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MEDIA RELEASE

STAKEHOLDERS SUPPORT CASINO VISIT LIMIT AND URGE NCPG TO FORM RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING FORUM

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) reports strong stakeholder support for the enhanced social safeguards under the proposed Casino Control (Amendment) Bill, particularly the visit limit, and for the establishment of a Responsible Gambling forum between community leaders and all gambling operators.

2. NCPG engages the public and stakeholders from time to time to garner feedback on pertinent issues related to problem gambling and social safeguards. NCPG held four consultation sessions between 18 and 31 July with community and religious leaders, and social service professionals to obtain feedback on the social safeguards amendments in the Casino Control Act, namely, the proposed visit limit system, amendments relating to casino exclusions, and responsible gambling.

3. Stakeholders supported the proposed Third-Party Visit Limit, Voluntary Self Visit Limit and Family Visit Limit. They noted that it would be a useful complement to the current NCPG casino exclusions as it enabled NCPG to take a graduated approach to protect the financially vulnerable, frequent casino gamblers. As assessing financial vulnerability could be complex, they welcomed the proposal that NCPG will appoint a Committee of Assessors, drawn from a pool of community and grassroots leaders, as well as social service and help professionals, to look into each case before a visit limit is imposed. This is similar to how casino exclusion is determined today for family exclusion.

4. Some stakeholders however voiced their concern that a visit limit could lead to an increase in gambling intensity. Casinos today are required under the law to have in place a pre-commitment system to enable patrons to pre-determine their expenditure limit at each visit. NCPG will work with the casinos to do more to publicise and encourage the use of this system. Families and casinos could also alert NCPG of those who intensify their gambling after the visit limit is imposed, and NCPG will impose casino exclusion orders on these gamblers if they cause harm to their families.

5. Stakeholders also called for more public education as well as support and help services for families to cope with problem gambling. NCPG is stepping up its help services, with support from the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) and Tanjong Pagar Family Service Centre. NCPG is also piloting its legal and financial advisory services at three family service centres, namely Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre, Hougang Sheng Hong Family Service Centre and Tanjong Pagar Family Service Centre. NCPG will also continue to intensify its public education efforts to create greater awareness of problem gambling across all forms of gambling, and encourage help seeking behavior among families affected by problem gambling.

6. Stakeholders stressed the importance of responsible gambling measures across all gambling operators. They called for the establishment of a regular dialogue platform between community leaders and casino and non-casino gambling operators, similar to the Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee (RGAC) in Queensland, Australia. This would be a step forward in enhancing responsible gambling practices across all forms of gambling in Singapore, and addressing problem gambling holistically with community support.

7. NCPG Chairman Mr Lim Hock San said: “We are heartened by the strong support for the proposed social safeguards amendments to the Casino Control Act, especially the proposed visit limit. While the feedback was by no means exhaustive, we had good and honest feedback reflecting the views of the stakeholders during the stakeholder consultations.

8. We note that stakeholders would like us to seriously consider setting up a regular forum for dialogue between gambling operators and community leaders. NCPG will work towards this.

9. NCPG would like to thank all stakeholders for their participation. Their candid views and insights will certainly help NCPG to better address problem gambling.”

10. A summary of the feedback is at Annex and can also be found at NCPG's website: www.knowtheline.sg.

About the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)

The NCPG was appointed in August 2005 as part of Singapore’s national framework to address problem gambling. The Council comprises 13 members with expertise in legal, psychiatry and psychology, social work, counselling and rehabilitative services. The Council’s role is to provide advice and feedback to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) on public education programmes on problem gambling and on the effectiveness of treatment, counselling and rehabilitative programmes; to decide on funding for these programmes; and on the applications for exclusion of persons from casinos. Stop Problem Gambling. Turn Your Luck Around, Know The Line. Call 1800-6-668-668. For more information, please visit www.knowtheline.sg.

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**SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS
ON THE PROPOSED SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS ENHANCEMENTS
IN THE DRAFT CASINO CONTROL (AMENDMENT) BILL**

Introduction

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) regularly holds consultation sessions to gather feedback from the public and community on pertinent issues related to problem gambling across all forms of gambling.

