

## Goa's chief minister rules out establishing gaming regulator



*Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar makes remarks during a joint press conference with Secretary of Defense Ash Carter in New Delhi, India, April 12, 2016. Carter is visiting India to solidify the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. (Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Adrian Cadiz) (Released)*

While plans to establish a regulator for Goa's casino industry were first announced six years ago, the state's chief minister Manohar Parrikar stated that there were already "enough provisions to impose restrictions" on the gaming industry this July.

More than a year after Goa's Legislative Assembly announced plans to shift the state's six offshore casinos to "a land-based designated entertainment zone" the authorities have still to make any forward progress on the issue.

"As things stand, everyone is in the dark," explained Ranjana Adhikari, a gaming lawyer with **Nishith Desai Associates**, speaking to Casino Review last month. "The only fact we know for sure is that the government's intention is to shift to offshore casino to the new zone. Yet nobody really knows how this will happen and the entire situation is a state of flux right now."

Meanwhile, plans for a gaming regulator in the state were first announced six years ago, but successive governments have failed to make headway on the issue.

Last year Goa's chief minister Manohar Parrikar confirmed that the government was planning to amend the Goa Public Gambling Act 1976, introducing a provision to establish a gaming regulator to oversee the sector.

However, in an about-face on his previous position, at the start of July, Parrikar stated that it was unnecessary to amend the current legislation.

“There is no need for amending the Gambling Act. In the existing Act itself, there are enough provisions to impose restrictions on functioning of the casinos,” Parrikar stated on 4 July.

Despite this, a recent academic study, published in the International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Systems, underlined the importance of Goa’s casino industry for the state’s economy and supported the creation of an independent regulatory body, along the lines of the Nevada Gaming Commission.

“Casinos have been promoted in tourism areas due to their assumed capability of being the largest employers and their potential to attract a huge number of tourists who otherwise might not have considered visiting the said destination,” wrote Dr. Afonso Botelho, associate professor of Sociology at the Rosary College of Commerce and Arts in South Goa.

“[However] the establishment of a casino controlling regulatory authority or gaming commissioner is absolutely necessary.”

In addition to the ongoing uncertainty over their future location and governmental ambivalence towards establishing a regulator, Goa’s casino operators have faced a sharp hike in annual fees this year, along with a tax evasion probe by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence.

“We’re not in a position to see whether or not [any new] policy’s going to be introduced, either as a bill or an ordinance, until there is some movement by the government, such as the publication of an official policy document,” Adhikari added.