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Green Paper on 'Gaming' tabled in the House::

By Ruth O'Kelly-Lynch

Premier Ewart Brown delivered the Green Paper on 'Gaming for Bermuda' yesterday and politicians will debate whether gambling will become legal this July.

The report, compiled by the Innovation Group, recommended that a casino be permitted in Bermuda and Government use some of the revenue generated to deal with social ills associated with gambling.

It estimated that opening one casino in Hamilton would generate \$83 million in Government revenue a year.

And if casinos were allowed in hotels with 100 or more rooms as well, Government could be looking at reaping \$130 million in revenue annually.

If the number of casinos was expanded to St. George's and Dockyard as well as in Hamilton and large hotels, Government could earn \$145 million in revenue. In order to offset the social ills of gambling the report recommended \$565,000 be spent on counsellors and social workers as well as \$1.1 million on extra policing, hotlines and gambling treatment.

Yesterday Dr. Brown said he realised that people had strong opinions on gambling but hoped the public would read the report and look at the pros and cons.

He added: "The synergies between the introduction of gaming and the renewal of Bermuda's tourism are inevitable.

"Similarly, the safety net required to ensure that those affected by the indiscipline in gaming must be addressed. This Green Paper contemplates these and other matters.

"Bermuda is at a pivotal stage in its 400-year-old story. How we approach the task before us on this issue of gaming will determine our economic future and our positioning in the increasingly competitive tourism marketplace. I look forward to hearing the views of the Bermudian people on this Green Paper and the specific questions that emerge from this comprehensive research."

The report recommended:

- that some form of casino gaming be permitted;
- that a suitable site in the City of Hamilton is recommended for a casino;
- that a ten percent gross revenue tax be levied on a casino;
- the prescribed application of any revenue received;
- that an advanced social service safety net be adapted to address the negative effects of the introduction of gaming;
- that all gaming permitted in Bermuda be incorporated under one omnibus piece of legislation;

- that the casino be privately owned and operated;
- that there be no restriction on Bermudian participation;
- that casino opening hours would mirror existing nightclub liquor licensing laws.

The report also projected that a single casino in Hamilton could result in 1,278 people gaining direct or indirect employment. And if casinos were built in Hamilton, St. George's and Dockyard it could result in 1,725 people being employed. This could increase to 2,207 extra jobs if casinos were also allowed in large hotels.

When it came to a national lottery the report said it would "not likely" result in increased tourism and the majority of revenue generated from it, estimated to be \$51 million a year, would come from Bermudians playing it.

It also said the "potential negative effects... potentially outweigh the benefits when it came to operating Internet gambling sites in Bermuda".

While Internet gambling would generate revenue for the Government it would give the perception that illegal activities were happening in Bermuda, few jobs would be created and there would be little impact on the tourism industry, it concluded.

The report in full can be found at www.gov.bm and members of the public are encouraged to share their views by sending a letter to the Cabinet Office or E-mailing greenpaper@gov.bm.
