

Irish Gaming Conference Sets Scene For Debate On New Gaming Legislation!

With representatives of the majority of the Irish Gaming Industry in attendance (either direct representation or represented by their respective trade associations), the Irish Gaming Conference provided an unprecedented forum for the industry to get together and discuss the issues currently affecting the industry.

Opened by Michael McGrath BL, Chairman of the now disbanded Casino Regulation Committee and author of the Department of Justice report 'Regulating Gaming in Ireland', the industry utilised the event to provide frank and open discussion on the frustrations at the lack of legislation, a regulatory body and the subsequent limitations imposed on the Irish Gaming Industry in the absence of such statutory instruments.

Having experts from the UK, such as Deputy CEO of the UK Gambling Commission and CEO of GamCare, to share their experiences provide further proof that the Irish industry is suffering as a result of the lack of a comprehensive legal framework in which to operate. In fact, the diverse and often conflicting laws related to different niches of gaming have exasperated many an industry stalwart.

Bookmakers voiced their frustration on the lack of debate in government on the FOBT issue and the disinformation being peddled by politicians, who have taken moral high ground on false information regarding FOBT's and their unfounded allegations of being a prime contributor to problem gambling.

Arcade operators aired their long standing view that their business is continually being eroded by illegal machine operations who have not licensed their machines / sites as

they have to and also the low value of their stake and prize levels.

Independent gaming machine and single site operators voiced their concern at the inability of the government to provide a licensing classification for them and to legislate for their long standing industry practices dating back over 50 years and subsequently pigeon-holing their valuable contribution to employment and tax revenues into a legal minefield.

Casinos / Private Member Card Clubs are still worried about the fact that the wide scope for interpretation of existing laws leaves them and their substantial investments in clubs, staff and facilities potentially at risk. The fact that a lack of unambiguous law, in what has been historically a professional, self regulated segment of the gaming market, may allow unscrupulous operators give the industry a ,black eye' and force legislation, is at least annoying. This is not a desired route for casino owners.

John Purcell, MD of Purcell & Associates who organised the event, said „It is overwhelming that the unified voice of the industry has spoken so succinctly in this incredibly productive forum to let legislators know that we do want regulation and we are willing to step up to the plate and do what is necessary.

Without exception, the industry wants a regulator that can engage with operators and make decisions as well as a statutory social responsibility group to ensure professional operations and support resources for problem gambling.

One would expect a positive government reaction to this from an industry that generates over EUR 5bn in turnover in the Irish market, which wishes to ensure the proper controls are in place to regulate the entire gaming trade.

A transcript of the event will be furnished to the Minister for Justice to assist his office in advancing the process to

formulate a new Gambling Bill that can be openly debated on the Dáil (Parliament) floor and subsequently brought into Irish law to reflect our modern society's requirements".