

Charlie Brooks



Starmmer is blind to benefits of cutting tax for pool betting

In spite of the Prime Minister's appearance at Doncaster on Saturday, I am assured by very good sources in Westminster that the Government currently has no interest in helping horse racing.

It is offended by the lack of attention it received before the general election from racing's rulers, critical of an apparent lack of self-help measures such as pooling media rights and mass procurement, and dismissive of the sport's dysfunctional regulatory structure, of which it is well briefed.

The Government is also obsessed with the amount of money horses at the top of the market make at auction, convinced that somebody somewhere must be getting rich. It does not appreciate the fact that the vast majority of that money is inward foreign investment which supports jobs. It also does not care that there is now an equine talent

drain abroad because of the lack of prize money here.

The fact that racing is part of a global industry, and must be able to compete with the rest of the world, passes it by. It cares not that around the world racing has a major economic impact that generates several hundred billion dollars in GDP and employs more than two million people.

So it is hardly surprising that Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges, the highly respected head of the Hong Kong Jockey Club, the most successful and benevolent horse racing organisation in the world, described the sport in this country as "close to mission impossible". He did, however, identify a way forward for the UK and other struggling countries.

"An alignment of interests is crucial when you have one of the best products," he said, referring to the World Pool, which allows betting pools from around the





Missing the point: Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and wife Victoria at Doncaster

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world to commingle and offer punters much better value.

Peter V'landys, the most visionary horse-racing entrepreneur in the world, who set up the Everest race in Australia, concurs. And when he talks, the world should listen.

"We should be taking our competitors on, we should be taking sports betting on and other forms of entertainment," he said. "I think World Pool has the potential to save world racing because it really highlights the major events

in every country, it puts the focus on that event and punters from all around the world can bet on that particular race."

Bookmakers across the globe indiscriminately attempt to lure in punters with special offers for new accounts and various other incentives. The more the punters lose, after all, the more they win.

Tote pool betting is "inherently different" from fixed-odds betting with bookmakers because the pool operators have no incentive in luring players to gamble more than they can afford.

All bets go into a pool and the customers share the winnings after the operator has taken out a reasonable fee. That is why the HKJC, which operates the World

Pool, is able to plough so much back into the sport and wider society.

The World Pool's priority is, in fact, to draw in punters from the illegal black market, which is estimated to be worth \$1.7trillion (£1.3trillion) worldwide.

Like the Tory administration before it, this Government does not seem to understand problem gambling or the threat of the black market and is pressing on with gambling checks that will only exacerbate the problems.

As was detailed in a recent report by the World Tote Association, "risk levels from different gambling forms are determined by a number of factors, including speed [game or event frequency], availability and continuity of the game, payback intervals, chance of winning, jackpots, near wins, multiple and variable stake opportunities, sound, light and colours, and other parameters".

For these reasons, and the subsequent harm to society, it is absurd that pool betting on racing pays the same amount of tax as addictive, compulsive casino games.

Rather than driving punters to the black market with affordability checks and taxation on the most benign forms of gambling, an enlightened government should treble the taxation on casino games and reduce pool betting taxation by two thirds.

But getting that message across has become nigh on impossible because in the eyes of the politicians in this country who are dictating policy, racing has lost the right to have a conversation.

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