

Prosecutors agree to plea bargain for owner of gambling ship

After police arrested hundreds of people in sting operations targeting unauthorized gambling ships operating off the Eilat coast, prosecutors have agreed to a plea bargain with the owners of one of the ships, underworld figure Francois Abutbul, Channel 2 revealed Wednesday evening.

Abutbul will agree to complete six months of community service and pay a fine of some NIS 100,000, a mere fraction of the ship's total profits, Channel 2 said.

Abutbul and his father, Charlie – who has since died – were the central suspects targeted in the gambling operation. The Abutbuls own three of the five boats that were seized in the operation.

Police estimate that the gambling ring generated illegal incomes of more than NIS 100 million.

Operators of the casino boats organized illegal gambling for some time, arguing that the gambling operations were legal since they took place outside Israel's territorial waters.

However, senior law-enforcement officials have previously stated that all gambling operations in the Gulf of Eilat are illegal, as neither Egypt nor Jordan allow gambling.