

AUD 400 million to make Star sparkle

A name change for Star City Casino is on the cards as part of a AUD 400 million upgrade.

Gambling giant Tabcorp wants to sex up the image of its casino – dubbed the Pyrmont Workers Club – in the face of challenges from the Asian gaming boom in Macau, Hong Kong and Singapore.

And it wants to win over domestic tourists, who are known to favour the swankier Packer-owned Crown Casino in Melbourne, with its mix of high class and family entertainment, shopping and dining facilities.

A Star City spokesman confirmed a name change was under consideration. Star Casino is a front-runner, but some advocate something more radical.

„There are various things being discussed including the name change which I cannot outline,“ the spokesman said last week. „They are looking at relaunching the complex when the building is completed. Some want a totally new look, others want to keep the present name.“

This year Tabcorp Holdings chief executive Elmer Funke Kupper disclosed the company wanted a larger upgrade of Star City than the AUD 300 million originally planned.

The bigger facelift would include a reorientation of the building to take advantage of views of Sydney Harbour, expansion of the gaming room floor, setting up more high end restaurants, lifting the quality of the retail precinct and building an additional 300-room hotel.

Existing features such as the volcano, fountains, glass lifts,

giant stairwell and outdoor escalators which were central to the look of the casino when it opened in 1997 are also under review.

British entrepreneur David Michaels, from design agency BEE (Brand Environment Experiential), has won the contract to provide the concept plans for the redesign. Latest estimates suggest this upgrade would be about AUD 400 million.

A Star City spokesman said a discussion had been held with the Iemma Government about whether the makeover could be designated a major project, allowing the state taking over the approval process.

Tourism and Transport Forum managing director Christopher Brown said the upgrade to Star City would be a huge boost to the city and provide an integrated tourism destination which catered for the under-resourced convention market. „No one will miss the volcano,“ he said. „The name change is understandable.“

A spokeswoman for Planning Minister Frank Sartor said:

„The casino refurbishment may automatically come to the Government for assessment but it depends on its size and whether it requires an amendment to the master plan.“