

# Ireland to legalize casinos

In Ireland, the Justice Minister has revealed that he will loosen the nation's gambling laws by legalizing casinos and creating a new regulatory authority for all forms of gaming.

According to a piece from the Irish Independent newspaper, Dermot Ahern stated that existing laws on gambling were "past their sell-by date" but promised to reach cross-party agreement and consult with the public before making any changes.

Casinos are illegal in the Republic under the 1956 Gaming and Lotteries Act but up to 50 private members' clubs currently offer roulette, blackjack and other games. Ahern said most parties have agreed in principle to a proposal to establish a cross-party committee on gambling with talks continuing.

In addition, the Minister revealed that he would publish a report from the inter-departmental Casino Regulatory Committee rumored to recommend legalizing medium-size casinos subject to strict regulatory controls. It is also thought the report advocates awarding casino licenses according to criteria set by a regulatory body rather than an auction along with the establishment of an age limit of 18 or possibly 21.

The report also recommends that Government policies across different departments be reviewed for consistency and that more research should be carried out into the effects of problem gambling. Although strongly against allowing fixed-odds betting terminals in bookmakers or pubs, the report is equivocal about permitting such machines in other licensed gaming premises.

Irish bookmakers Paddy Power has revealed that it would be examining the possibility of entering the Irish casino market once the Government published any legislation. A spokesperson for the Dublin-based firm said that the group's interests in

operating casinos would be predicated on the assumption that any new legislation introduced was "sensible".