2. NCPG has just concluded four closed-door stakeholder consultation sessions from 18 to 31 July 2012 on the Government's proposed enhancements to social safeguards in the draft Casino Control Act (Amendment) Bill. Participants included key representatives from community, grassroots, religious, and social service organisations. While the feedback received was by no means exhaustive, it enabled NCPG to obtain a good sense of the general sentiment from the ground. The Council also received constructive feedback on the proposed amendments to casino social safeguards. There were also several suggestions on how to further improve protective measures against the harm of gambling.

3. NCPG would like to thank all stakeholders who participated in the consultation exercise.

Summary of Stakeholders' Feedback

4. Feedback and suggestions received from stakeholders across all the consultation sessions are summarised below.

A. Visit Limit System

5. Stakeholders supported the proposal for NCPG to impose a limit on the number of visits that the financially vulnerable can make to the casinos each month. Stakeholders were informed that there were three types of visit limits proposed: Third-Party Visit Limit, Voluntary Self Visit Limit and Family Visit Limit. Stakeholders noted that the current NCPG casino exclusion system only offered the option of banning a person outright from the casinos. Stakeholders recognised that the visit limit allowed an intermediate option for those who were financially vulnerable, as individuals and families may find an outright ban too harsh in certain circumstances.

6. Stakeholders also recognised that the visit limit system targeted the frequent casino visitors who were financially vulnerable. They understood that the financially vulnerable were not necessarily the low income. As financial circumstances could be complex and vary across individuals, they supported the proposal for NCPG to form a Committee of Assessors to determine, on a case-by-case basis, the financial vulnerability of a frequent casino patron based on his financial situation, especially his ability to service his debts and meet his financial obligations.

7. Some stakeholders were concerned that imposing a visit limit might lead to an increase in gambling intensity at each visit, and suggested that intensity of play could be curbed through an expenditure limit. Others suggested a ‘cooling-off’ period between each visit or a weekly visit limit (as opposed to the proposed monthly visit limit) to deliberately space out the visits.

8. NCPG acknowledges stakeholders’ valid concern as gambling problems can arise from both frequency and intensity. Casino operators are currently already required under the law to have a pre-commitment system for patrons to voluntarily set an expenditure or loss limit, and both casino operators have put this in place. NCPG agrees with stakeholders that more could be done by NCPG and the casino operators to publicise and increase the usage of this system. With regard to a ‘cooling off’ period and spacing of visits, the difficulty would be in determining what these time periods should be. NCPG’s view is that if any individual starts to gamble very intensively after being placed on a visit limit, the family and the casino operators could alert NCPG and NCPG will impose a casino exclusion order if the circumstances warrant it.

B. Responsible Gambling Measures

9. Stakeholders highlighted that while they supported the proposed casino social safeguards, they expressed the need for similar social safeguards for other forms of gambling, in particular, jackpot rooms in private clubs and horse racing. NCPG shared that it currently has a voluntary Responsible Gambling Code of Practice adopted by Singapore Pools, Singapore Turf Club and the major clubs that run jackpot rooms, such as SAFRA and NTUC. Stakeholders were also concerned that there were no checks in place to address the potential problem of online gambling, especially among youth.

10. On casino gambling, stakeholders were unsure if casino staff received adequate training, or had the incentive to be pro-active in identifying and helping at-risk patrons. Stakeholders welcomed the proposed amendment that requires casino operators to review their Responsible Gambling initiatives in relation to other top jurisdictions and casinos, and to provide more specificity in their responsible gambling policies and measures. Stakeholders also felt that the casino operators could enhance the voluntary pre-commitment system, and suggested that they also establish on-site counselling booths or ‘cooling-off’ rooms to provide help to at-risk gamblers.

11. NCPG supports their call for the casino operators to be better equipped to be pro-active and help protect patrons, especially the financially vulnerable ones; to enhance and increase usage of the pre-commitment system; and for casinos to have on-site counselling booths or ‘cooling-off’ rooms to provide help to at-risk gamblers.

