

Betting agencies want online poker curbed

GAMING: A leading online betting operator has called for any legislation on exotic gambling options to include a tightening of controls on online poker.

Australia's big four online gaming sites — Sportsbet, Betfair, Centrebet and Sportingbet — yesterday backed proposed new measures to stamp out match-fixing in sport.

However, Betfair chief executive Andrew Thwaits said online poker sites, which he says cost the industry hundreds of millions of dollars annually, should also be part of new legislation.

"While it is pleasing to see both the federal and state governments taking the integrity of betting in sports seriously and on a united front, the present legislation is clearly not working when it comes to online poker," Thwaits said.

"Online sports betting in this country turns over \$300 million a year, is highly regulated and we pay our taxes, while operators of online poker sites are not, many of which are controlled and run offshore.

"That's the real challenge facing not just the federal and state governments of this country, but governments across the globe.

"It is estimated that the turnover in this and other forms of illegal betting is \$125 billion worldwide. That's why as an industry we welcome any tightening of the present legislation in this country of the Victorian Integrated Gambling Act.

"The sooner the rest of the states and territories fall into line the better it will be for everyone."

Thwaits' call comes as ministers for sport from the federal, state and territory governments prepare to meet on the Gold Coast today to address issues of preserving the integrity of sporting events.

Sportingbet Australia chief

executive, Michael Sullivan, called yesterday on professional sports under the Coalition of Major Professional and Participation Sports umbrella to employ full-time supervisors to scrutinise betting trends. The AFL employs an integrity officer.

The coalition represents the AFL, ARU, NRL, Cricket Australia, FFA, Netball and Tennis.

"The NRL could take a leaf out of the AFL's book on this issue. They seem to be dragging the chain a little," Sullivan told *The Australian*.

"We've seen on the issue arising from the North Queensland investigation that the checks and balances we as an industry already have in place actually do work.

"As for the NRL asking for an industry-wide ban on exotic bets, that's fine, but our figures show that the average bet on the first and last try scorer is just \$9.

"That wouldn't buy you a schooner of beer in some pubs in Fremantle.

"Betting on cricket matches in this country isn't a problem. The trouble starts with the sheer weight of money bet on games in India and Pakistan where the industry is either illegal or nowhere near as regulated as you find it here in Australia.

"All we are asking for as a collective is a level playing field."

Executive chairman of Sportsbet, Matthew Tripp, said the big four operators remained committed to working with governments to ensure a zero tolerance policy.

"Our customers and the broader community demand sporting events be contested on their merits and without the taint of corruption," Tripp said.

"We also support consistent legislation across Australia to combat match-fixing and penalties of up to 10 years in jail for individuals found guilty of corrupt behaviour."

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