

Problem gambler sues casino after AUD 30m loss

Victoria's gambling regulator has launched an investigation into claims Melbourne's Crown Casino allowed a banned problem gambler to lose AUD 30 million.

The Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation has ordered the casino to hand over all documents relating to multi-millionaire property developer Harry Kakavas.

In a Supreme Court statement of claim lodged last week, Mr Kakavas alleges he lost AUD 30 million playing baccarat at Crown in a 14-month gambling spree starting in June 2005.

The Gold Coast-based gambling addict claims he'd had himself excluded from the casino but was lured back by chief operating officer John Williams.

Mr Williams, the stepson of Crown's developer and former owner Lloyd Williams, will be interviewed by VCGR officers as part of the investigation.

If found to have breached regulations, he could be stripped of his licence to work in Australian casinos.

Mr Kakavas is suing Crown and Mr Williams for the AUD 30 million he says he lost, plus damages.

Mr Williams is a lifelong friend of PBL chief and casino owner James Packer.

They forged a close friendship through their fathers, Lloyd and the late Kerry Packer.

Mr Williams was recently promoted within PBL ranks to take charge of the company's European gaming activities.

The VCGR revealed yesterday it had the power to demand all documents held by Crown relating to Mr Kakavas, including his gambling expenditure and self-exclusion papers.

Mr Kakavas claims Crown bosses contacted him in late 2004 after learning he had been gambling in Las Vegas.

He alleges Crown's interstate marketing manager, Richard Daggert, later told him the casino needed a doctor to say he was cured before he would be allowed back in.

„Just get me a letter from any psychologist. Try someone on the Gold Coast,“ Mr Kakavas alleged he was told.

He says Mr Daggert flew to the Gold Coast to get him to sign a letter, written by Crown, seeking his readmission to the casino.

Mr Kakavas says he was soon betting up to AUD 300,000 a hand in private gaming suites on the 29th floor of the Crown Towers Hotel.

He also alleges he was flown 32 times on Crown's VIP jet and was regularly handed bags and boxes of cash containing up to AUD 50,000.

„They knew my history,“ Mr Kakavas said.

„I excluded myself because I knew I had a problem. They should not have contacted me.“

Mr Kakavas is represented by a team of leading Melbourne lawyers, including Allan Myers, QC.

Crown has hired top law firm Minter Ellison to take charge of its defence.

Casino spokesman Gary O'Neil yesterday declined to comment.