



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
25 April 2004

More Questions Than Answers at 2004 AGM

Guest speakers at The Bingo Association's 2004 Annual General Meeting failed to provide delegates with all the answers, or in-sights, to key deregulation issues the industry had hoped for.

Sir Peter Fry, Chairman of the Association said:

"The Association is happy to provide Government and the DCMS with a platform, as it enables members to hear of thoughts and developments first hand and to raise issues. However, it is apparent from this year's meeting that it is not only delegates who feel that more questions need to be answered."

"John Greenway and Susanna Fitzgerald both raised questions in their presentations about local authorities' role in the granting of licenses and the scope for inconsistency and confusion. Susanna also raised concern about the potential monster Government is creating in the Gambling Commission. Under current proposals, the new 'super' regulator will be able to completely change the face of gambling in the UK without having to return to Parliament. These are not small matters."

"However, an area of greater concern is the denial or dismissal of reports on problem gambling post de-regulation. Lord McIntosh criticised a number of such studies, stating that the DCMS would seek out its own research. The impact of problem gambling cannot be ignored and should not be 'sexed-up'. The cost of problem gambling and other addictions can never be fully measured, as all those involved with the addict will be affected. The existing draft Bill refers to the 'young and vulnerable' who must be protected, and also talks in terms of the 'informed consumer'. The questions we are left with are where does the line fall that

separates informed consumer from the vulnerable, how robust that line is and how is it to be enforced?"

"There are currently still many areas of the Bill that lack enough detail and to move forward with out proper consultation and consideration is likely to cause continuing concern."

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

For further information contact:

The Bingo Association
Steven Baldwin
01582 860915
07939 241164
steven@bingo-association.co.uk

About The Bingo Association:

The Bingo Association is the trade body for the licensed bingo industry in Great Britain, representing the proprietors of bingo clubs licensed under the Gaming Act 1968. The purpose of The Bingo Association is to promote and develop the interests of the licensed bingo industry and to represent members' interests in contacts with third parties, in particular with various government departments, other trade associations and the media.

There are 110 proprietors in membership and between them they operate 538 bingo clubs. Membership profile ranges from the very large operators with well over 100 clubs, to many single unit businesses.

www.bingo-association.co.uk

pr-0023-ba

Lord McIntosh of Haringey was well received by delegates, despite an attack on operators who were exploiting existing legislation (section 21), rather than following the spirit of the law. Such is his concern over this issue that an agreed code of conduct may be asked for prior to deregulation. McIntosh was particularly concerned about the rapidity of play and the impact on problem gamblers. Despite his concerns for problem gamblers he criticised the findings of many recent studies, particularly those that estimated approximately one million problem gamblers by the end of the decade and said that the DCMS is looking for alternative research.

John Greenway MP, chair of the recent Pre-legislative Scrutiny Committee for the Gambling Bill, addressed delegates immediately following Lord McIntosh. In his speech he suggested that local authorities may not be up to the task of dealing with the licensing of gambling premises, at least in the short term, and that the task could remain with the Magistrates Court until they are ready. He also said that while there appeared to be little public demand for the Gambling Bill, the vast unregulated online gambling sector was reason enough to update the laws and bring some restrictions to the online betting operators.

Susannah Fitzgerald QC asked whether or not the government could be creating a monster with all the powers that it planned to give to the Gambling Commission. Under current proposals, the new 'super' regulator will be able to completely change the face of gambling in the UK without having to return to parliament. A further concern is the guidance that local authorities will receive from the Commission in order to make decisions on applications for premises licences. As it is guidance authorities need only show they have regarded the guidance and are under no compunction to follow it.