The 7th European Conference on Gambling Studies and Policy Issues, conducted by the European Association for the Study of Gambling and held in Nova Gorica, Slovenia, was attended by 265 delegates.

The majority of delegates were from European Union jurisdictions, however there were also attendees from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, South Africa, U.S.A., Macao and Israel.

Similar to the attendances at NAGS conferences, delegates came from academia, the gambling industry, problem gambling support service providers, regulators and policy-makers. It was interesting to note that (as is the case with NAGS conferences) gambling consumers were not represented.

The theme of the conference “Putting all the pieces together” aptly described the breadth of the presentation subject matter.

Although the range of the 16 plenary and 106 concurrent presentations was very broad, the general thematic streams were:

Gambling/problem gambling, the law and crime;
Current economic and policy trends pertaining to gambling;
Gambling regulatory challenges;
Industry initiatives around responsible gambling and customer care;
Young people and gambling;
Gambling and technology; and
Problem gambling research.

Official Opening

The conference was officially opened by Andrej Vizjak, the Slovenian Minister of Economy, who outlined the importance of the gambling industry in the economy of Slovenia. The country has 13 casinos and the tourism trade that they generate accounts for 7% of Slovenia’s GDP. In 2007, expenditure on gambling at Slovenian casinos exceeded 196M euro.

The economic value of the boutique-style casinos in EU jurisdictions was reinforced in many presentations.

Plenary Session – Setting the Scene

Bertil Vagnhammer (European Commission DG Internal Market and Services, Belgium)

Bertil outlined the challenges faced by the European Union with cross-boarder trading of gambling products and the limited capacity for jurisdictional regulation. This is also impacting on jurisdictions collection of
taxation revenue and the ability to fund and provide appropriate problem gambling measures and services. Moving forward, it will be important for jurisdictions to develop a “harmonised” regulatory environment particularly in the areas of harm minimisation, taxation and money laundering.

Bill Eadington

Eadington compared the development of gambling environments of the United States and the European Economic Union (EU). There are a number of differences between the markets, and yet some similarities in their performance in the current economic environment. In the US 60% of gambling revenues come from Casinos (including tribal casinos and approximately 25% from lotteries and VLT’s. Conversely, only 16% of gaming revenues in Europe are generated from casinos, with lotteries accounting for 44% of total revenues. The European-style casino tends to be more boutique and many gambling opportunities exist outside the casino environment. Even the newer, larger European casinos would be regarded as insignificant compared with casinos in Las Vegas or Atlantic City.

Casino revenue has been significantly negatively affected in the US as consumers are hit by high fuel prices, increased airfares and the introduction of smoking bans in some US states.

Eadington concluded that much work needs to be done across the EU to develop “harmonised” regulatory frameworks for the establishment of integrated resort-style casinos in Europe.

Jeff Derevensky

Jeff provided an overview of the attraction of young people to gambling and other risk-taking activities and provided a number of examples where advertising of gambling products was either directly or indirectly targeted towards young people.

Jeff also showed a number of instances from movies and television shows where gambling has been glamorised.

Studies undertaken by McGill’s International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-risk Behaviours have shown that young people with the propensity to develop gambling problems are more likely to respond positively to the attractive advertising by increasing their participation. The recent phenomenon of poker tournaments has added a more social element to gambling and is being increasingly taken up by young gamblers.

Alun Jackson

Jackson outlined the conduct and interim results of a longitudinal gambling risk and protective factors study that was conducted in Australia. The
study also examined the existence of co-morbidities with problem gambling, including substance abuse and mental illness.

Not surprisingly, there was a strong correlation between hazardous alcohol use, severe mental disorder or depression and problem gambling.

The study also looked at the role of social capital in the potential prevention of problem gambling. Not surprisingly, no-risk or low-risk gambling groups felt that they had strong social supports, whilst high-risk and problem gambling groups indicated that they had few social supports.

Problem gamblers were also half as likely to feel that they were valued by society. It is possible, therefore that community development and health-style interventions could also be an effective intervention for high-risk or problem gamblers.

**Plenary Session – Crime and Passion and the Law**

Alan Littler, Tilburg University, The Netherlands
Martin Sychold, Swiss Institute for Comparative Law, Switzerland
Johan van Kastel, Holland Casino, The Netherlands
Valerie Peano, Studio, di Consulenza Societaria e Tributaria, Italy

This plenary session considered some of the legal aspects pertaining to gambling, in particular, gambling and crime and gambling regulation between and within jurisdictions.

