



Crown employees charged in China

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Crown employees face long prison terms over Macau money laundering

PAUL TOOHEY, News Corp Australia Network

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A Macau-based gambling expert has warned that senior Crown employees charged in China with gambling offences could still face potentially long prison terms for money laundering.

Crown Resorts released a short statement to the Australian Securities Exchange that revealed little except that the cases had now progressed to the charge stage.

It told the ASX that “all its detained employees in China as well as those employees released on bail have now been charged with offences related to the promotion of gambling and their cases have been referred to the Baoshan District Court”.

This was interpreted by some as evidence that China had decided to go soft on 14 detained and three bailed Crown employees, including three Australians, who were arrested in co-ordinated raids in October.



Crown mogul James Packer. Picture: Bloomberg

The suggestion is that they have been hit with lower-level charges over allegations they tried to lure gamblers to Crown Resorts casinos in Melbourne and Perth.

However, Ben Lee, who consults to casinos on Asian gaming strategies, said there was heavy conjecture in Macau that there were further charges to come.

“There’s speculation that one if not more will be charged with money laundering because [that person] was found with tens of millions of RMB in [a] Chinese bank account,” Mr Lee said.

That person is not Jason O’Connor, the Melbourne-based Crown executive man who was arrested along with the others.

“I would not say they are going soft on Crown,” said Mr Lee.



Ben Lee, who consults to casinos on Asian gaming strategies, said there was heavy conjecture in Macau that there were further charges to come. Picture Andrew Tauber

“However, some of the junior staff would not have handled any money. Given their functions, they would merely facilitated the Chinese players going to Australia and as such, may have helped promote gambling.

“There’s still a chance that higher level charges will come in on the money laundering issue. It may not be the end of the story.”

A group of South Koreans were charged with gambling offences in 2015 for trying to entice Chinese high rollers to Seoul. They were released after spending around 15 months in prison for low-level offences.

China is trying to stop the flight of cash overseas and gave plenty of warning that it would not tolerate foreign casinos offering VIP deals, usually involving free flights on private jets, accommodation, and lines of credit to those wealthy individuals having trouble moving their money out of China.

News Corp has previously reported on industry insiders saying they believed that Mr O’Connor was in China on behalf of Crown’s credit committee, negotiating over a debt with a high-roller who had visited Melbourne and taken an unsecured cash advance to gamble.

Crown has not commented on this claim, nor given any insight into what efforts it is making on behalf of its employees.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop is yet to make any comment.