

5.1 (a) Strengthening sporting relationships across the Commonwealth to combat threats to the integrity of sport

Office of Sport

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Summary

At the international level, there is an increased focus on targeting those individuals, networks and organisations involved with match fixing and illegal sports betting, but there are opportunities for greater international collaboration. This paper proposes that Commonwealth Sports Ministers agree to support both domestic actions and international collaboration to combat match-fixing and illegal sports betting and also consider adopting a set of guiding principles to underpin a coordinated international response.

Recommendations

Ministers could consider adopting a set of guiding principles to underpin a coordinated response to match fixing which could include:

1. Where applicable, establishing a legislative framework to regulate the relationship between legitimate gambling operators and organisers of sporting competitions within the nation (for countries that allow and regulate sports betting);
2. Where applicable, recognising the rights of sports event organisers to receive a share of betting revenue obtained in relation to their event (for countries that allow and regulate sports betting);
3. Sporting organisations within the nation to be encouraged by governments to develop and implement codes of conduct relating to match fixing including the provision of appropriate education to athletes and support personnel;
4. Penalising match-fixing behaviours as a criminal offence with significant penalties;
5. Establishing a centralised monitoring and integrity agency within each nation to assist sports and where applicable, betting agencies to address issues relating to corruption; and
6. Introducing measures to increase cross-border police and judicial cooperation on match-fixing matters.

Main Body

Match fixing and illegal sports betting are becoming an increasingly prominent issue on the international sporting landscape. Figures provided by Interpol on illegal and irregular sports betting state that over US\$140 billion is generated annually by illegal betting with larger amounts being wagered each year.

It is a problem which does not remain contained by national borders and has the potential to threaten the credibility of sports around the world. At the international level, there is an increased focus on targeting those individuals, networks and organisations involved with match fixing and illegal sports betting, but there are opportunities for greater international collaboration.

Although there is no evidence of systematic fraud in Australian sport, Australia has developed its National Policy on Match-Fixing in Sport in recognition of the growth of sports betting and the risk of corruption that exists. To adequately address this issue, cooperation is required across governments, sporting administrators, the betting industry and law enforcement agencies, both domestically and internationally.

Australia recognises that it is up to each nation to design and implement a framework which best addresses the threats to its sports and gambling industries. However, domestic responses themselves will not be sufficient to tackle the globalised nature of the threat from match-fixing and illegal sports betting. Australia contends an integrated international approach to match fixing and illegal sports betting is required including cross-border collaboration through information sharing, monitoring, investigation and ultimately enforcement.

Currently there are a number of international initiatives aimed at combating match fixing. In April 2011, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) established a Working Group on Irregular and Illegal Betting in Sport and a number of expert panels to develop responses in the areas of governance, education, monitoring and exchange of intelligence. The IOC Working Group met in February 2012 to consider these proposals and as a result many countries, sporting organisations, regulators and betting operators now have a greater appreciation of the risks associated with match fixing and its impact on the integrity of sport.

As regional sporting competitions become more important in the global sporting landscape, coordinated collaboration between nations will be even more influential in addressing the threat posed from match-fixing and illegal sports betting.

At the 12th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport held on 15 March 2012, the final resolutions invited the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), in conjunction with other relevant organisations, to launch the negotiation of a possible new international convention against manipulation of sports results. On 27 April 2012, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called for the adoption of mechanisms to limit the risk of match fixing, illegal betting and other forms of corruption.

Another example of a regional response to the threat of match-fixing is the agreement reached by South Pacific Island Sports Ministers in August last year to examine possible legislation to combat match-fixing in sport.

In addition, sporting organisations such as FIFA, SportAccord (formerly the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF)) and the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) are all engaging in the fight against match-fixing.

Due to the divergent nature of gambling markets, government approaches to regulation and the resources that can be directed at combating the problem, a 'one-size-fits-all' prescriptive approach to international cooperation is not appropriate.

In general, countries can be divided into two main groups; those countries that prohibit betting on sports and those that allow betting on sports, but regulate the activity. Countries in both these groups have experienced issues with match fixing and illegal sports betting demonstrating that match fixers are not constrained by international borders.

There is no quick fix for the problem. An international response will require time to be developed and implemented in a way which allows for flexibility to adapt as match-fixing behaviours and techniques change over time.

A commitment by Ministers attending the 6th Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting to work together to address match fixing and illegal sports betting would raise the profile of this issue not only within the Commonwealth but globally as well.

Australia suggests that Commonwealth nations agree to establish mechanisms to facilitate greater cooperation, such as the initiatives outlined below, to support both domestic actions and international collaboration to combat match-fixing and illegal sports betting.

Commonwealth Sports Ministers could consider adopting a set of guiding principles to underpin a coordinated response to match fixing which could include:

1. Where applicable, establishing a legislative framework to regulate the relationship between legitimate gambling operators and organisers of sporting competitions within the nation (for countries that allow and regulate sports betting);
2. Where applicable, recognising the rights of sports event organisers to receive a share of betting revenue obtained in relation to their event (for countries that allow and regulate sports betting);
3. Sporting organisations within the nation to be encouraged by governments to develop and implement codes of conduct relating to match fixing including the provision of appropriate education to athletes and support personnel;
4. Penalising match-fixing behaviours as a criminal offence with significant penalties;
5. Establishing a centralised monitoring and integrity agency within each nation to assist sports and where applicable, betting agencies to address issues relating to corruption; and
6. Introducing measures to increase cross-border police and judicial cooperation on match-fixing matters.

While cooperation between Governments is an essential element in combating illegal sports betting and match fixing, any agreement should provide capacity for greater interaction and collaboration between governments, sporting organisations and betting providers. Integrity frameworks within sports and arrangements with betting providers will help underpin any policy response by Government, particularly if common principles are reflected across nations.

Conclusion

Sport has the capacity to teach participants and broader society, about values such as fairness, respect, responsibility, dedication and the achievement of goals through competition on an equal playing field.

Establishing consistent guiding principles across Commonwealth nations, information exchange between governments and the establishment of integrity frameworks for athletes, officials and sporting codes will provide a foundation upon which to enhance existing domestic responses to match fixing as well as supporting the development of enhanced international initiatives.

Further Information

Australian Government (2011), 'National Policy on Match-Fixing in Sport' available at: http://www.regional.gov.au/sport/programs/files/national_policy_match-fixing.pdf (accessed 24 May 2012)

IOC Press Release (2012), 'IOC's fight against irregular and illegal betting in sport moves to implementation phase', available at: <http://www.olympic.org/news?articleid=151887> (accessed 24 May 2012)

12th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport 15 March 2012 (2012), 'Final Resolutions', available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/epas/resources/2012/MSL_12/final_resolution_en.pdf (accessed 24 May 2012)

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2012), 'Resolution 1876 (2012) The need to combat match-fixing', available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=18264&Language=EN> (accessed 24 May 2012)

Pacific Islands Sports Ministers Meeting Communiqué (2011), 'Second Pacific Islands Sports Ministers Meeting Communiqué', available at: http://www.sportingpulse.com/get_file.cgi?id=1511052 (accessed 24 May 2012)