

# Slot machines forbidden

President George Maxwell Richards signed legislation banning one of the most significant gambling activities in Trinidad and Tobago, slot machines.

Once the legislation comes into force, it will be against the law for common gaming houses and private members' clubs to conduct gambling by way of slots.

If such an activity takes place on the premises of a private members' club, that premise shall be deemed a "common gaming house" for the purposes of the Gambling and Betting Act.

The Gambling and Betting Act effectively bans gambling by making a person guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of USD 1,500 or 12 months imprisonment if he owns, occupies, permits announces or establishes any premises as "a common gaming house". The Act defines such a common gaming house as any premises kept or used for the playing of any game of chance for winnings.

Private members' clubs, set up under the Registration of Clubs Act, were made exempt from this ban under Section 10 of the Gambling and Betting Act. But an amendment to this act, in the form of the Finance Act 2007, has been assented to by Richards which has the effect of cancelling this exemption if the members' club in particular uses slot machines.

By Section 5 of the Finance Act 2007 is amended to specifically expand the meaning of "gaming machine" to include slots. The amended definition of "gaming machine" now reads "a machine for playing a game of chance being a game which requires no action by any player other than actuation or manipulation of the machine, and includes a slot machine." A "slot machine" is "any mechanical game or device set in operation by the insertion of a token and includes a gambling machine."

The effect is this: if you are a private members' club and you host the use of slot machines, you will no longer be exempt from the statutory gambling ban. Sunday Newsday understands that almost all members clubs in Trinidad and Tobago currently offer the use of slot machines which –according to President of the Association of Members' Clubs Brian Phillips– are their biggest earner of revenue.

A members' club which is scheduled to open in a new multi-million dollar wing of MovieTowne, Mucurapo, is considering opening without offering slot machines in the face of the new legislation.

The legislation was passed both in the House of Representatives on June 13 and the Senate on June 27 and was assented to by Richards on July 10, days before Prime Minister Patrick Manning was reported by Newsday to be contemplating abolishing gambling outright in Trinidad and Tobago. It will come into force on a date to be announced by the President.

Manning has since aired his dissatisfaction with gambling in the form of Play Whe and Lotto at a walkabout in the Tunapuna constituency on July 25. All of this is in line with his now well-established stand against gambling, famously articulated in the 2006/2007 Budget Address:

“The emerging trends in casino-type gaming activities are of great concern to the Government, particularly its rapid spread in urban, rural, and semi-rural communities,” Manning said, noting the government was totally against the operation of casinos and all casino-type establishments.

“The Government is strongly against the proliferation of these casino-type establishments in Trinidad and Tobago,” Manning told Parliament, warning that his Government was moving to ban the importation and use of slot machines.

Yet although the legislation was assented to since July 10, members' clubs in Trinidad and Tobago continue to operate with

slot machines.

The question that remains, however, is whether police will enforce such legislation. Asked this week whether police would divert its resources to tackle the use of slot machines in private members' clubs, Police Commissioner Trevor Paul told Sunday Newsday, „We are mandated to enforce all laws.“