



Big sporting codes under pressure to give up alcohol sponsorship

By **STEVE LILLEBUEN**

AUSTRALIA'S biggest sporting leagues are under pressure to drop alcohol sponsorship after a dozen other codes effectively banned similar types of advertising and support.

Twelve leading sporting organisations – covering athletes in soccer, basketball, netball, swimming, cycling, hockey and others – have agreed to end all existing and future alcohol sponsorship deals.

In exchange, the groups will share \$25 million in replacement government funding taken from new alcopops tax revenues.

But the nation's biggest sports organisations – AFL, NRL and

Cricket Australia – have not yet signed up to the new program, prompting alcohol abuse experts to push for a similar approach.

Professor Mike Daube, co-chair of the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol, said: "We urge the remaining sports ... to start discussions with the government as to how they too can move away from their present role in exposing children to alcohol promotion."

Sports Minister Kate Lundy, who announced the "Be The Influence" strategy yesterday, said more sporting groups were not part of the initiative partly due to funding issues. "With \$25 million available, this is the best we can do," Senator Lundy said.

She did, however, praise the three big leagues for their own efforts in trying to reduce binge-drinking. "The issue here is that they are all carrying a responsible drinking message," she said.

Last week, the AFL announced a 10-year extension to a major sponsorship deal with Carlton United Brewers.

Cricket Australia has been sponsored by VB for years, while the NRL has commercial partnerships with Fosters and Diageo, which makes Bundaberg Rum.

NRL spokesman John Brady said he hoped the government would invest more funding in harm prevention groups rather than target sports sponsorship programs. **AAP**