

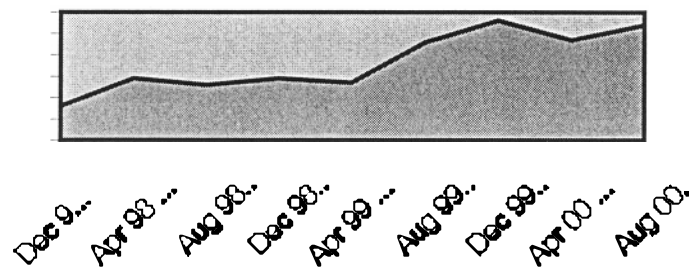
IN AUGUST 1999 THE NUMBER OF PROBLEM GAMBLERS IDENTIFIED IN STAR CITY CASINO DOUBLED

1. Voluntary Exclusion Orders.

Among the range of initiatives offered by Star City casino to persons who believe they may have a gambling problem include the facility to self-ban themselves from the casino by taking out a voluntary exclusion order. If a person the subject of a voluntary exclusion order re-enters the casino it is customary for that person to be spoken to by an on-site government inspector before being escorted from the premises. By the end of 2002, more than 2000 people had voluntarily excluded themselves from Star City casino.

2. Persons breaching their Voluntary Exclusion Orders.

Between the opening of Star City casino in November 1997 and July 1999 the number of persons identified gambling in the casino in breach of their voluntary exclusion orders remained stable at about 6 per month. In August 1999 the number of persons identified gambling in the casino in breach of their voluntary exclusion orders suddenly doubled to 12 per month with a gradual increase to its current level of more than 20 per month. By the end of 2001 more than 500 persons who had taken out a voluntary exclusion order had been identified gambling in the casino.



Voluntary excluded persons identified gambling in the casino

3. What happened in August 1999?

In May 1999 the Director of Casino Surveillance (government regulator) received advice from the Budget Committee of Cabinet that staff reductions were to be made to his department. As a result, in August 1999 the number of on-site government inspectors located at Star City casino was effectively halved.

4. Government inspectors role in harm minimisation pre August 1999.

As a result of working around the clock on-site in the casino, inspectors were in a unique position to observe the effects of gambling on patrons who visit the casino. By way of constant floor patrols inspectors became familiar with the target group (regular punters or repeat customer) most likely to develop gambling related problems. In turn, the regular punter, familiar with the role and accessibility of the government inspectors often sought out their assistance in matters concerning gambling related problems.

By August 1999 inspectors had participated in hundreds of interviews and discussions with patrons who recognised that they had developed a gambling problem. Those deemed at risk could then be referred on to a range of counselling services to receive expert advice in a range of community languages.

5. Government inspectors' role in harm minimisation post August 1999.

Despite the massive staff cuts, the Division of Casino Surveillance (DCS) still had a statutory obligation to fulfil its regulatory objectives, which can be summarised as; ensuring that gaming is conducted honestly, minimising crime and social harm and verifying revenue.

In order to fulfil its obligations the DCS was required to move away from the traditional hands-on approach to casino surveillance and undertake an escalated risk management approach. It is therefore not surprising that something had to give, and you can bet your last dollar (as so many problem gamblers do) that it would not be revenue verification.

Inspectors, highly trained in all facets of casino surveillance, including gaming, the law, regulation, surveillance and counselling were slowly converted into fulltime auditors.

Harm minimisation became a product of risk management. Counselling was replaced by the introduction of pro-rata forms. Priority was shifted from *why* patrons had breached their voluntary exclusion orders to recording *how many* patrons had breached their exclusion orders.

6. Conclusion

For so long on-site government inspectors managed to keep a cap on the numbers of voluntary excluded patrons returning to the casino to gamble. Unfortunately budget controls required the regulating body to manage its functions with a 50% reduction in workforce. The consequences were evident immediately, with the number of problem gamblers returning to the casino doubling overnight.



Hal Jam.

10 October 2003

Sources:

Dept Gaming & Racing Annual reports

Casino Control Authority Annual reports