

THE POKIES PLAY YOU

Brisbane Lions and NEDs – time for tobacco-style ban

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

The Alliance for Gambling Reform today condemned the debt-laden Brisbane Lions for signing a shotgun major sponsorship with controversial online bookmaker Neds which will distribute gambling messages on its player jumpers throughout the 2019 AFL season.

Alliance spokesman and director Tim Costello said:

“After all the hard work getting gambling brand names off AFL jumpers and AFL clubs progressively out of pokies, it is extraordinarily disappointing to see the Brisbane Lions partner up with Australia’s most controversial online gambling company ending a 5 year run without corporate bookies on AFL jumpers across Australia.”

“Unsurprisingly, the gushing [Brisbane Lions press statement](#) yesterday announcing the deal, triggered a [social media backlash](#) from out-raged fans who clearly want this deal to be cancelled.”

“I can’t believe that the [8 directors](#) of the Brisbane Lions, led by the relatively new chairman Andrew Wellington, believe it is appropriate for a family friend club to partner up with a notorious gambling company which has repeatedly been [forced to withdraw](#) demeaning and [tasteless advertisements](#) from our TV screens.”

“The AFL and the Brisbane board need to quickly intervene to reverse this decision by CEO Greg Swann who has a history of doing gambling deals with AFL clubs – surely a credible Queensland company or the Queensland Government, rather than a foreign-owned gambling provider, can be sourced to support the Brisbane Lions in 2019.”

“And why would the AFL, which is keeping the Brisbane Lions alive with generous grant funding and loan guarantees with Westpac, allow a company like Neds to undermine the AFL’s own controversial deal with Beteasy, which also should be terminated.”

“This desperate Neds deal by the Brisbane Lions should be a wake up call for politicians to start treating the gambling industry like tobacco and move to a full ban on gambling advertising and sponsorship, particularly in the sporting industry which has been corrupted and degraded by gambling for far too long.”

The Alliance noted that Neds, founded by former Gold Coast pornographer Dean Shannon, was only [sold last November](#) to GVC, parent company of Ladbrokes, for \$68 million up front with a further \$27 million payable based on performance. It reportedly took almost \$1 billion in bets with gamblers losing almost \$100 million during its first 12 months. GVC is one of the world’s biggest gambling companies with a market capitalisation of \$6 billion.

“It is disappointing that GVC has decided to keep the notorious Neds brand alive rather than folding it in with Ladbrokes,” Mr Costello said. “There are far too many largely foreign-owned and Northern Territory licensed gambling companies competing for market share in Australia and this has triggered a surge in television advertising spending to almost \$300 million in 2018.”

“The community are sick to death of the advertising deluge and we need Scott Morrison and Bill Shorten to promise a further crackdown in addition to the siren-to-siren restrictions which started on April 1, 2018.”

“In addition to this advertising deluge, we don’t want kids in Brisbane running around in jumpers promoting Neds when the company was last year [convicted for illegal advertising](#) into the NSW market.”

“Australians are the world’s biggest gamblers in per capita terms with about \$24 billion lost in 2018 and sports gambling is the fastest growing category, now exceeding more than \$1 billion a year in losses.”

The Alliance noted [recent media reports](#) which commended the good work by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation in counter-sponsoring Victorian-based AFL clubs over recent years to give up their gambling sponsorships and instead promote the [“Love the game, not the odds”](#) message.

In 2018, all 10 Victorian-based AFL clubs were part of [the VRGF program](#).

The Alliance believes this Neds sponsorship just confirms how far Queensland and NSW – which suffer the largest per capita gambling losses of any Australian states – are behind Victoria on issues such as public education and campaigns to reduce gambling harm.

“The Queensland Government should move to establish a Victorian-style Responsible Gambling Foundation to assist with buying out gambling sponsorships in Queensland, similar to the original model pioneered by VicHealth with tobacco sponsorship in the 1980s which is now being rolled out with gambling sponsorship,” Mr Costello said.

“And the Federal and State Governments should also review their matching \$15 million contributions towards the proposed Brisbane Lions training facility in Springfield to make it contingent on the Neds jumper sponsorship deal being cancelled.”

“If the Brisbane Lions want a [new \\$70 million facility](#) in Springfield which is substantially funded by all three levels of government, surely it needs to be a good corporate citizen and sever this ill-considered relationship with a toxic foreign-owned gambling company.”

Sadly, in addition to the Neds deal, the Brisbane Lions also operate poker machines as part of its commercial operations, but still faced “going concern” warnings from its auditor KPMG in the [2018 annual report](#).”

“This desperate deal by a financially teetering AFL club was put together in just two weeks after the previous sponsor [SOOW pulled out](#) and it should be unscrambled just as quickly before any more damage is done,” Mr Costello said.

“I call on fans to boycott buying any Lions merchandise which features the Neds brand as this move is just aimed to further indoctrinate the next generation of gamblers and should be resisted strongly.”

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