

SkyCity defends itself in wake of drug bust

SkyCity has been criticised by a senior judge after a drug ring used its VIP gaming lounge as part of its multi-million operation, but the casino company defended its systems for detecting illegal activities.

Drug gang ringleader Ro Tong Zhou, 41, was jailed for 15 years in the High Court in Auckland yesterday on more than 30 methamphetamine drugs charges.

He used SkyCity Casino's VIP lounge to run the operation, which included the supply of more than NZD 3 million worth of P in two months.

SkyCity chief executive Nigel Morrison said the Zhao case happened over two years ago, and SkyCity was one of a number of venues named.

„At all times we fully co-operate with the police, other authorities and regulators, and willingly assist with all of their legal enquiries and investigations,“ he says.

„Our state of the art surveillance, anti-money laundering reporting and tracking systems are often used by the police and other authorities to assist in the detection of unlawful actions or behaviour.“

In court, Judge Rhys Harrison heavily criticised SkyCity for the way it had been used by the drug dealers, and said anti-gambling lobbyists had warned the casino could become a „scene for large-scale criminal activity“.

The court was told Zhou ran a sophisticated distribution network, often using the VIP lounge at SkyCity as a hub to discuss buying and selling methamphetamine. Money and drugs

even changed hands in the basement carpark.

The judge said Zhou used both the VIP lounge and the carpark as his office, and he ordered his sentencing notes be sent to Mr Morrison, the newspaper reported.

During the police drug operation, 13 people were arrested and millions of dollars worth of P and cash seized from the drug ring, run by an Asian organised crime ring headed by a mystery man nicknamed Xiao Pang in China.

The inquiry uncovered criminals involved in the supply and distribution of methamphetamine, particularly in Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.

The court was told drug money was gambled in a money-laundering operation.

In August 2007 a ONE News investigation found a VIP gambler running a money lending business on the side at Auckland's Sky City casino.