

Probe on Tabcorp pay-off claims

Regulator looks at alleged pokies offer

VICTORIA'S gambling regulator will launch an investigation into allegations that gaming giant Tabcorp offered \$20 million to a rival if it withdrew a bid to operate the state's poker machines.

Gaming Minister Tony Robinson yesterday compared Tabcorp's alleged conduct to a price-fixing scandal that embroiled Visy boss Richard Pratt.

Mr Robinson confirmed the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation would examine claims that Tabcorp managing director Elmer Funke Kupper had offered a lump-sum payment of \$5 million and annual payments of \$1.5 million over 10 years to Clubs Victoria.

"The regulator does not have to be asked (to investigate) ... we would be confident that they would have those matters in

"Any accusations like that obviously concern the Government. Gambling is heavily regulated ... and we've always insisted on very high standards of behaviour," he said.

The statement of claim lodged by Clubs Victoria as part of a dispute with its former president, Leon Wiegard, included allegations Tabcorp's \$20 million offer required Clubs Victoria to "refrain from participating in any bidding process for gaming licences".

Mr Funke Kupper denied the offer was contingent on Clubs Victoria pulling its bid to operate poker machines after 2012.

"Tabcorp rejects any suggestion it has contravened the Trade Practices Act or acted improperly in any way," he said. "Tabcorp has a range of commercial arrangements with various representative bodies. In particular, (it) has had longstanding sponsorship arrange-

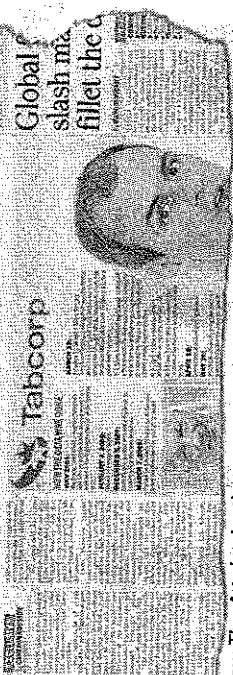
hand, and no doubt I'll be getting an update from Peter Cohen (VCGR executive commissioner) ... in coming days," Mr Robinson said.

"Dick Pratt was the last one that was in the papers and they (VCGR) did that by themselves. They don't need me to write to them and say you should do this."

Pratt, who faces criminal charges over allegations that he lied to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, was forced to step aside as Carlton Football Club president amid concerns the club would be stripped of its gaming licence.

Mr Robinson said the Government was alarmed by the allegations raised by *The Age* yesterday.

Tabcorp accused of bid to pay off pokies rival



How *The Age* broke the story yesterday.

ments with Clubs Victoria." But Mr Funke Kupper would not say why Tabcorp had raised its sponsorship arrangement from annual payments of \$200,000 a year to \$1.5 million and a one-off contribution of \$5 million on the same day Clubs Victoria announced its plan to bid for the licence.

Last night, ACCC chairman

Graeme Samuel said the competition regulator never discussed its investigations.

The Australian Securities and Investment Commission refused to discuss the claims while they were before the Supreme Court of Victoria.

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