

## **LCQ20: Combating illegal gambling activities**

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Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 30):

### *Questions:*

Regarding monitoring and combating gambling activities and assisting pathological gamblers, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) as it has been over two years since the regulation of soccer betting, whether there are data indicating the prevailing situation of gambling and illegal soccer betting in Hong Kong, including the participation of adolescents under the age of 18 in soccer betting activities; whether the situation is worse or better than that two years ago; if the situation is worse, of the measures to tackle it and the enforcement actions taken by the authorities;
- (b) of the total number of requests for assistance so far received by the counselling and treatment centres set up for assisting pathological gamblers and, among them, the number of cases which required face-to-face counselling and long-term follow-up; and whether such centres have analysed the causes of pathological gambling and the behaviour of pathological gamblers;
- (c) of the modes of operation of local illegal soccer betting activities and how they attract gamblers; and
- (d) of the measures to be taken by the authorities to combat illegal soccer betting activities during the World Cup Soccer Championships next year?

### *Reply:*

Madam President,

My reply to the questions is as follows:

- (a) The amounts of cash and betting slips seized from Police enforcement actions against illegal football gambling during the period of January 2003 to September 2005 are as follows:

Amount of cash and betting slips seized

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January to July 2003	\$34,435,770
2003 (full year)	\$36,565,330
2004 (full year)	\$21,111,180
2005 (January to September)	\$23,076,876

The seizure figures on illegal football betting in 2004 and 2005 are considerably lower than those during the period immediately before authorisation (January to July 2003). This to a certain extent reflects that authorisation of football betting had diverted some of the demand for football gambling from illegal channels to the authorised outlet.

After the authorisation of football betting, the Police continued to take vigorous enforcement actions against illegal football gambling activities. The Police enhanced preventive and enforcement activities both in the run-up to, and during major international soccer tournaments, including Euro 2004. These actions will continue with emphasis on intelligence gathering and enforcement actions. The Police has also maintained regular liaison with the Mainland and Macau officials for the purpose of combating cross-border illegal bookmaking activities.

We commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct a study on Hong Kong people's participation in gambling activities. This study seeks to track the results of the first benchmarking study conducted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2001. It includes a questionnaire survey on the pattern of gambling participation among adults and adolescents, and also a qualitative research into cases of problem and pathological gambling. The findings of the study are expected to be released by the end of 2005. We will take account of the findings in devising and implementing measures to tackle gambling-related problems in Hong Kong.

(b) From October 2003 to September 2005, the two pilot counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers financed by the Ping Wo Fund received a total of 8,382 requests for assistance, mainly through their telephone help-line service. 1,976 cases required face-to-face counselling and related follow-up actions.

According to the clinical experience of the two centres, the major factors contributing to problem and pathological gambling behaviour are:

- lack of meaning and direction in life
- seeking excitement
- greed for money
- coping with stress
- peer or social influence
- interpersonal or family relationship problem
- chasing gambling losses
- believing in his/her own gambling skills

(c) According to information from the Police and the Hong Kong Jockey Club, illegal bookmaking syndicates in Hong Kong have been using mobile phones as the major channel to receive bets. They offer a wide variety of gambling activities with discounts and credit to attract bettors. They often change their bases of operation, and sometimes engage in cross-border operations to avoid being detected by the police.

(d) The Police will maintain its vigilance and enhance its enforcement actions against illegal football betting during the period of World Cup 2006. Intelligence-led operations will be mounted against syndicated football bookmaking activities during important matches.

The Police will enhance its liaison with law enforcement agents in the Mainland, Macau and other overseas countries to combat bookmakers who accept bets originated from other places.

The Police has also established a hotline to facilitate the public to report illegal football gambling activities.

Ends/Wednesday, November 30,2005