



Alcohol sponsorship deals under pressure Sports booze ban push

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 agreements.

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.

"We urge the remaining sports such as AFL, NRL and cricket to start discussions with the government as to how they too can move away from their present role in exposing children to alcohol promotion," said

Professor Mike Daube, co-chair of the National Alliance for Action on Alcohol.

Sports Minister Kate Lundy, who announced the "Be The Influence" strategy on Saturday, 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," she 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.

Health Minister Tanya Plibersek says banning alcohol sponsorship of sporting events is not on the

government's agenda.

"We think banning alcohol sponsorship is a step too far," Ms Plibersek said yesterday, adding that the government had "no intention of banning alcohol advertising".

Ms Plibersek said the government funding was for those sporting codes that would prefer not to accept alcohol sponsorship or wanted to be involved in tackling binge drinking to promote a healthy lifestyle.

"That's a strong message to send, but we're not interested in, you know, over the top policing in this area," she said.

"We know that a lot of sports depend on alcohol sponsorship."

The federal government banned tobacco advertising at all sporting events in Australia from October 2006.

Ms Plibersek said there was a "big difference" between alcohol and tobacco goods.

"You can have safe consumption of alcohol. You can't have safe consumption of tobacco," she said.



Tanya Plibersek