

Residents of Penghu reject casino resort plan

Written by Taipei Times

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More than 17,000 Penghu residents voted against a plan to allow casino resorts in a referendum yesterday, defeating supporters of the casino plan by about 4,000.

Cheering, clapping and shouting “Penghu is hopeful,” members of the Penghu Alliance Against Casinos celebrated as the Penghu County Election Commission released the official results of the referendum.

With a total of more than 70,000 eligible voters, only about 42 percent, or a little more than 29,000 people, turned out to vote. Of them, 17,359 voted against the casino plan, while 13,397 voted for it.

The binding “gambling referendum” — the first of its kind in the country — was held in accordance with amendments to the Offshore Islands Development Act (《離島發展法》), which passed the legislature in January.

Under the amendment, if the majority of voters had said “yes” in the referendum, Penghu would get the green light to authorize gaming groups to build casinos there.

Unlike the Referendum Act (《 referendum 法》), which requires at least 50 percent of eligible voters to cast ballots for the referendum to be valid, the Penghu referendum was valid regardless of voter turnout.

Following the passage of amendments to the Offshore Islands Development Act that allows the nation’s outlying islands to build casino resorts, many local business leaders and politicians, such as Non-Partisan Solidarity Union Legislator Lin Ping-kun (林平坤), actively promoted the casino plan, saying that resorts could bring large numbers of visitors to Penghu and bring prosperity.

Anti-casino activists had expressed concern that casinos would bring criminal activity and cause environmental damage. They also said that only a handful of people — casino operators and politicians — would benefit from them.

The two sides have been intensively campaigning to mobilize support during the past months.

“The people made a wise decision,” said Yen Chiang-lung (顏昌龍), a native of Penghu and the executive director of the Penghu Alliance Against Casinos.

“Now that the people have rejected the plan, the county government should reconsider its development strategy for Penghu and look into some of the proposals we’ve made,” he said.

Green Party Taiwan Secretary-General Pan Han-shen (潘翰聲) welcomed the outcome.

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“I’m sure the Japanese, who are having a similar debate about casino resorts, will take a serious look at the Penghu case,” he said.

Penghu County Commissioner Wang Chien-fa (王健法), who has spoken in favor of casinos, said he respected the residents’ decision.

“I hope everyone in Penghu can stand united from now on for a better future for Penghu,” he said.

Lin declined to comment and left immediately after the results were announced.

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