

Lawyer slams Sports Minister over jumps racing

REBECCA PUDDY

AN animal welfare lawyer has called South Australia's Sports Minister "disingenuous" after he deflected criticism over jumps racing by denying the government was responsible for the sport.

Calls to ban the sport follow the death of 10-year-old gelding Virvacity at Adelaide's Oakbank Easter Racing Carnival on Saturday after he stumbled after a jump, dislocating his shoulder.

Barristers Animal Welfare Panel chairman Graeme McEwen said yesterday responsibility for jumps racing, which has a significantly increased rate of

fatalities among the horses, lay with the Victorian and South Australian governments.

Mr McEwen wrote to the SA government urging a ban on hurdle and steeple races, but he said Sports Minister Tom Kenyon had responded by saying he did not think jumps racing was cruel and the government did not have control over management of the sport.

"The real issue is whether the government would act to ban jumps racing — that was what was recommended by a Senate committee back in 1991," Mr

McEwen said. "There is a strong probability that a horse will be injured or killed in jumps racing and there

should be no such thing as an acceptable death rate in a sport.

"Mr Kenyon's response was disingenuous because the question of jumps racing is a matter for government as to whether they phase it out or ban it."

Mr Kenyon said owners paid a lot for their horses and did not deliberately injure them.

"The statistics probably speak for themselves but I don't agree that it's a cruel sport or that it should be banned," Mr Kenyon said. "I just look at whether it's cruel or not... and I think putting them down is the most humane way of treating them once they've been injured."

"I don't think just because there's a potential for injury for

horses that it is reason enough to ban the sport."

While jumps racing has been discontinued in most states, Mr McEwen said there was strong support for the sport in the SA and Victorian governments.

"The question is not whether it is cruel or not, it is whether there's such a high risk of death or injury to the horse that the event should be banned," he said.

"Statistics point conclusively (to) a high risk of death or injury." RSPCA spokesman Tim Pilgrim said the Baillieu government had contributed \$2 million towards horseracing since the 2010 Victorian election.

Thoroughbred Racing SA was unavailable for comment.