

BETTING EXCHANGE OPERATORS

137. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Racing and Gaming:

Will the minister explain to members what is being done at a state and federal level to prevent betting exchange operators such as Betfair targeting Australian racing?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I start by thanking the member for Collie-Wellington for the question and acknowledging his strong interest in and support for the racing industry in the south west. The racing industry is very important to the state of Western Australia. It is one of the six biggest industries in the state. It employs thousands of citizens across the state. It provides a great deal of interest and enjoyment for many hundreds of thousands of Western Australian citizens.

The state government is very determined to protect the racing industry from the influences of betting exchanges. For that reason, in 2003 we legislated to make it an offence for a person resident in Western Australia to bet with an unlicensed offshore gambling operator. We also made it an offence for an advertisement to be published promoting those sorts of services. The reasons we are opposed to betting services are that, first, they make no contribution to the racing industry in Australia and, secondly, betting exchanges allow punters to bet on any of the racing codes and lose. That means that the integrity of the racing industry is put under threat by betting exchanges. They are absolutely opposed by all three racing industry codes in Western Australia. They are opposed by the government. They are opposed by virtually all state governments. However, we have a problem: we cannot control the Internet. We have written to the federal government and to the minister for communications asking whether she will ensure that betting exchanges are made illegal under the Interactive Gambling Act. She has declined to do so. The federal government has declined to protect the racing industry across all the states. I hope that members on both sides of the house agree on this issue. Maybe the member for South Perth can answer that.

Mr J.E. McGrath: Yes, I agree.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Members on both sides of the house agree that betting exchanges should be outlawed in Western Australia. However, the commonwealth government is not protecting the racing industry from these very pernicious threats to the integrity of the industry, which threats deny the industry much-needed funds and the Totalisator Agency Board revenue. We are determined to ensure that this influence is stopped. We have again written to the commonwealth government. We would like to see it take action. We are at an absolute loss on why the commonwealth government is not taking action as requested by this and other state governments across Australia to prevent betting exchanges adversely influencing the racing industry in this country.