The panel was announced by the Government before last year's state election, after it emerged Premier Steve Bracks had been lobbied by former Tattersall's lobbyist and former Labor gaming minister David White, including at a private seaside dinner.

The refusal to release any information relating to the gambling licence review comes as the Government surrenders thousands of documents to the parliamentary committee on gaming licensing.

The committee is expected to begin public hearings next month.

Mr Rich-Phillips said it was ridiculous the gambling regulator would not release documents. He said it would not be contrary to the „public's interest“ but rather the „Government's interest“ to release the documents.

Mr Rich-Phillips said the Government and the commission's secrecy over the new gambling licences was one of the reasons the parliamentary inquiry was called in the first place.