



NRL JULY CROWDS PLAN BELONGS IN THE SIN BIN

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the National Rugby League (NRL) plan to have crowds of fans back watching live NRL Premiership matches at suburban grounds by July is a huge risk to public health and should be abandoned.

“Put bluntly, this absurd and dangerous idea belongs in the sin bin,” Dr Bartone said.

“The NRL should be satisfied that it has its competition back in action, but it is unfair and unwise to put the health of the game’s fans at risk. They must first monitor the health and safety of the players and officials who will be involved in the thick of the on-field action.

“Australians have done exceptionally well in flattening the COVID-19 curve, and we are not too far away from relaxing more restrictions.

“Now is not the time for sporting codes to be considering having crowds at games. They must wait until the medical experts advise that it is absolutely safe to do so – and that will not be as early as July.

“The AFL and other sporting codes are adopting the right approach, which is to wait for the expert medical advice before allowing crowds back to watch games.

“We have to be consistent in our public health messaging.

“Decisions on the safety of holding mass gatherings should be made by medical experts in consultation with the National Cabinet, not by rugby league administrators.

“Of course, we all want to see sport return with fans in the stands barracking for their teams. We also want to see theatre, dance, live music, cinemas, and other entertainments open to the public.

“But the public health must come first. Getting beyond the COVID-19 pandemic is bigger than rugby league - it is about the safety of all Australians.”

The English Premier League (EPL) has indicated that crowds may not be permitted at all during 2020. The EPL's Chief Medical Officer, Dr Mark Gillett, in consultation with Public Health England, said that social distancing rules are likely to be in place for 6-12 months.

Although the Germany Bundesliga has resumed without crowds, the chair of FIFA's medical committee, Michel D'Hooghe, believes football should not be resuming until September because of the coronavirus pandemic.

France, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Argentina have already announced that their 2019-20 football seasons will not continue.

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