

### **Government leads with its boots tackling sports sponsorship**

Many people in the alcohol industry were alarmed to hear that a government body, the Australian National Preventative Health Agency or ANPHA, is in negotiation with the Football Federation of Australia about paying \$7.5m for an end to any sponsorship of soccer in Australia by alcohol companies. Other sports were reportedly also being approached by the preventative health agency with the taxpayers' chequebook in hand as part of that agency spending the Community Sponsorship Fund.

Considering the Australian government has a wafer-thin surplus, I was surprised to see this amount of money on the table for spending in an area that not too many people outside the professional anti-alcohol NGOs were concerned about.

Some history is useful here. ANPHA's funding for its - \$25m Community Sponsorship Fund – supposedly to provide an alternative to alcohol sponsorship for community sporting and cultural organisations came to – was a demand from the Green Party and Senator Nick Xenophon for their help passing the Alcopops Tax in 2009.

DSICA was asked back in 2011 (alongside the other industry sectors and the public health NGOs) about how the Community Sponsorship Fund should be used. All of the talk during the stakeholders meeting, and how the agency discussed its plans, was around community sports clubs and other community groups. Victoria and West Australia already had such programs operating under the banner of *Good Sports*, where sports clubs and the health NGOs negotiated about alcohol –related sponsorship, and more importantly how alcohol was served in the clubhouse bar.

The Community Sponsorship Fund – which was intended for grassroots programs aimed at changing how community sports clubs and groups used and served alcohol – has mutated into funding for ending alcohol sponsorship at the national level.

While it might be 'only' the Football Federation of Australia at the moment, the symbolism of such a change is stark. Enormous pressure will be put on all the other sports to take the government's money (actually taxpayers' money) to end the longstanding relationship with alcohol brands.

But national sports bodies should be very wary of taking the Government's money and breaking their relationship with the industry. The history of government funding to replace tobacco sponsorship indicates that a change of Government - or simply a more urgent need for those funds - quickly ends any chance of future funds beyond that first agreement.

All that aside, ending sports sponsorship does not even seem to be good alcohol policy. France has banned sports sponsorship for many years and its drinking trends have continued unchanged. The evidence for a ban is just not there. But the existence of sports sponsorship annoys those who see no legitimate role for alcohol in our society, so they have kept on agitating again it.