

The Wrap



IN YOUR FACE: Sports odds promotion to be restricted

Odds against gambling ads

Special focus on children's viewing hours.

The promotion of live odds at sporting venues and during match broadcasts would be banned under the recommendations of a parliamentary inquiry into online gambling and gambling advertising.

The Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform also found gambling advertising should be prohibited during children's viewing hours, including sports broadcasts during those times.

Committee chair Andrew Wilkie (Denison, Tas) said there is significant concern from the community about the growth of advertising for sports betting services.

"Children in particular are being constantly bombarded with advertising for gambling during sporting programs and the committee heard alarming stories about children and young people now not talking about their team's form but instead talking about their team's odds," Mr Wilkie said.

"In other words the abundance of gambling advertising during sport is normalising gambling for children."

The committee also has recommended maintaining the restrictions on 'in play' sports betting and online casino style gambling contained in the Interactive Gambling Act 2001, and extending these restrictions to cover 'practice' websites and other inducements to gamble. 'In play' betting includes wagering on the outcome of a sporting event after it has already begun, as well as more exotic bets such as on what team or player will score the next goal in a soccer match.

The recommendation to maintain existing restrictions on online gambling is supported by Relationships Australia, the members of which regularly provide counselling for problem gamblers facing relationship breakdowns and financial ruin. National executive officer Alison Brook said these problems are often

exacerbated for online gamblers because of the ease of access to online gambling and the ability to use a credit card to gamble.

"Additionally, access to gambling via mobile devices has the potential to keep gambling habits more secretive, thus not giving partners and friends the opportunity to help in resisting opportunities," Ms Brook said.

However national betting agency SportsBet claims restricting online gambling in Australia is actually placing gamblers at risk of further harm.

The agency has given support to some restriction of sports advertising, including the phasing out of live odds during play and in commentary and the removal of sponsors' logos from children's sports clothing and equipment. But its submission to the inquiry called for restrictions on online gambling and 'in play' betting in Australia to be removed to allow the industry to be properly regulated.

"The proliferation of the internet as a global phenomenon, ease of access to international websites, the number of offshore websites offering these prohibited forms of online gambling to Australian residents, and the lack of enforcement of the Interactive Gambling Act means the prohibitions are becoming counterproductive," SportsBet said in its submission.

"That is, they are putting domestic wagering and gaming service providers at a significant commercial disadvantage, channelling Australian demand for an established industry offshore, beyond the reach of Australian regulations including customer harm minimisation measures and taxation revenues.

"Prohibition simply does not work. Gambling is an established industry, and the internet is a modern conduit to facilitate this activity, as was the telephone before it."

Mr Wilkie acknowledged the problems in controlling access to international gaming websites, but said the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 has been very effective in restricting Australian based online gambling services and should be maintained. •

LINKS

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