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BERMUDA: Hotel Association backs introduction of casinos

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HAMILTON, Bermuda, CMC – The head of the Bermuda Hotel Association (BHA) says his group supports the introduction of casinos on the island.

Backing the plan, BHA chief executive officer John Harvey revealed that an electrical services company chose the Bahamas ahead of Bermuda for a group business meeting because Bermuda does not offer casino gambling.

Harvey estimated the decision has cost Bermuda US\$200,000 – a blow to its faltering tourism industry.

Government recently tabled a Green Paper on gaming in parliament after a report recommended that it be allowed on the island.

“On behalf of the Bermuda Hotel Association, I would like to thank and congratulate the government for producing and presenting to parliament the Green Paper on gaming,” Harvey said in a statement.

He noted that hotels in Bermuda have faced more than a decade of challenges and to add another amenity for hotel guest use and enjoyment that has proven to be an extra revenue earner in other jurisdictions will be welcomed by the properties that may be successful in having a gaming facility on their site.

“I was recently informed that TEGG, a company that was seriously considering one of Bermuda’s major hotels for its group meeting business, has selected the Atlantis in the Bahamas solely because that location offers gaming and Bermuda does not,” Harvey said.

“The lost business, conservatively estimated at US\$200,000, is a blow to Bermuda’s economy and hotel revenues.

“Most importantly, business that goes to another destination has a negative impact on the full employment and earnings of hotel employees.

“For Bermuda to be competitive in an international market, we must provide what today’s guests expect, enjoy and demand,” Harvey added

The Green Paper tabled by Premier and Tourism Minister Dr. Ewart Brown – a firm supporter of casinos - was based on a feasibility study conducted by The Innovation Group which looked at the potential impact of relaxing the island’s anti-gaming laws last year.

The New Orleans-based consultants’ US\$300,000 study determined that casinos might be an appropriate fit for Bermuda, but a lottery or an Internet gaming scheme would not achieve government’s primary goal of “stimulating increased tourism”.

“The evidence is clear from other jurisdictions that given the right legislative policies, tax structures and operating environment, casino gaming can be a catalyst for additional tourism development,” the study concluded.

Legislation regulating gaming will be tabled in the third term of the legislative session, with a bill tabled in time for debate in July.

Although Bermuda has no casinos, it has betting shops on which punters pay a 20 per cent

government tax per wager on overseas sports events including horse racing and football.

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