

# Responsible gaming policy unveiled in New Brunswick

A new responsible gaming policy unveiled by Premier Shawn Graham and Finance Minister Victor Boudreau focuses on responsible management and responsible play, in a responsible environment.

The new policy, the most comprehensive of its kind ever introduced in the province, will bring transformational changes to gaming in New Brunswick. Graham said there were many issues considered leading to today's announcement.

„We carefully examined all aspects of this important sector, and without a doubt, the driving force behind our action is responsibility,“ Graham said. „The Responsible Gaming Policy brings greater protection to the public. It brings integrity to responsible gaming activities in the province, as well as a new approach that highlights clarity, fairness, transparency and consistency to this sector throughout New Brunswick.“

The new Responsible Gaming Policy includes cutting the number of video lottery terminal (VLT) sites in the province by more than 50 per cent, from 625 to 300. The number of VLT machines will be reduced by nearly 25 per cent, from 2,650 to 2,000.

A moratorium will be placed on the approval of new video lottery sites for at least one year.

All video lottery terminals will be hosted in age-controlled environments. To this end, video lottery terminals will be removed from restaurants by April 2009. Royal Canadian Legion branches which currently have VLTs will be able to continue to operate them under the new model.

The policy also includes launching the most comprehensive responsible gaming initiatives ever seen in New Brunswick. Responsible gaming funding will double to USD 1.5 million.

Addiction services programs delivered by the Department of Health will receive an additional investment of USD 250,000 above current funding of USD 757,000.

In addition, more efforts will go toward research, prevention and education awareness campaigns, with an investment of USD 500,000 through the Lotteries Commission of New Brunswick. Focused education campaigns will be launched so that New Brunswickers can make more informed choices.

The Province will establish corporate social responsibility standards which will include training of staff at VLT sites. Responsible advertising standards and practices will also be developed. Many charitable organizations depend on bingos, raffles, Monte Carlo nights and similar events to raise money for worthy causes.

Legislation will be introduced to provide regulatory-making authority with respect to charitable gaming activities. At the same time, the government will review ways of assuring red tape and costs for charities are controlled, to make sure funds raised go to those who need them the most without undue delay.

Also, a program for the licensing of charitable Texas Hold 'Em tournaments, a popular form of card play which charities have been asking permission to host, will be licensed starting in 2008. An evaluation of the proposed new charitable gaming policies will be undertaken with input from charitable gaming licensees.

Statistics show that the number of tourists visiting N.B. has dropped considerably from 2002 to 2006, from two million visitors to 1.57 million – a decrease of nearly 25 per cent. While there may be a slight increase in visitors in 2007, Boudreau said it is imperative that the five-year downward trend from 2002 to 2006 is addressed, as the province needs to be strong in all sectors, including tourism.

One way the tourism sector can be bolstered is by offering visitors more services, attractions and entertainment choices. As such, it was also announced today that the Lotteries Commission of New Brunswick, on behalf of government, will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a destination casino in the province. This would make New Brunswick the ninth province in Canada to authorize a casino and/or racino complex.

Further, the provisions for ancillary services which will be part of the proposals made on a destination casino will weigh heavily in the assessment process. Ancillary services could include, but are not limited to: a standard-bred horse racing facility, hotel, performance theatre, meeting or trade and convention facilities, special events venues, restaurants, lounges or specialty restaurants, retail facilities or recreation facilities.

Boudreau emphasized that absolutely no government funding will be involved in the design, construction, equipping, financing or operation of the destination casino complex. An independent third party consultant, KPMG, has been engaged to oversee the development of the RFP as well as the evaluation of the bids. The company will also act as the fairness monitor for the submission and evaluation process.

The Lotteries Commission will enter into an agreement with the successful bidder, and it is anticipated that a destination casino complex will be in operation in 2010. It would make New Brunswick the ninth province in Canada to authorize casino or racino gaming.

The government recognizes that First Nations communities have very specific interests, requirements and challenges in relation to gaming. In 2006-2007, the provincial government returned USD 7.5 million to eight First Nations communities through gaming revenue sharing agreements.

Boudreau noted government is committed to immediate action through the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, New Brunswick Relationship Building Bilateral Agreement, and other avenues of bilateral dialogue, to engage and involve First Nations and aboriginal organizations in the new approach to responsible gaming. Talks will begin on formal development of First Nations Economies and Sustainability, which includes responsible gaming.