

Casino owners to face rigorous background checks

Casino owners will undergo in-depth criminal and financial background checks before being granted a licence under new proposals revealed today.

A new report recommended business dealings and tax history must also be scrutinised in a bid to combat money laundering in the gaming trade.

The government appointed casino committee said that if gaming laws are updated, a new regulatory body should develop and implement anti-money laundering strategies and have the power to enforce the law and prosecute.

Some 32 recommendations were made in the report of the casino committee – Gaming in Ireland – which will be scrutinised by a cross-party committee after the summer recess.

Justice Minister Dermot Ahern said he was anxious that the government get things right in relation to gaming and betting codes.

“I want to ensure that betting and gaming activities are carried out within a responsible framework that recognises the reality of these activities, but which ensures they are properly managed, particularly as regards problem gamblers,” he said.

The group formed almost two years ago when Justice Minister Michael McDowell was asked for proposals to better regulate casino-style gambling, which currently falls under the Gaming and Lotteries Act, 1956.

It recommended the establishment of an Interim Gaming Regulatory Authority to run the industry, adding that gardai

and the Revenue Commissioners would have secondary roles.

Members also agreed that it had to have the powers to carry out investigations, basic licensing requirements – with consideration for good character, criminal record, taxation, financial history, and disclosure of shadow directors and shareholders – to prevent money laundering.

Mr Ahern said because of technological advances associated with the online betting and gaming environments, the changing nature of gaming, and the proliferation of private members' clubs offering a casino-style experience, the complex issues would require further detailed analysis before Government makes a formal decision on introducing any significant changes to the regulatory regime in the gaming and betting area.

He said the report was published ahead of the summer recess to allow parties familiarise themselves with its contents before an informal cross-party committee is set up to examine all aspects of gaming in Ireland.

“The committee will have wide latitude to address the many complex and even emotive issues surrounding gaming and gambling,” added Mr Ahern.

“I look forward to completing the establishment of the committee shortly and look forward to receiving the advice of the committee in due course.”