12. In response to the call for stronger responsible gambling measures across both casino and non-casino gambling operators, NCPG shared with stakeholders that it has been studying responsible gambling measures in more mature gambling jurisdictions. In particular, NCPG shared that Queensland, Australia had formed the Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee (RGAC) - a partnership involving community, industry and government. An interesting feature was that the chairmanship of the RGAC alternated between community

and industry, and that it thus provided a platform for meaningful dialogue between both. Stakeholders strongly encouraged NCPG to consider forming a similar dialogue platform between all gambling operators here and the community, with many expressing interest to participate in such a forum.

C. Public Education

13. Stakeholders felt strongly that public education efforts should be intensified to heighten awareness of the social ills of problem gambling, as many remained largely unaware of the potential problems. They called for more pro-active initiatives and stronger campaigns to be rolled out. Many also suggested for the public, especially community, grassroots and social service organisations, to be educated on the various social safeguards available to better equip the community to assist those at risk. There were also suggestions for greater focus on encouraging help-seeking behaviour. Many felt that more education could also be provided through counselling or education programmes that teach life skills such as financial management.

14. NCPG's public education has largely focused on creating greater awareness of the consequences of problem gambling across all forms of gambling. However, since 2012, NCPG is also encouraging families affected by problem gambling to seek help. To this end, NCPG is working with community partners to enhance its outreach to targeted groups in the community. NCPG also shared that it is currently piloting legal and financial advisory services at three Family Service Centres (FSCs), and hopes to expand it to more FSCs as part of the suite of services to help families and problem gamblers. NCPG agrees with stakeholders that public education is important and will act on their comments and suggestions.

D. Enhancements to NCPG Casino Exclusion

15. Stakeholders expressed support for the proposed amendments to the existing NCPG Casino Exclusion system, which included the implementation of Provisional Family Exclusion Orders (FEO), enabling FEOs to be issued even if the respondent was absent or uncooperative, mandatory assessment and counselling when applying for revocation of exclusion orders, and the empowerment of the NCPG-appointed Committee of Assessors to exclude a person who was vulnerable to financial harm due to gambling.

16. However, stakeholders called for more support and help services for families to cope with the problem. Stakeholders raised concerns that while casino exclusion and the visit limit protected families against the harm of casino gambling, there could still be excessive non-casino gambling. Stakeholders also suggested mandatory counselling for all problem gamblers placed under casino exclusion or visit limit as they felt it was necessary to tackle the problem gambling.

17. While NCPG supports that there should be more counselling offered, and is stepping up its help services, NCPG is of the view that it would not be very helpful to mandate counseling at the time when a visit limit or casino exclusion has just been imposed as the gambler is unlikely to cooperate. This is where families, friends and the community could play an important role. Encouraging the gambler to attend, or accompanying him to,

counselling sessions are known to be more effective in obtaining cooperation from the gambler to address his problems.

E. Entry Levy

18. Some stakeholders suggested that the entry levy should be extended to foreigners on work permits, in particular foreign domestic workers, as they were also a vulnerable group. They were of the view that these workers, if addicted, could potentially pose social problems for their employers and society at large.

19. The NCPG notes that voluntary self-exclusion has been gaining impetus among foreign workers. The NCPG will continue to work with employers to encourage their employees to opt for self-exclusion.

Moving Forward

20. NCPG is heartened to have stakeholder support for the continued enhancements to keys areas which it had intended to focus on:

- a. Enhancing the current exclusion regime to better protect individuals and their families;
- b. Intensifying public education and awareness outreach to more targeted segments of the community;
- c. Expanding services to better help gamblers and their families; and
- d. Increasing engagement with community leaders to strengthen the support network to identify and assist those affected by problem gambling.

21. Taking into account the feedback and suggestions received from stakeholders, NCPG will also explore the following areas:

- a. Establishing a regular forum between the industry and community to enhance responsible gambling practices by gambling operators and secure community support to address problem gambling; and
- b. Building capabilities in the community to strengthen the network of personnel trained in gambling-related counselling.