

Authorities want banks help to fight illegal web casinos

Only Dutch state lottery De Lotto can offer online gambling

Dutch authorities intend to crack down on illegal online casinos and are calling on banks to stop providing financial services to them, a Justice Ministry spokeswoman said last weekend.

„It is illegal to offer gambling services in the Netherlands without a permit. These companies know they break the law,“ she said.

She confirmed that Swedish online gamer Unibet and Dutch firm Oranje Casino, were targets, but declined to give other company names. The ministry has made a list of 30-50 Internet gamers and has asked banks to stop services to these companies. The spokeswoman said dossiers would be passed to the public prosecutor who would be tasked with bringing cases to court.

In the Netherlands only the Dutch state lottery De Lotto has a permit to offer online gambling, and last month the Dutch upper house defeated a bill that would have allowed Holland Casino to open a gambling website on a trial basis.

The Dutch approach to online gaming has put it on a collision course with the European Union, which is pushing for member states to open up their markets to competition. In February the EU gave Greece and the Netherlands a final warning before it initiates court action over restrictions in their gaming markets.

Most of the illegal Web gambling is via credit cards. „This is a Dutch issue, so we have only asked banks operating in the Netherlands to participate,“ the spokeswoman said.

Europe is grappling with the issue of Internet betting. While some countries like Britain have opened up to almost every kind of online gambling, others like Germany and France have been reluctant to follow suit, concerned about gambling addiction and worried that state betting monopolies would see their revenues eroded.

Last year Unibet's CEO Petter Nylander was arrested in the Netherlands and taken to France where a judge had issued a European warrant for contravening France's betting laws. He was freed on bail.