

Ruling due on supercasino challenge

The British Casino Association (BCA) is due to learn whether it has succeeded in its High Court challenge over the legality of the Government's new gaming policy.

Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell was accused during a recent hearing of treating existing gaming establishments with „blatant unfairness“ as she pushes ahead with plans for 17 new casinos, including the first Las Vegas-style „super-casino“.

The BCA, which represents the interests of more than 90% of current gaming businesses, challenged the legality of the transitional order made under the 2005 Gambling Act which paved the way for the controversial new wave of casinos.

Michael Beloff QC, appearing for BCA and four of its member companies, said Government policy was „potentially seriously damaging to our legitimate commercial interests“.

Casinos already in business could lose GBP 120 million a year in profits and face ruin.

Mr Beloff told Mr Justice Langstaff, sitting at London's High Court, that Ms Jowell had pledged that she would ensure „fair competition between old and new“. But she had created a situation in which existing casinos were „condemned to second-class status“.

Lawyers for the Culture Secretary argued the challenge was „without merit and should be dismissed“.

The legal challenge was backed by four companies – Gala Casinos Ltd, Grosvenor Casinos Ltd, London Clubs International Ltd and Stanley Casinos Ltd – which between them operate 116 of the 138 existing casinos in Britain.

Mr Beloff argued the position of the Culture Secretary had changed so frequently, and she had performed so many twists and turns that she „eventually misunderstood the reach of the powers which she enjoyed“. At the same time she had failed to comply with her „duties of fair consultation“.

BCA chairwoman Penny Cobham said in a recent statement: „We have consistently argued that existing casinos would be unfairly treated under the terms of the 2005 Act through its inherent inequality and incoherence. The additional entitlements given to the 17 new casinos will seriously threaten many long established businesses and jobs.“