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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING WRAPS UP  
CONSULTATION EXERCISE ON CASINO EXCLUSION MEASURES**

***Public Supportive of Simple but Holistic Approach to Family Exclusions;  
Council will work on Regulations for Casino Exclusion Measures***

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) issued today a detailed response to a public consultation exercise on casino exclusion measures that was held from 29 December 2006 to 31 January 2007 via the government feedback portal, REACH.

Public views were sought on the operational procedures of the three types of exclusion measures under the Casino Control Act: voluntary self-exclusion, family exclusion and third party exclusion; as well as the panel of assessors. In all, 12 submissions and letters were received via the website, emails and newspaper forum pages. Apart from the online public consultation exercise, the NCPG also conducted three focus group sessions with 25 recovering problem gamblers and their families.

**Key Comments: Holistic Approach to Family Exclusions Required and Self Exclusion Procedures to be Simplified**

Members of the public raised issues that were similar to those expressed by key community stakeholders in phase one of the consultation.<sup>1</sup> Many felt that the focus of the family exclusion should be on offering holistic help to problem gamblers and their families. Family exclusion should be exercised as a last resort to complement other approaches such as counselling and self-exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> The first phase of stakeholder consultation involved over 80 representatives from various social service, religious, community, grassroots and corporate organisations. These stakeholders provided many suggestions which the Council has incorporated into its draft casino exclusion procedures. Some of the suggestions include making the process for exclusion simple and accessible, as well as involving social work professionals in the family exclusion process. Stakeholders also raised the importance of having a mix of both professionals (e.g. social workers, counsellors, psychiatrists) and persons of high social standing to be on the panel of assessors to decide on cases of exclusions, so that decisions would be more balanced.

They also highlighted the instrumental role of the social worker in the exclusion process in arbitrating family conflict issues and in rendering help and support to families during the hearing process. The social worker would also be in a position to persuade the problem gambler in seeking professional counselling and to explore self exclusion instead.

The public recommended making the self exclusion process simple. For third-party exclusions, the public also suggested notifying persons under the third-party exclusions in advance and allowing individuals to self-check on his status before going to the casinos.

### **NCPG's Response: Draft Regulations and Family Exclusion Proceedings**

The NCPG acknowledges the key concerns of the public and key community stakeholders alike. Said Mr Tan Kian Hoon, Chairman of the NCPG Public Consultation Sub-committee: "We have certainly gained much insight and ideas from interested members of the public since we began our consultation process in June last year. The NCPG will start work immediately to install a simple yet rigorous system for the casino exclusions. However, what we would like to see is that self-help and family support always come first; and exclusions would be the last line of defence."

Moving forward, MCYS and the NCPG will work on the regulations for the administration of the casino exclusion measures and the proceedings for family exclusion cases, taking into account feedback from the stakeholder and public consultations.

#### ***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. It is a council comprising 15 members with expertise and experience in public communications, psychiatry and psychology, social work, counselling and rehabilitative services. The Council's main roles are to provide advice and feedback to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) on public education programmes to promote public awareness on problem gambling; to decide on funding applications for preventive and rehabilitative programmes; to assess and advise the Government on the effectiveness of treatment, counselling and rehabilitative programmes; and to decide on the applications for exclusion of persons from casinos. For more information, please see [www.ncpg.org.sg](http://www.ncpg.org.sg).*

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***Attachments:***

- Annex A: Summary and Response to Feedback Received
- Annex B: English-Chinese Glossary

**ANNEX A:**

**NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING  
PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE CASINO EXCLUSION MEASURES**

**Summary and Response to Feedback Received**

The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) held a public consultation exercise from 29 December 2006 to 31 January 2007 via the REACH website. The Council received a total of 12 submissions and letters from the public through the newspaper forum pages and via online channels. In February 2007, NCPG also conducted three focus group discussions involving 25 recovering problem gamblers and their family members to seek their feedback.

2. The feedback received and the NCPG's responses are summarised below.

**Overall Approach to Family Exclusion**

3. *Most of the feedback received reiterated that the focus of family exclusion should be on offering holistic help to problem gamblers and their families, rather than on the exclusion per se. Family exclusion should be exercised as a last resort when all other options (e.g. counselling, moral suasion to undertake self-exclusion) have been exhausted.*

4. *While family members of recovering problem gamblers welcomed family exclusion as it provided a means to prevent the problem gambler from gambling at the casino, some were hesitant to apply for it. They expressed concerns that lodging an application might cause further conflict within the family and lead to divorce or estrangement from family members.*

5. *The preferred approach was to persuade problem gamblers to apply for self-exclusion, rather than to go for a hearing which was often confrontational. It was felt that exclusion would be more effective if it were part of the counselling process and social workers as well as counsellors should be informed of the exclusion measures.*

6. The Council agrees that family exclusion should focus on providing holistic help to persons affected by gambling problems, and should not be an end in itself. NCPG notes the views expressed that family exclusion should be seen as a last resort, and will also work with centres providing counselling to problem gamblers as well as other social service agencies to increase awareness of the exclusion measures among their staff. NCPG will also look into incorporating basic awareness of exclusion measures as part of the regular training

programmes for the social service workers. NCPG will also engage or employ social workers who will be trained to provide help to applicants of self and family exclusions.

