



Proposal would end tobacco company sponsorship of sport

By MARK METHERELL

Big sporting events including the Benson and Hedges World Series, the Escort Cup and the Marlboro Open would lose their names and sponsors under proposals being examined by the Victorian Government.

The Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria has recommended that tobacco company sponsorship of sport be scrapped. The council has suggested a special State tax of at least 0.3 cents a packet on cigarettes to enable the Government to take over the sponsorship at present provided by tobacco companies.

The Minister for Health, Mr Roper, said yesterday that the Government was carefully considering the council's proposals. He said he expected to discuss them with representatives of the council soon. But he was reluctant to give a personal view on the submission or indicate the likely stance of the Government.

He said the Labor Party's policy included moves to control tobacco advertising. But the party had made it clear that it would consult with both those concerned with the ill-effects of smoking and with the tobacco industry before taking action.

Mr Roper said that it would seem odd for the Government to be connected with World Series cricket (sponsored by Benson and Hedges) and the Marlboro Open tennis.

But the director of the Anti-Cancer Council, Dr Nigel Gray, said that provided the Government raised sufficient revenue from cigarettes there should be

government could not be involved in such events.

Dr Gray said that the council had already discussed the general thrust of its suggestions with the Premier, Mr Cain, and hoped to meet Mr Roper this week to discuss details. He said the council believed an increased tax on cigarettes should be considered in this year's State Budget.

The Anti-Cancer Council contended that the tobacco companies had turned much of their promotion to sport because of the loss of television advertising, Dr Gray said.

A recent publication produced by the Tobacco Institute of Australia entitled 'Don't sit on the Sideline' and highlighted the benefits of tobacco company sponsorship of sport and claimed that the industry spent \$5 million a year on sport sponsorship, Dr Gray said.

"We do think sporting advertising is the strongest pressure for recruitment of smokers," Dr Gray said.

The chairman of Australian Football Championships, which organises the Escort Cup, Dr Allen Aylett, last night opposed the council's suggestions.

He said he did not believe Government sponsorship could bridge the financial gap. Asked about the possible ill-effects of tobacco promotion, Dr Aylett said: "I would look at it positively. Sport in itself is a great promoter of activity and good health."

Dr Aylett would not disclose how much W. D. and H. O. Wills contributed towards the Escort Cup, although the total prize money is nearly \$500,000.