Some learnings from this session were:

Conflicts in gambling regulation between member States in the EU have led to decisions by the European Court of Justice favouring the concept of cross-jurisdictional gambling operators. This will have increasing implications for discreet jurisdictions attempting to prohibit the operation of foreign (especially internet) gambling providers;
Many jurisdictions are now looking at “exporting” gambling product to increase State revenue;
The different speeds with which jurisdictions in the EU are attempting to keep pace with gambling technology is indicative of many jurisdictions worldwide. Hence, “virtual gambling” platforms are operating in a less-regulated environment than was previously the case for gambling products;
A nation-wide linked system (as in The Netherlands) allows monitoring gambling visitation across venues, which allows tracking of player participation;
Player-tracking also identifies indicators of potential money-laundering activity (including large deposits, large bank transfers, trading of chips – especially for foreign currency, changing small denominations to large);
It will become increasingly necessary for jurisdictions to develop an ability to prohibit cross-border providers that do not comply with responsible gambling/consumer protection requirements and provide revenue to the jurisdiction in which the customer resides.
Concurrent Sessions

Some of the learnings from the concurrent sessions attended are grouped below under the broad themes previously mentioned.

Industry Initiatives Around Responsible Gambling and Customer Care

Studies into gambling and responsible product development in the gambling industry could benefit from findings in game (non-gambling) studies. These include work on the psychology of entertainment, game play and emotions, and the psychology of goals in games. [Jarvinen, Finland]

Recent studies have found that self-exclusion is used by gamblers as both a proactive and reactive tool. Pathological and problem gamblers accessed self-exclusion to stop uncontrollable gambling behaviour. Social gamblers tend to self-exclude for shorter periods of time as a control mechanism (i.e. to slow down their access to gambling). Further, pathological gamblers feel it important to have other supports (eg counselling) than do less-problematic gamblers. Overall, however, participants in self-exclusion programs feel that self-exclusion is an important tool to control their gambling behaviour. [Meyer, Germany]

EUROMAT is a peak body for the European gaming and amusement industry (operators, manufacturers and distributors) in 16 jurisdictions, to promote responsible gambling and customer care practices. EUROMAT has developed a comprehensive responsible gambling Code of Practice, provides training for venue staff on customer care, and advises on the operation of self-exclusion programs. [Kok, Belgium]

Presentations my EGM manufacturers provided an overview of on-screen information that can be included in game software, including pop-up messages, mandatory cash-outs after a set time, player limit-setting and the use of smart cards to track time and money spent over time. The take-out from these presentations was that all these RG features are capable to incorporate in gaming machines providing that the purchaser of the machines wants them.

The Svenska Spel internet gambling website [based in Sweden] has a number of responsible gambling features, including time and spend limit setting, provision for a player to self-exclude and robust age verification procedures. A recent analysis surveyed the gambling activity of 3,000 internet poker players who gambled exclusively on the Svenska Spel site compared with those who gambled on other internet gambling sites. The prevalence of problem gambling of Svenska Spel-only customers was 3% compared with 11% for those who accessed other international sites. [Jonsson, Sweden]
**Gambling/Problem Gambling, the Law and Crime**

Macao is rapidly overtaking Las Vegas as the “gambling Mecca”, especially for Asian gamblers. Many of those who are making Macao a success are high rollers from mainland China. Due to the secretive personas of many high rollers a study was conducted using media reports to identify 122 high rollers, including their occupations, career length of gambling activity and maximum session loss. It was found that the average career length was 4 years and the maximum session loss depended on their access to cash, either their own or that of others. 33% had engaged in criminal activity to fund their gambling. (Note, this sample may be biased due to the data collection source, which would necessarily report on illegal activity that was uncovered). [Zeng, Macao]

**Problem Gambling Research**

The Responsibility in Gambling Trust (RGIT) was established in the UK to develop and implement a 5-year collaborative research agenda with the UK Research Council. The agenda is underpinned by a preventative public health framework to address the risk and protective factors associated with problem gambling, the impact of gambling on communities and industry/regulator roles and responsibilities. [Hancock, UK]

