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Star next in line

The Australian, Australia



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Just when it seemed as if Sydney's Star casino might get off scot-free, the state casino regulator has lobbed its latest inquiry into the gaming group and, despite all attempts to pass it off as

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just a "regular review", its contents threaten to see it follow the same fate as its rival Crown Resorts across the harbour.

ILGA chair **Phil Crawford** on Tuesday lobbed the missile, enlisting barrister **Adam Bell** to lead the review, the same man who proved his interrogation skills as **Patricia Bergin's** counsel assisting, tasked with grilling Crown's major shareholder **James Packer** on matters of Packer's mental health, among other points.

Terms of reference for the probe include scope to investigate Star's involvement with junket operators, in particular the notorious Suncity junket, better known for its close associate **Alvin Chau** and his alleged links to organised crime.

Recall Star's chief casino operator **Greg Hawkins' brief** stint before the Bergin inquiry last August, when he revealed the second-largest casino

operator continued to have links to Chau.

ILGA's latest drop notes that such associations with junket operators continued even months after the relationship was revealed, the regulator specifying it had received

information in May this year indicating the casino operator had "dealings with junket operators until October 2020 (at least)".

"The Star's dealings with Suncity and other junket operators in the circumstances identified above raise concerns for the authority as to The Star's ongoing willingness and capability to comply with its obligations under the Act," it said.

On top of that, there's scope to investigate Star's management of its bank accounts and any overseas or VIP deposits, as well as its methods of withdrawing credits from its own bank accounts.

Sound familiar?

All this just weeks after NSW Opposition Whip **Mark Buttigieg** made his similar concerns known to a state budget estimates hearing, with detailed questions on notice filed covering remarkably similar territory.

Alongside questions of the government's motives in issuing a further 1000 poker machine licences to Star, the state MP is seeking the government's answer to whether any actions

have been taken against the Star following the admission from Hawkins that the company had continued its association with Suncity long after the reports of their alleged links to the triads were first aired.

"What action, if any, have you undertaken with respect to assessing whether The Star remains suitable to hold a casino licence in NSW?" Buttigieg asked on August 25.

With responses due next

week, it seems the government has already gone a way in providing an early answer.



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The Star is the next casino under the microscope