

S.C.M.P.

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Allowing women to cue

Stepping up control on billiard halls may encourage more women to join the game, a Central and Western District Board meeting heard yesterday.

Majority support was given by the board's environmental improvement committee for licensing private billiard clubs.

Ten out of 11 members who spoke backed licensing which would allow police entry into halls to deter undesirable elements.

They also suggested confining billiard halls to commercial buildings or fixing business hours to avoid nuisance to residents living in the same blocks.

Currently only public billiard halls have to be licensed while private clubs offering billiards need only be registered as businesses and can stay open 24 hours a day.

But members said many billiard halls were open to the public under the guise of private clubs and added that both types of halls should be licensed for fairness and security reasons.

They added that cleaning up the business would help promote the game as a healthy pastime.

Mrs Lee Tang Yee-lin said many women interested in billiards were discouraged by the halls' image as a breeding ground for crime.

She suggested requiring hall owners to tape-record operations inside the halls which could be produced for police sample inspections.

Mr Hung Wing-tat also said the licensing would be meaningless without police patrols. He added that all billiard halls should be subject to licensing irrespective of the

number of tables they had.

The Assistant Director of the Urban Services Department, Dr P. Hase, explained that the five-table division line was proposed because a rough survey had shown that genuine private saloons seldom had more than five tables.

The only dissent came from Mr Leung Ying-yeung who objected to extending licensing to private billiard clubs on security grounds.

He said the potential danger of triad elements gathering also existed in many other public places, such as restaurants.

Dr Hase told the meeting there was now little evidence of triad elements in private billiard clubs but there was high potential for that danger because police were denied entry to such clubs.