A group of expert researchers was surveyed regarding the effectiveness of a centralised gambling model (gambling-specific venues) as a harm minimisation strategy for problem gambling rather than allowing gambling opportunities in retail outlets. The study concluded that a centralised gambling model was far more likely to have policies and procedures in place, trained staff and linkages with problem gambling support services than non-centralised retail outlets. This model was recommended for consideration by jurisdictions planning expansion of gambling opportunities. [Griffiths, UK]

An interview study of 25 problem gamblers sought their opinions on whether gambling advertising contributed to their problematic gambling behaviour. The study concluded that problem gamblers believe that exposure to gambling advertising is a factor in the development of problems; however, it is not a primary cause. There was also a significant level of belief amongst interviewees that gambling advertising might be harmful to “other people” rather than to themselves. [Binde, Sweden]

Whilst there has been much study on problems caused by gambling and on harm-prevention measures, there was very little research into the benefits to the individual of engaging in recreational gambling. This poses challenges for researchers to look at the broader question of why gambling is as popular as it is and not problematic for the vast majority of people. I.e. – can gambling be “good” for you? [Collins, UK]

A survey by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission of people who had self-excluded from venues in the province found that:

- It would be useful to have closer linkages with problem gambling support services;
There are disadvantages for many potential self-excludees in having a
48 hour “cooling off” period;
There needs to be some form of effective negative consequence for
people who breach self-exclusion; and
Innovative measures need to be developed to more effectively detect
breaches of self-exclusion. [Verlik, Canada]

Gambling Regulatory Challenges

European jurisdictions face increasing fiscal pressures to provide additional
gambling opportunities in order to prevent revenue from going offshore.
There are a number of jurisdictional models where legal casino operations are
currently located, including the limited private operator model (Australia,
Singapore), the state-owned monopoly model (Sweden, Finland, Holland,
Canada) and the multi-operator competitor model (Las Vegas, Macao).
These models pose significant organisational challenges for the EU moving
forward. [Eadington, USA]

Two approaches to gambling regulation, autonomy and harm minimization
versus consumer protection, whilst having methods and purposes that
overlap, differ substantially. Harm minimisation (and responsible gambling)
programs are largely concerned with gamblers who have problems controlling
their gambling and whose choice-making abilities are already impaired.
Consumer protection regimes seek to maximise the effectiveness of
consumers’ informed choices, and increase the autonomy of the consumer.
Effective gambling regulation needs elements of both. [Eggert, USA]

The UK Gambling Act has been in place for nearly one year. A number of
factors have negatively impacted on land-based (non-internet) gambling.
Smoking bans in casinos and bingo centres has reduced trade and, at the
same time, taxation on gambling products has increased. A regional casino
proposal has been abandoned and development of 16 small sites across the
UK has been delayed. Although the Act provides for duty of care by gambling
operators, a recent court decision found in favour of a bookmaker who was
sued by a problem gambler.
There has been a significant increase in the number of off-shore internet
gambling sites available to UK gamblers, mainly due to dramatically reduced
taxation in some other jurisdictions. There has also been an increase in the
number of fixed-odds betting opportunities and betting exchanges. [Wilson,
UK]

Gambling and Technology

There were a number of presentations proposing solutions to allow gamblers
.especially EGM gamblers) to set pre-commitment limits, track their time and
money expenditure, and barring them from play.
Xidos outlined a magnetic strip card-based player tracking and limit-setting system that could be applied to many forms of gambling (not just EGMs). [Xidos, Canada]

**Meeting with EASG Board**

During the Conference I met with members of the EASG Board and proposed the reciprocal arrangement whereby financial members of EASG would become associate members of NAGS at no additional cost, and financial members of NAGS would become associate members of EASG at no cost. We also discussed the new criteria for the NAGS Conference Student Presentation Award. The EASG Board was very receptive to the concept of reciprocal membership and reciprocal free student conference registration for the Student Award recipient.

At the time of writing this report a draft Memorandum of Understanding is being drafted for consideration by both the EASG Board and the NAGS Committee in September 2008.

**Networking**

Very few of the attendees at the EASG conference had attended any of the NAGS conferences, and many expressed an interest in submitting an abstract for the 2008 NAGS Conference. The 100 copies of the NAGS Journal taken by me to the conference were taken by delegates and 150 conference call for abstract flyers were also taken.

The presentation about NAGS was very positively received and generated the development of new linkages throughout the course of the conference.