

Secretary of State for Scotland to talk to UK Government about Horseracing

✘ The Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, MP, is to raise the issue of British horseracing and Levy revenues with colleagues in the UK Government. Not to give them any racing tips but to point out that Scotland is losing out on money at horseracing events held here – and that it is set to get worse.

It follows a meeting with representatives of The Friends of Scottish Racing Parliamentary Group (FoSR) at Westminster, in which the delegates highlighted how Scotland's five racecourses will be hardest hit.

The Horseracing Levy is a tax paid by bookmakers based on their gross profits and used partly to fund prize money at UK race meetings. But racecourse chiefs say loopholes in legislation is allowing bookmakers to avoid paying the surcharge and this will have a massive knock-on effect on the racing industry.

It is forecast revenue from the Levy will fall to less than £60 million in 2010-11, down by almost half (£115 million) in 2008-09.

The cross parliamentary FoSR delegation was led by Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock MP, Sandra Osborne and included fellow MPs Fiona O'Donnell and Pete Wishart, Scottish Racing manager, Rebecca Ricketts, Musselburgh Racecourse boss Bill Farnsworth and Richard Johnston, managing director of Ayr Racecourse.

Sandra Osborne, MP, said: "The yearly wrangling over the betting levy is now putting Scottish racing at risk in a totally unacceptable way.

“As Members of Parliament who have racecourses in our constituencies, we are only too well aware of the benefits racing brings locally and nationally. We strongly welcome any assistance the Secretary of State can give and we will continue to push for a speedy and fair settlement of the current impasse, as well as a long term solution which guarantees that the tremendous progress racing has made in Scotland continues.”

Bill Farnsworth, general manager at Musselburgh Racecourse and a board member of racing’s governing body, the British Horseracing Authority, welcomed the fact Mr Moore was raising the issue.

He said: “British horseracing is facing a funding crisis and that is partly due to ‘free riders’ and bookmakers exploiting loophole which means they can avoid contributing to the Levy.

“Without a strong and fair Levy a vicious circle will develop in which prize money drops, the quality of racing declines, racecourse make less money and therefore can’t put up as much money in prizes, and ultimately we will stage fewer fixtures.

“Scottish racecourses will feel this most acutely and will be first to suffer. This is because we are more geographically remote from most of the training centres in England and trainers and owners will question the economic viability of racing in Scotland.

“We welcome the fact the Secretary of State for Scotland is raising the issue at the highest Government level and will continue to challenge the Government to address this situation before a crisis becomes a full blown catastrophe.”