

Harmful product marketing in the 2023 State of Origin

July 2023





The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is the leading not-for-profit organisation working towards an Australia free from alcohol harms. We approach this through developing evidence-informed policy, enabling people-powered advocacy and delivering health promotion programs.



ALLIANCE FOR GAMBLING REFORM

The Alliance for Gambling Reform is a national peak body which represents a collaboration of organisations with a shared concern about the harmful aspects of gambling and its normalisation in Australian culture. We are a registered health promotion charity. The Alliance supports public policy and regulatory regimes that make Australia a safer, healthier, and more equitable society by reducing the level of gambling harm.



Food for Health Alliance (formerly Obesity Policy Coalition) is a leading policy and advocacy voice working to improve diets and prevent overweight and obesity in Australia. We advocate to governments across Australia for changes to laws and policies to improve our food environment – the way our food is made, labelled, sold and advertised.



The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) is a pioneer in health promotion – the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. Our primary focus is promoting good health and preventing chronic disease.

Key points

- There are 16 alcohol, gambling and unhealthy food sponsorships of the National Rugby League (NRL) State of Origin.

- One in four sponsorships for the State or Origin are for these harmful products.

- These sponsorships includes branding on the players and field, and marketing activities including social media and limited-edition products, such as branded beer cans.

- Eleven of the 16 sponsors identified were running ads on Facebook and Instagram at the time of the first game of the State of Origin.

- Just over a third (35.5%) of all unique Facebook and Instagram advertisements featured sporting content, including specific reference to the State of Origin.

- Alcohol, gambling and unhealthy foods contribute to significant health and social harm in Australia.

- The final game of the 2022 State of Origin had more than 3 million viewers and the highest Broadcaster Video on Demand (BVOD) viewership for a live broadcast.

- With so many people watching, these events become one large advertisement for harmful products.

- Children see this marketing and it has harmful impacts. For example, the younger that children are exposed the alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to start drinking early and to drink at higher levels.

- This also normalises the association between these harmful products and sporting events.

The 2023 State of Origin kicked off on Wednesday 31 May 2023. The series involves three games spanning to 12 July 2023 and is one of the biggest events in the National Rugby League (NRL) each year.

Alcohol, gambling and unhealthy food companies sponsor the State of Origin, with signage on the players clothing, the field and in advertisements during the game, including online.

Why does this matter?

Like many live sporting events, the State of Origin has a large audience which includes children and families. In 2022 the decider had a national audience of 2.585 million views on linear television and 463,000 viewers on Live Broadcaster Video on Demand (BVOD). The three matches together had the three highest BVOD live streaming ratings in Australia (Game 1 – 425,000, Game 2 – 463,000, Game 3 – 463,000).

With so many people watching, these events become one large advertisement for harmful products. This is problematic because children see this marketing and it has harmful impacts. For example, the younger that children are exposed to alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to start drinking early and to drink at higher levels.



What did this analysis include?

This analysis examines the listed sponsors on the websites of the New South Wales (NSW) team, the Queensland team and the Origin series.

For the NSW and Queensland teams, the platinum, major and official partners were included in the analysis. There were 19 sponsors across these partner tiers for the NSW team and 21 sponsors for the Queensland team. For the Origin series, the premier, major and official partners were included in the analysis. There were 24 sponsors in total across these partnership tiers for the Series. Some sponsors had more than one sponsorship arrangement (i.e., sponsored both the NSW and QLD team); these were counted as separate sponsors. In total 64 sponsors were included in this analysis.

This analysis also examined the advertisements that were placed on Meta platforms (e.g., Facebook and Instagram) by these harmful product sponsors sourced from the Meta ad library as at 31 May 2023. A total of 353 ads and 135 unique ads were found and included in this analysis.

What did the analysis conclude?

In total, there are 16 harmful product sponsorships of the State of Origin Teams and the Series, including seven alcohol, two gambling and seven unhealthy food company sponsorships. This equates to 25 per cent of all sponsors. One in four sponsors for the State of Origin are for harmful products.

	ALCOHOL (NO.)	GAMBLING (NO.)	UNHEALTHY FOOD (NO.)	TOTAL HARMFUL SPONSORS (NO.)
NSW	2 Tooheys Jim Beam	1 The Star	2 McDonalds Gatorade	5
Queensland	2 XXXX Ned Whisky	0	2 McDonalds Gatorade	4
State of Origin	3 Bundaberg VB DrinkWise	1 Sportsbet	3 KFC Solo Shapes	7
Totals	7	2	7	16

Eleven of the 16 sponsors identified were running ads on Facebook and Instagram at the time of the first game of the State of Origin (31 May 2023). Ads being run by the State of Origin teams were also included in this to allow for the assessment of cross promotion of brands.

COMPANY	ADS (NO.)	UNIQUE ADS (NO.)	ADS REFERRING TO SPORTS, INCLUDING THE STATE OF ORIGIN (NO.)
Tooheys	24	13	10
Jim Beam	1	1	0
XXXX	23	13	9
Bundaberg	35	21	0
VB	13	8	6
DrinkWise	8	8	0
The Star	120	15	0
Sportsbet	19	12	12
KFC	13	13	3
Gatorade	1	1	1
McDonalds	92	27	5
Queensland Maroons	4	3	2 (ads featured alcohol)
Total	353	135	48

Just over a third (35.5%) of all unique advertisements related to sporting competitions, including the State of Origin.

What does this look like on the ground?

The jerseys and shorts of both teams feature harmful product sponsors. The NSW jersey has Tooheys New and The Star branding, while the Queensland jersey has XXXX branding. The NSW shorts have McDonalds branding and the Queensland shorts have XXXX and McDonalds branding.



