

Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Commission Ensuring Proper Gaming Sector

Gaming is big business the world over and Jamaica is no exception. As the industry grew here, the government recognized a need for regulation, and so in 1975, it created the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Commission.

In an interview with JIS News, Executive Director of the Commission, Derek Peart explains that the purpose of the Commission is to regulate the gaming industry.

„The Commission has the responsibility of regulating them, licensing or approval being given and also to ensure that only persons who are licensed or receive approvals are able to participate. If not, it would be committing a breach and the Commission has the responsibility as well to correct those breaches,“ he points out.

Mr. Peart says the major function is to ensure that the country has a modern gaming sector in which people are involved in leisure activities, that the promoters are licensed, that they are fit and proper and that there is protection for the punters and for the public as a whole.

The Commission is now organised on a sectoral basis, meaning that there is a Betting Division, Gaming and Lottery Division, Enforcement Division, and Administration.

Mr. Peart explains that there will be a change within the Commission, which will result in the organisation becoming more process driven.

„This means that you will have a Licensing and Registration Division, which will license and register the entire gamut of

the gaming sector. You will then have an audit and compliance division, which will ensure that there is compliance to the rules and to the regulations," he informs.

„These particular changes are very important as you are now looking at separating the two main activities one from the other. So licensing and registration will be in one division and that would involve betting, gaming and lotteries, all of those," Mr. Peart adds.

He points out that similarly, the audit and compliance division will cover all areas or all sectors.

There was a period in Jamaica's history where all forms of gambling were illegal and this continued up until 1899, when the first gambling Act was passed.

This Act was subsequently repealed, paving the way for the passing of the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act in 1965, and the establishment of the Commission 10 years later.

Many persons can attest to hearing the phrase, 'Authorized under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act,' or seeing this phrase on entry slips. This is usually associated with prize promotions, which is a major marketing tool used by corporate entities. Organizations involved in this activity must first obtain permission from the Commission.

Charitable gaming, such as fund-raising bingo parties organized by a school or church group, is not covered by the Betting Gaming and Lotteries Commission, although organizers of such events will need to obtain permission from the relevant authorities, such as the Ministry of Education, in the case of a school.

In addition to its work of regulating the gaming industry, the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Commission has been funding various social interventions to tackle the issue of problem gambling.

One such is a grant to RISE Life Management Services (RISE), which has enabled this Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) to operate a gambling prevention and counselling programme, where activities include school interventions, training of Guidance Counsellors and providing counselling for problem gamblers.

„The Commission has been monitoring the whole issue of problem gaming in Jamaica, and in that regard we have provided a grant to Rise Life Management Services, which has now put on its portfolio, problem gaming (gambling), where people can call in and provide counselling and they provide educational services,“ Mr. Peart tells JIS News.

He also informs that the Commission has made a grant to RISE to do a study on the extent to which Jamaican adolescents are involved in gambling, and that very shortly the results will be made available.

The Executive Director says that internationally, it is perceived that between three and five per cent of persons who are engaged in gambling have problems and „maybe in the region of three per cent, you may consider it to be pathological gambling.“

„So we have taken up this particular challenge and have been providing resources for combating this problem and also to fund a study which would give us an idea as to the magnitude of the problem and therefore to equip the Commission and also of course RISE, as to how best to craft the strategy for its combat,“ he explains.

He informs that one of the disturbing things that has „come up (from the study), speaks to the extent to which young people are engaged in gambling.“

„Quite a number of them are in the schools, not necessarily the particular activities that are prescribed by law. We have had one or two unfortunate instances where, through gambling, there has been violence,“ Mr. Peart says.

On the issue of making gambling illegal, Mr. Peart says this question will continue to be raised, in terms of dealing with the issue of problem gambling.

„If you ban it, are you going to be really able to effectively ban it, or are you just going to create a climate where there is neither rule nor regulations,“ Mr. Peart argues.

Jamaica's gaming industry includes horseracing, lotteries and lottery type games, gaming machines and gaming lounges and prize promotions.