7. *Members of the public viewed the social worker in the exclusion process as vital and felt that the social worker must be experienced in dealing with both gambling and family conflict issues. The social worker should also be empowered to negotiate on issues such as repayment plans to help the problem gambler cope with their financial difficulties. The social worker should continue to render help and support to families during the hearing process and after the exclusion order is made, to ensure that the family situation is stable.*

8. NCPG agrees with the public on the importance of the social worker in the exclusion process and in following through each case, and will place strong emphasis on the selection and training of social workers.

9. *There were suggestions to set up a 24-hour helpline for persons to make informal enquiries about the exclusion measures or other help services available, before deciding whether to make a formal application. There are views from the public that self-exclusion measures should also be publicised widely to encourage people to apply.*

10. NCPG notes the suggestion to have an avenue to provide accessible information and will explore whether this should be a separate enquiry line or if this can be part of a 24-hour national helpline which can link callers to the various help services for problem gambling. NCPG will embark on publicity efforts once the exclusion measures have been put in place. Publicity will also focus on other avenues of help, in addition to exclusion.

### **Exclusion Process**

11. *In order to simplify the self-exclusion application process, there were suggestions to remove phone verification for Singpass applications and mail applications that were accompanied by a copy of the applicant's NRIC.*

12. The Council agrees with this feedback and will consider ways to further simplify the application process for self-exclusions.

13. *In order to minimize embarrassment and ensure the privacy of those excluded under Third Party Exclusion, suggestions were made to notify these persons in advance and to provide a search engine or phone enquiry system to allow the person to do a self-check on his status before going to the casinos.*

14. The Council agrees with this feedback and will set up such a system to allow persons to check if they are on the exclusion list.

### **Legal Aspects of the Exclusion Measures**

#### *Exclusion measures in other gambling venues*

15. Some families asked if they can exclude their members who are problem gamblers from other gambling venues, besides the casinos. It was noted that the Casino Control Act only covered exclusion orders for casinos.

16. NCPG has noted the suggestions for exclusion measures to be applied to other gambling venues, and has taken the initiative to start dialogues with existing gambling operators to encourage them to voluntarily adopt self-exclusion measures as part of a Responsible Gambling Code of Practice.

### **Other Issues**

17. Members of the public suggested that the panel of assessors should include persons who have worked with families of problem gamblers and dysfunctional families. They felt that professionals who have had little or no interaction with dysfunctional families should not be included on the Panel just to make up for the need for "diversity". They were also of the view that persons who have a vested interest in the success of the casino not be considered, as this could lead to conflicts of interest.

18. The Council agrees with the suggestions and will incorporate these in the criteria for the selection of persons to sit on the Panel of Assessors.

19. There was concern from the public that there would be insufficient social workers to handle the exclusion cases.

20. The Council will either employ or commission full-time trained social workers to handle the exclusions. It will adjust its manpower needs according to the number of applications received.

### **National Council on Problem Gambling**

21. Suggestions were made for NCPG to adopt a holistic approach in tackling gambling and to organize regular public education campaigns. It was also felt that NCPG needs to build up a strong reputation before the casinos open to show that it was effective in helping people and not merely a response to the upcoming casinos.



The Council fully agrees that in tackling problem gambling, it needs to adopt a holistic approach including preventive efforts as well as putting in place intervention services for persons and families affected by problem gambling. The Council notes the support for its ongoing public education efforts on problem gambling, and will continue to play a proactive role.

### **Conclusion**

22. NCPG has carefully assessed the concerns and suggestions expressed during the consultation process, which began with the consultation of key community stakeholders in June 2006. We will consider the various views expressed and would like to thank all those who have participated for their time, their thoughts and their effort.

**ANNEX B: ENGLISH-CHINESE GLOSSARY**

National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)	全国预防嗜赌理事会
Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS)	社会发展, 青年及体育部
Problem Gambling	嗜赌
Gamblers	赌徒
Pathological/ Problem Gambler (PPG)	病态赌徒
Gambling Addiction	赌瘾
Addiction	癖瘾症
Mr Tan Kian Hoon	陈建勋
Public Consultation Sub-committee	公众咨询委员会