

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The growth of gaming activities in the province over the past 10 years has required a careful review of the province's gaming policies, to ensure they take into account current circumstances and set out clear and specific procedures and processes.

The Gaming Licensing Policy Review was initiated for that purpose. Its specific objective was:

To recommend licensing gaming policies that address issues of growth while continuing to ensure the effective regulation and socially-responsible delivery of gaming activities in the province over the next five years.

The views of Albertans and stakeholder groups during the review process were instrumental to the recommendations presented in this report. In addressing issues of growth, the recommendations attempt to achieve a balance between the social and fiscal capacities of the province.

In addition, this report of the Gaming Licensing Policy Review is not a fixed document that concludes with its publishing. Rather, it is a key starting point for the Commission to ensure that the objective of the review is implemented based on the direction provided by the government in response to the recommendations.

Legal Framework

The fundamental purpose for gaming in the province is to generate proceeds for charitable, non-profit, public and community-based initiatives. The province's legal and policy framework for gaming supports this purpose.

The legal and policy framework starts with the *Criminal Code* (Canada). In Alberta, it is further defined in the provisions of the *Gaming and Liquor Act* (Alberta) and the *Gaming and Liquor Regulation* (Alberta). Gaming policies, or the ground rules for the gaming industry of the province, are established accordingly within this framework.

Gaming policies must also ensure gaming activities are delivered in a socially-responsible manner. While gaming has become an acceptable form of entertainment or recreation for many people, it poses serious difficulties for those who experience problems with their gambling.

It is also recognized that work is needed to assess the social and economic impacts of gaming in the province. Currently, the Alberta Gaming Research Council and the Alberta Gaming Research Institute are addressing the social and economic issues. As that proceeds, the Commission will continue to work closely with the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) in being as effective as possible in creating awareness of problem gambling and developing programs to address this serious issue.

Recommendations

The recommendations call for a clearer and greater role by the local community to determine whether the expansion of licensed gaming facilities may occur in their respective communities.

In this regard, the recommended approach will be much more proactive than in the past. It will give priority to the views of the local community before any further consideration is given to proposals for the expansion of licensed gaming facilities.

It is recommended that the maximum limit of 6,000 VLTs for the province remain in effect. This limit has been in effect since 1995. Moreover, the availability of VLTs should be reduced by consolidating VLTs in fewer locations and creating dedicated VLT gaming entertainment centres within the hospitality and tourism industries of the province.

Single facilities in the province with more than one bar or lounge with VLTs will have until December 31, 2002 to establish a dedicated VLT gaming venue in the facility. Otherwise, the VLTs will be removed from all but one bar or lounge in the facility under the same time limitation.

Charities involved with bingo and pull ticket sales, two activities whose sales have been declining, will have more opportunities to compete in the province's gaming market, and bring added value to consumers, while generating proceeds for their charitable or religious community projects.

The rules that determine which groups are eligible for gaming licences, and that set out the approved use of gaming proceeds by eligible groups, must be clear and precisely set out so that stakeholders understand them and the policies are fair, equitable and transparent.

Efforts will continue to be made to ensure that gaming activities are delivered in a socially-responsible manner. Problem gambling awareness training should be compulsory for staff of all licensed gaming facilities (permanent charitable casinos and bingo association halls, as well as racing entertainment centres) and private VLT retailers. It is recommended that new electronic gaming devices, such as slot machines and VLTs, contain proven responsible gaming features.

A consolidated set of Guiding Principles for Gaming in Alberta should be formally adopted or affirmed and made readily available to the public and stakeholders.

Working with Stakeholders

The Gaming Licensing Policy Review was the first comprehensive review that the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission conducted of the province's gaming policies since the Commission was formally established in 1996. The policy review has allowed the Commission to take a more strategic approach to consulting with stakeholders and establishing stronger relationships for the future.

The review has also heightened the awareness among staff of the issues and challenges faced by the Commission. The common objective of the policy review has helped to focus the organization's energies toward being a more effective and responsive organization.