

Tribunal's cigarette ad ruling could axe \$20m sport, art sponsorship

By TIM ALLERTON

AUSTRALIAN Broadcasting Tribunal rulings on tobacco advertising have put the future of cultural and sport sponsorship, worth more than \$20 million a year, in doubt.

The tribunal issued rulings yesterday against the country's two biggest tobacco companies — Benson and Hedges and Rothmans of Pall Mall — promoting cigarettes through sponsorship of cricket, ballet, football and film.

The rulings said television stations could risk losing their licences if they screened sponsorship advertisements considered to be cigarette advertising.

The tribunal ruled that Benson and Hedges' television commercials promoting its \$5 million sponsorship of cricket and \$400,000 support of ballet contravened the Broadcasting and Television Act, while ruling against Rothmans' \$100,000 promotion of the America's Cup film, Aussie Assault, and its football promotion.

A spokesman for Benson and Hedges, Mr Duncan Fairweather, said the company would "reappraise its involvement in cricket sponsorship at Test, State and one-day levels" as its contract with the Australian Cricket Board would expire later this year.

He said the tribunal "lives with an Alice in Wonderland attitude" and had given a "retrospective ruling on ads that have been running for more than a year".

If Benson and Hedges or other companies "do not get recognition in promoting

sponsorship activities, there is no point in giving money to support sport or culture".

The chief executive of the Australian Tobacco Institute, Mr John Dollison, said the tribunal's opinion of Section 100 of the Act "runs contrary to senior legal counsel's advice to the institute, the tobacco companies, licensees and sporting and cultural bodies".

The rulings showed people regarded sponsorship advertisements as seeking indirectly to promote cigarettes, despite the majority of 39,000 submissions to the tribunal advocating the present standards.

Goodwill

In its rulings, the tribunal said the Benson and Hedges' "field of battle" television advertisement for cricket, "which gives as much prominence to promoting the Benson and Hedges company as this does, can reasonably be assumed to be intended to promote ... the only product universally identifiable with that company — cigarettes".

The tribunal also found the use of Winfield's name in advertisements for Aussie Assault was "apparently intended to promote, or attract goodwill to the name Winfield, and, by extension, the only product bearing the Winfield name".

Winfield's participation in the 1982 Rugby League Grand Final in Sydney also breached the Broadcasting and Television Act because its promotion signs were placed "so as to ensure maximum television exposure".