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Betting operators welcome sanctions against Lee

Mike O’Kane, Chairman of ESSA the integrity body for licensed betting operators, stated that his organisation “fully supports tough sanctions against any player, official or other party that engages in corrupt activity designed to manipulate sporting events to defraud bookmakers and their customers.”

Commenting following the decision to ban Stephen Lee for 12 years for match-fixing, O’Kane stated that “detailed information regarding the amounts, types of bets and the individuals placing those bets were vital elements in that decision. Licensed betting operators work closely with regulators and sporting bodies and have done much to drive corrupters away from regulated gambling markets.”

However, O’Kane advised that his organisation “remained vigilant, employing sophisticated security systems designed to detect suspicious betting. Licensed operators have a clear business need to maintain the integrity of sporting events and it is pleasing that when such corrupt activity does occur it results in effective action to punish the individuals involved.

“Unfortunately, some other sports are not as active in this area lacking effective rules and sanctions and with poor financial records, notably safeguarding players’ wages. Such poor governance issues are allowing fixers to infiltrate certain sports and that is an issue that needs to be addressed as matter of urgency.”

He also warned against unsubstantiated and knee-jerk reactions to limit the markets offered by regulated betting operators, such as in-play betting, as a remedy to address match-fixing. O’Kane fully supports recent comments made by the British Gambling Commission on this issue that “any threat to sports betting integrity can be managed without the need to ban what is a very popular activity.”

“As Europol and others have detailed, match-fixers bet primarily on unregulated markets which are not subject to any restrictions. Any attempt to impose market restrictions on licensed operators would have the undesirable effect of pushing consumers towards the unregulated market, which has no transparency or accountability and would be virtually impossible to monitor,” he stated.

“There is simply no evidence to support limits on regulated betting markets which would be an unjustified restriction on trade based on unsubstantiated integrity grounds. Such market limitations would put licensed operators at a clear disadvantage and be of no benefit on integrity issues.”

Notes for Editors

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ESSA (The European Sports Security Association) was established in 2005 by the leading online sports book operators in Europe to monitor any irregular betting patterns or possible insider betting from within each sport. To achieve this goal ESSA implemented an early warning system between its members that highlights any suspicious betting activity. The Early Warning System allows ESSA to work with the sports regulators and their disciplinary and legal department, ensuring that when an alert is given the regulator is informed immediately which may prevent the possibility of any game manipulation on a given event. ESSA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a number of sports federations including FIFA and the IOC, as well as regulatory bodies such as the UK Gambling Commission, the Gibraltar Gambling Commissioner and the Malta Lotteries and Gaming Authority.

ESSA's members include: Bet-at-home, Bet365, Betclac, bwin.party, BetVictor didgibet, Expekt, the Hong Kong Jockey Club, Goldbet, Interwetten, Ladbrokes, Paddy Power, Sportingbet, Stan James, Stanleybet, Unibet and William Hill.

For more information on ESSA and its activities please visit ESSA's website at www.eu-ssa.org