

Oakley: AFL limit free agency

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Oakley helped the VFL transform into the AFL during an action-packed 10-year tenure after stepping up as chairman in 1986.

He oversaw the introduction of West Coast Eagles, Adelaide Crows, Fremantle and Port Adelaide, which made its debut in 1997, and was at the helm when Fitzroy bowed out of the competition.

He is happy with the current 18-team structure.

"If the competition gets any bigger there is going to have to be a lot of

central AFL support for the new teams," he said.

"Not only that but the competition standard is going to drop because the players are being spread too thinly, unless we find a new reservoir of players from South Africa or from the Irish side or something of that nature."

Oakley believes Warrnambool is the ideal place for a pre-season match — if the facilities are up to scratch.

Warrnambool's premier football ground Reid Oval, long criticised for its ageing facilities, underwent the first steps in a master plan upgrade

this year. However, a decision to improve its maligned playing surface, which marred a TAC Cup fixture at the ground mid-year, is yet to be reached.

"What it needs is for a lobby out of Warrnambool to actually put some pressure on the AFL to get a game here but you will have to have a ground that meets the standards. That's the critical thing," Oakley said.

"It'd be great to have a game down here in Warrnambool. I think it would get good support and it's a traditional footy area.

"It's produced some

good players in the past." Oakley said the AFL's support at grassroots level was strong, giving itself the best opportunity to grow and prosper.

"The money they've put into grassroots is pretty good compared to most sports," he said.

"Anskick is a massive organisation and I think they do it pretty well.

"Soccer is the danger. There is a lot of junior support for soccer but it seems once the kids get to secondary school age they tend to swap into AFL because the exposure is greater and their mates are playing it."

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