SHANE ANDERSON: Good Morning Minister Andrews.

MINISTER ANDREWS: Good morning Shane

SHANE ANDERSON: It’s amazing to think a Federal Minister had a passion for race calling. How did this all begin?

MINISTER ANDREWS: Ah I grew up in a racing family; my father was secretary of a country race club for probably the best part of twenty-five years. We went to the races every Saturday when I was a kid, there was, in fact I can remember when there was only racing on Saturday. And from a very early age I used to go up the back of the grand stand and start practicing calling the races and eventually took it up for a while.

SHANE ANDERSON: How serious were you about the art of race calling?

MINISTER ANDREWS: Um, I spent, if I didn’t go to the races on Saturday I would sit down and listen to the radio stations, I’d study the techniques of, in those days Bill Collins, Bert Bryant, Joe Brown and the likes, and you know I was very serious about it. I wanted to do it professionally and my father talked me into going to university and eventually I pursued a different career.

SHANE ANDERSON: I suppose some of the skills set that you have as a race caller come in handy at Federal Parliament?

MINISTER ANDREWS: Um, I suppose it does. Some of my colleagues still say I talk a little too fast so, (laughter) there’s a background there.

SHANE ANDERSON: Um in regards to, just before I get to a very serious topic, but no doubt because you grew up with the passion for racing you would have watched yesterday’s Melbourne Cup, a tremendous victory by Protectionist.

MINISTER ANDREWS: It was. I’m in Adelaide actually working but I did manage to find ten minutes to watch the Cup and yeah it was a great run. I mean he was still well back at the 400 and the way that Ryan Moore slotted him through the field it was a great run and he really went away with it.
SHANE ANDERSON: The reason you’ve given me some time this morning is to talk about the new Illegal Offshore Wagering Working Group which has been established by your Federal Government, the Gambling Industry Advisory Council, through significant influence by the Premier of Victoria and Minister for Racing, Denis Napthine. Why is this group so important?

MINISTER ANDREWS: Well as you’ve said Premier Napthine came to the Federal Government to ask if we could cooperate, not with just him but with the Racing Ministers throughout Australia, to do something about this emerging problem of illegal offshore gambling. It’s a problem for a number of reasons; one is that it goes to the integrity of racing, we want racing to be one which is conducted properly, that there are proper checks and balances in it and if you have illegal offshore betting than that can undermine that approach to it. There’s also a question about the loss of revenue, to the states and territories in particular in Australia, and there’s even things about how you can actually prevent the identification of people who are in need of problem gambling support services. None of that can adequately occur if there is this great migration to illegal offshore betting.

SHANE ANDERSON: Minister no doubt this is important and it is great that the Federal Government is taking this very seriously, but without a doubt this is not going to be easy to manage and easy to get on top of. I mean we’ve seen online poker, online casinos flourish. How do you feel that you’ll be able to stop punters using and activating offshore accounts through bookmaking firms?

MINISTER ANDREWS: That’s a very good point Shane and in fact in a preliminary meeting I had with Mr Napthine a couple of months ago we explored some of these issues and there are no simple, easy solutions. There are questions about how people transmit money overseas because we live in a world of PayPal and the like where money is regularly transmitted overseas for purchasing a variety of good and services. There’s questions then about the regulation of the internet, the means by which this occurs, again there are difficulties with that and people can get around those things. So I suspect in the end there won’t be one simple solution to this there may be a number of measures we can take but the important thing in having this group is that the industry itself is involved in this. It’s not something that Government alone can do; it has to involve the industry as to what are the possible solutions and how we can put that together.

SHANE ANDERSON: Minister the Federal Government has often stayed clear of racing issues I know that when we had the outbreak of EI back in 2007 there was Federal Government assistance but as a rule racing is considered a state based issue. Is this the first step of perhaps the Federal Government becoming more involved in the racing industry, it is the third or fourth biggest industry in the country.

MINISTER ANDREWS: Look our preference has been to leave it as a state matter. We believe that where states have got responsibilities then they should exercise their responsibilities, but in this case it was the states who approached us because they see that some of the issues involved go beyond their own jurisdiction, that go to matters that the Commonwealth has power in, and so it’s on that basis that they’ve come to us and said look would you be involved. But our primary position is that this is a state based industry, it’s regulated by the states, the revenue goes to the states so we don’t want to change that position.
SHANE ANDERSON: Racing is just one aspect of wagering; of course sports betting is becoming bigger and stronger each and every year. Are you also concerned about the impact that illegal offshore wagering groups could have on perhaps match fixing and the like?

MINISTER ANDREWS: Oh we certainly are, I mean it’s the issue of integrity of racing and indeed the integrity of sports. We have seen reports, from time to time, overseas where there’s been match fixing of cricket or alleged match fixing of cricket and soccer games. So any sport where people can see some reward which they can get from untoward behaviour is one which we have to be concerned about.

SHANE ANDERSON: This illegal offshore wagering working group which has been put together, has, well it’s got a fair significant reach is the best way of describing it because it’s not only your Department of Social Services, there’s an impact through Treasury, there’s an impact through the Communications Department. How do you see this working?

MINISTER ANDREWS: Well that’s right both my colleagues Joe Hockey and Malcolm Turnbull, through their departments, are involved. The Prime Minister asked me to, in effect, take charge of it at the Commonwealth level but we will be working closely with any other department which is relevant to the issue and certainly treasury is and certainly communications is.

SHANE ANDERSON: What will be the timeline around the creation of this working group?

MINISTER ANDREWS: We’ll be consulting over the coming weeks so that we get a broad and fair representation from the industry as to who will be on it. Once we do that I hope that they can have a report back to me in the autumn of 2015.

SHANE ANDERSON: Will you also be looking for members of the public to contribute in some way?

MINISTER ANDREWS: It will be open for people to make submissions, I haven’t thought about the final make-up at this stage of who will be on the group. It will be part of our already existing, or a set if you like, of already existing industry advisory (inaudible) in this area. But yes obviously public submissions are going to be important.

SHANE ANDERSON: Minister appreciate your time this morning.

MINISTER ANDREWS: My pleasure Shane.

SHANE ANDERSON: Kevin Andrews, the Federal Minister for Social Services joining us here on Racing Ahead.

Ends.