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# 'Aye' to private saloon licensing

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It's the best way to keep them free of vice, say owners

PRIVATE billiard saloon operators welcome the government's move to license their establishments as they believe this will be the best way of keeping the places free of vice activities.

A spokesman for the Hongkong and Kowloon Billiard Merchants' General Association, Mr Francis Yim, said the association has been very con-

cerned about the recent controversy over whether private billiard saloons — like the public saloons — should be brought under control.

He said as far back as three months ago, the association proposed to the Attorney-General that private saloons should also be licensed.

The association's 100-odd members operate both public and private billiard halls, he said.

Although members have not reached a unanimous consensus, Mr Yim said, the majority feel the government should have different licenses for public and private billiard parlours.

"Billiards is a healthy sport. In the long run, we think that licensing will be good, not only for improving the image of billiard halls but also for the development of the game as a sport. If bad elements were to gather in these halls, it would hurt our business.

"If private billiard parlours are licensed, police can conduct checks and ensure nothing bad is happening.

"But we want to have different licensing for private halls as we insist they control admittance. While anyone can enter a public billiard centre, private centres exert some kind of restriction."

The association proposed that private clubs should not allow 'instant' memberships and applicants should go through some kind of screening before being admitted. Clubs should have the right to revoke memberships.

It also suggested to the Attorney-General that private club members should be at least 17 years old.

Mr Yim said the association has not received any reply to its nine-page proposal to the Attorney-General.

He was speaking to reporters after attending a forum on "What regulations should be made to control billiard halls?"

At the forum, he said people get the wrong impression that all criminal activities that occurred in billiard halls took place in the unlicensed private clubs.

He said police figures showed that last year, there were only 230 criminal cases in billiard halls, without a breakdown on whether they occurred in private or public saloons.

Moreover, said Mr Yim, most of the private billiard clubs employ security guards to enforce order and all fighting or other law-breaking activities are reported to the police.

He said he believes private clubs actually impose stricter discipline than public halls.

Other speakers at the forum also felt that private billiard saloons should be licensed.

A Legislative Council member, Mr Yeung Po-kwan, added that the hours of operation for private clubs should be restricted.

Mr Yeung also suggested that those under 16 or in school uniforms should not be allowed to enter any billiard hall.

A floor speaker said it is unfair to youngsters since it has been established that the sport itself is a healthy activity. He does not see why young people should be barred from the sport.

There are presently 48 public billiard centres and 230 private billiard clubs.