Source: [NSW Blues State of Origin 2023 Mens Away Jersey Navy M | Rebel Sport](#)



Source: [Queensland Maroons Men's Replica Jersey | Burgundy-QLD | PUMA Shoes | PUMA](#)



Source: [2023 NSW Blues State of Origin Mens Playing Shorts: Small | City Sports & F1 Store \(citysportsandf1.com.au\)](https://citysportsandf1.com.au)



What does this look like online?

On the State of Origin, Queensland and NSW team websites, there are a lot of advertisements promoting these companies and products. Some of the companies who sponsor the State of Origin align the event with competitions and promote the game and partnership extensively on their social media platforms.



Source: [Official website of the New South Wales Rugby League | NSWRL](https://www.nswrl.com.au)



Source: [Official website of the New South Wales Rugby League | NSWRL](#)



Source: [Official website of the Queensland Rugby League | QRL](#)



Source: [Partners | QRL](#)



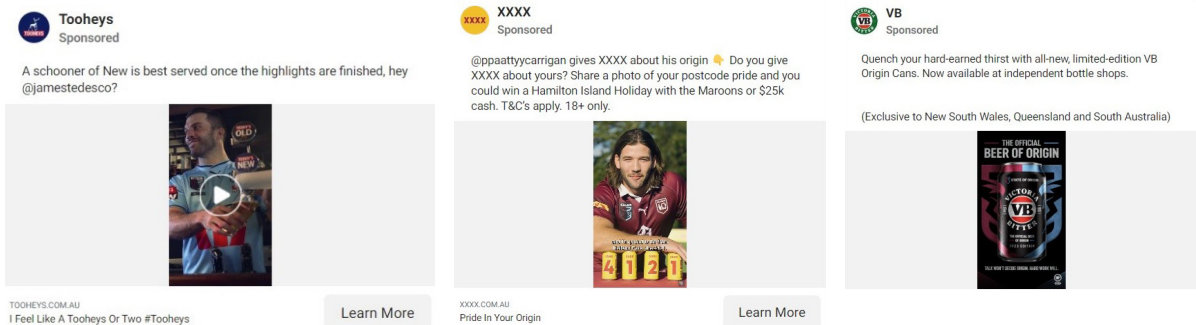
Source: [NRL 2023 news, VB Hard Earned Index Team of the Week from Round 13, Warriors, Eels players feature | NRL.com](#)



Source: <https://www.nrl.com/news/>

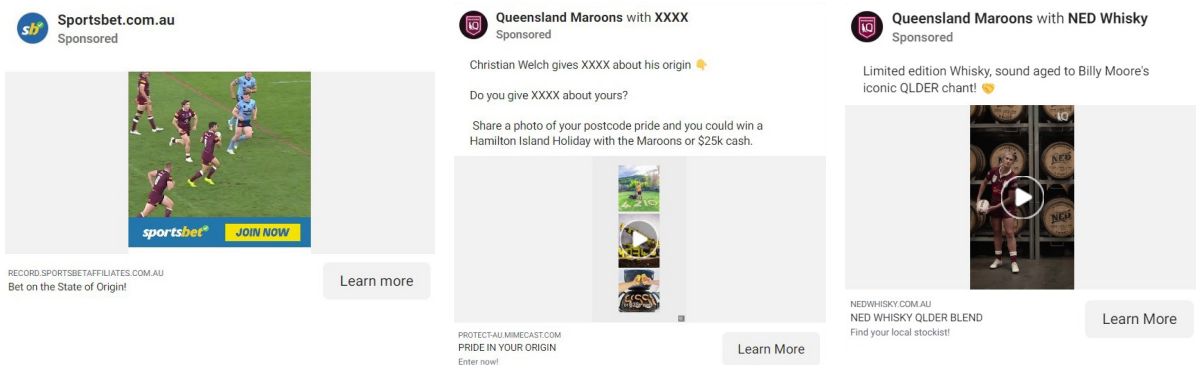
This marketing continues on the social media platforms of the companies selling these harmful products.

The beer company sponsors completely integrated the State of Origin into their marketing, featuring players from each of the teams and even producing ‘limited edition’ cans as part of their cross-promotion.

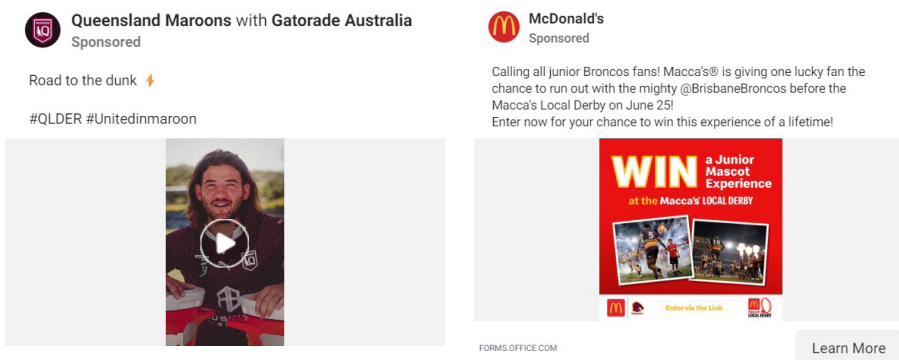


Sportsbet actively encouraged gambling calling on people to ‘Bet on the State of Origin!’ via a direct link to the betting website.

The Queensland team itself promoted XXXX and NED Whisky via its official social media channels. The ads highlighted a competition and a ‘limited edition’ whisky from the alcohol companies to coincide with the 2023 Origin Series.



Gatorade also advertised a cross-promotion with the Queensland team and McDonald’s promoted a competition for children to engage with the Brisbane Broncos NRL team.





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