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## Agencies fear charity cuts

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Any cut in donations by the Royal Hongkong Jockey Club could be catastrophic for hard-pressed voluntary agencies, the director of Hongkong Family Welfare Society, Mr Thomas Mulvey, said yesterday.

He was commenting on an announcement by the Jockey Club that increased betting duty was expected to cut its surplus income by a third in the next financial year.

At a press conference yesterday, the club's chief executive, General Sir John Archer, said the Government's share of the money derived from betting had increased by 25 per cent over two years.

Three-quarters of this increase had come from what was formerly Jockey Club income.

Sir John said the club's gross income had fallen by 17 per cent, which meant that after tax the surplus would be cut by about one-third.

"We shall obviously do all we can to make internal economies but as the Financial Secretary acknowledged in his Budget speech, the club's charitable activities will in future have to be looked at carefully," Sir John said.

Describing the news as "depressing," Mr Mulvey said there had already been a big reduction in Community Chest funds for many agencies.

"Although agencies have been asked to go back and present their case for additional fundings, the amount of money will not be as great as in previous years," he said.

On top of this, the Government had indicated a lack of welfare funds for the coming financial year, he said.

"It is depressing news if the Jockey Club cannot at least hold to its previous contributions," he said.

Mr Mulvey urged the club to consider the plight of voluntary agencies and expressed the hope that its direct grants to them would not be cut.

An executive committee member of the Hongkong Social Workers' General Union, Mr Mak Hoi-wah, said he feared the axe might fall on "worthwhile but not marketable" projects such as the summer youth programme.

As the Jockey Club is one of Hongkong's major contributors to charity, Mr Mak expressed concern over the future funding of facilities for the handicapped and the poor.

He said he hoped the club would give priority to projects that would benefit the most people.

The director of the Hongkong Council of Social Services, Mr Hui Yin-fat, said he had noticed that the club had funded many recreational and capital projects which were not meant for deprived groups.

He suggested that the future funding of these projects should be passed on to various Government departments and the Urban Council, leaving welfare funds untouched.

He also suggested that the Government should make up the difference if the club cut donations to agencies.