

Media release
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Casino will have a high social cost to the people of Samoa

The Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand says if plans to build a casino in Samoa go ahead, there will be a high social cost to local people.

The Samoan Government is to introduce the Casino and Gambling Bill 2010 that will make casino gaming legal in Samoa.

Graeme Ramsey, Problem Gambling Foundation CEO, says based on our experience in New Zealand, there will be a social cost to Samoa if the country gets a casino.

“All too often cities are persuaded into casinos on the basis that they are tourist attractions,” he says.

“It has been reported that the legislation in Samoa will allow only holders of foreign passports to enter casinos. There are more Samoans eligible for a New Zealand passport than Samoans with a Samoan passport.”

“We know from experience that it is locals that are the backbone of casinos and there will be pressure to allow locals into the casino in due course,” Graeme Ramsey says.

The Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand has recently launched Mapu Maia, a service dedicated to working with Pasifika communities in Auckland. This reflects the vulnerability of Pasifika communities in New Zealand to problem gambling.

Pesio Ah-Honi Siitia, Mapu Maia Manager, says in New Zealand, the prevalence of problem gambling is six times higher among Pacific than for European New Zealanders.

“When pokie machines were introduced in New Zealand, our Pacific people became the most at-risk ethnicity to develop problem or pathological gambling behaviours,” Pesio says.

The impact of gambling on Pacific communities includes relationship problems, poverty, crime and suicide.

After returning from recent visits to Samoa, Pesio says “I have seen how the negative effects of gambling have impacted families in Samoa. The bingo nights in the villages and the selling of bonus tickets are very common.”

“There may well be problem gambling issues in Samoa already and the introduction of a casino will bring a gambling ‘culture’ to the country and make these issues worse,” Pesio says.

Reverend Uesifili Unasa, ordained Minister of the Methodist Church of New Zealand says “The social harms of a casino will far outweigh any economical benefits that the Samoan government will hope to achieve”.

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