

Australian aid to Jamaica a '2022 World Cup tactic'

FOOTBALL Federation Australia has promised to help Jamaica implement Australian taxpayer-funded projects in the Caribbean in what some sports fans believe is an attempt to win support for its 2022 World Cup bid.

Jamaican government and football officials and senior Australian football official John Boulton were signatories of the memorandum of understanding between Jamaica and the FFA.

The agreement was trumpeted in the Jamaican press as a means of giving the Caribbean nation's football industry access to \$60 million in Australian aid money pledged to the region last year by former prime minister Kevin Rudd.

But Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said it "has not provided any funding towards this agreement".

The FFA has pointed out it has pledged to help Jamaica with projects only if and when aid money is approved for developing football in Jamaica.

"Our objective is to serve up some football-related projects in Jamaica and, eventually, other countries, as possible recipients of funding under the overall government development program," Mr Boulton said.

The agreement has raised eyebrows because it was instigated by Peter Hargitay, a Swiss-Hungarian hired by the FFA as a strategy adviser to influence the FIFA executive committee members, who will vote on the Cup host in Zurich on December 2.

Mr Hargitay is considered close to controversial FIFA committee member Jack Warner, who is from Trinidad and Tobago and wields huge power in Caribbean football circles. Mr Warner's support for Australia could be crucial in the later stages of the vote. "The suggestion to consider Jamaica in this context came from Peter Hargitay," Mr Boulton said.

FIFA rules prohibit bidding nations from striking secret deals with officials and member federations to get support for their bids but encourage nations to promote football development in poorer countries.

Mr Hargitay's wife is Jamaican and he owns property on the island. In 2006, he received an apology from its government after he was arrested but acquitted of a drug trafficking incident a decade earlier.

The memorandum of understanding was signed in Kingston, coinciding with a September 27 visit to Jamaica by Mr Warner and FIFA president Sepp Blatter, whom Mr Hargitay has previously advised. Jamaican sports minister Olivia Grange said the FFA help would be financial or in-kind support such as resources, education and equipment. "Australian experts and companies will help to implement the various initiatives. Such support will come either from the FFA or

Australian agencies directly," she said.

Australia's courting of the Caribbean has not gone unnoticed in the US, a major rival for the 2022 rights.

As chief of the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football, Mr Warner will support the US bid during early voting.

"We're very pleased that Australia is spending money in the Caribbean, that's fine, that's a good thing," US Soccer Federation Sunil Gulati said at the Leaders in Football conference in London last week.

While Prime Minister Julia Gillard met Mr Blatter at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich last weekend, Australia was conspicuous by its absence in London.

Instead, FFA executives hosted Paraguay's football team and officials before their match against the Socceroos in Sydney last night. The vote of Paraguayan FIFA executive member Nicolas Leoz is highly sought after by bidding nations.

— The Sydney Morning Herald