

BETTING EXCHANGES ON AUSTRALIAN RACING

1070. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

I refer to the document entitled "Report of the Betting Exchange Task Force to the Australasian Racing Ministers' Conference", tabled by the minister earlier today, which concludes on page 2 that -

betting exchanges on Australian racing would pose a serious threat to current betting turnover levels of the three categories of licensed wagering operator in Australia - TABs, traditional bookmakers and corporate bookmakers.

It goes on to make a series of recommendations.

- (1) What has the minister done to address these potentially alarming consequences?
- (2) How does the minister propose to limit, control, regulate and, particularly, police the activities of betting exchanges, which are already licensed in the United Kingdom and operating throughout Australia and may well emerge under licence from the Northern Territory Government, which has dissented from the major findings of this report?

Hon NICK GRIFFITHS replied:

I thank the member for the question and his interest in this very important issue.

- (1) Shortly after the House adjourned for the recent break I travelled to Sydney and Melbourne and conferred with leading people in the Australian racing industry. In New South Wales I conferred with the recently appointed Minister for Gaming and Racing, Hon Grant McBride, and put to him the Western Australian Government's position on the issue raised by the honourable member, namely that I am opposed to betting exchanges operating and having access to Australian projects. Further, I put to the New South Wales minister Western Australia's position that the report of the Betting Exchange Task Force to the ministerial conference should be made public. That has been agreed to by the other ministers as a result of my actions. It was a positive step, and enabled the public to be informed of the weight of opinion of Australian Governments on this very important issue. I next suggested to my New South Wales counterpart that a joint approach be made to the federal Government to deal with the issue when it considers amendments to the interactive gambling legislation, which I understand is in the process of being amended or will be shortly. As a result of that a letter has been sent during the period of my leave, signed by the acting Minister for Racing and Gaming, Hon Jim McGinty, to Senator Alston urging him to cause the relevant Act to be amended so that - as far as it can be done under law - Australia can be quarantined from the effects of betting exchanges.
- (2) Betting exchanges can certainly apply for licences, but they are not welcome on our shores. There is no way they can get the kick-off to engage in wagering because there are very important issues, of which Hon Barry House is well aware, relating to integrity, the return to the racing industry, and the return of taxation revenue to government.

As for the future, I continue to monitor what is taking place in response to what has been asked of the federal Government. I will continue to push the issue as hard as I can on behalf of the Western Australian racing industry with my ministerial colleagues across the jurisdictions. The member used the word "may" in respect of the Northern Territory. I note the Northern Territory is one of the centres, but that issue will continue to be pressed and argued. I regret that the next racing ministers conference has been postponed until a day in November. I also regret very much that because of the activities of another sporting engagement in Melbourne over that period, the conference is not now likely to take place in Melbourne. It has taken place on the first Friday in November in recent times. It will probably now take place in Sydney. Notwithstanding the change of venue, I can assure the member that the important issue he raises will continue to be pressed very hard. I hope that there will be a unanimous outcome.