

SE News
 HD **Sale** may be close for casino
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A NEW player could emerge as the buyer of Echo Entertainment's Jupiters Townsville Hotel and Casino.

An announcement is expected within days, but Echo and the Lasseters group, which has been negotiating to buy the hotel, yesterday both declined to comment.

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New Zealand's SkyCity which operates casinos at Darwin and Adelaide and **Chinese** investors including **Hong Kong** tycoon Tony Fung are being named as potential buyers.

Civic leaders hosted **Chinese** investors from Foshan last weekend who were said to have shown interest in the port, which is proposed to be privatised, and properties including the casino.

The Bulletin reported last October that Singapore-based Lasseters International Holdings, which operates a casino hotel at Alice Springs, had been looking at the property with negotiations becoming more serious since mid-2013.

Sources yesterday suggested Echo were looking to give Lasseters until this week to finalise its position at which point it would terminate exclusive rights to **sale** negotiations.

Echo chief executive John Redmond told the **company**'s annual meeting last November it was considering selling the Townsville property because it needed cash to fund other Queensland developments. He said there was limited potential to develop the Townsville assets.

"While the recent performance of the Jupiters Townsville has been positive, the size and breadth of the appeal of the Townsville market means a more limited opportunity for the creation of a large-scale integrated resort," Mr Redmond said.

Echo has announced plans to redevelop its Jupiters Hotel and Casino on the **Gold** Coast and build a new casino in Brisbane to replace its existing Treasury Casino, expected to cost \$1.5 **billion**. A **sale** price for the Townsville property is expected to be between \$65 **million** and \$75 **million**.

Dr Sudhir Kale, of GamePlan Consultants and Bond University's business faculty, said Townsville was constrained by its market potential. Townsville did not have substantial food and beverage earnings, nor VIP gaming, plus it was known as attracting "the grind market" where people bet in smaller sums, he said.

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