

CHAPTER 1.3: MERGING OUR INSTITUTES OF SPORT

It is necessary to change Australia's current model. A commonly held view by stakeholders is that the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) has become a competitor to the state and territory institutes and academies of sport (SIS/SAS)—the ninth state—and the issues of competition and lack of co-operation that affect the existing system will not be solved by goodwill and better communication alone.

The Panel's key recommendation is for the AIS to be separated from the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and then to be merged with the SIS/SAS into a single body to form the *Australian Institutes of Sport (AIsS)*. This organisation will have its own separate governing board and a charter to deliver high-performance outcomes. This arrangement should ensure a national approach, eliminating the current issues around co-ordination, co-operation and competition.

The issues stem from competing objectives which, in turn, are based on funding provided by the Australian Government and state and territory governments. In future, the Panel proposes that national programs should be supported by national funding and state and territory programs by state and territory funding, with their objectives realigned accordingly.

This change should seek to ensure that not only are the elite programs optimised but also 'feeder' systems below.

The current structure is second-best because collaboration is voluntary and never guaranteed. Even with reasonable collaboration, when agreeing on their high performance plans, the national sporting organisations (NSOs) still have to deal with each of the AIS and the various SIS/SAS as separate entities with differing objectives, which can be time consuming, expensive and frustrating.

There is also some disagreement about whether the AIS is always a positive. It takes elite athletes from club environments and often replicates the work done by the states and territories. In reality, the AIS and SIS/SAS are mostly focussing on the same athletes—those with potential to represent Australia. As such, they overlap and badging has been a problem.

This was not the way the system was intended. The Australian Government established the AIS in 1981 and its success prompted state and territory governments to develop their own programs.

There have been varying degrees of co-operation and strident protection of jurisdictional patches on all sides. Currently there is no nationally agreed demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of the various Australian Government and state and territory government agencies in respect of high performance and participation sport. The Australian Government and state and territory governments all fund programs supporting athletes that represent the nation. They are also involved in funding community sport.

A new approach built around a greater clarity of role and efficiency is needed. The obvious step forward is for the national programs to be funded and managed by the Australian Government and state and territory programs to be managed by state and territory governments. This would have to be agreed to at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to bind the Australian and states and territory governments to the agreed split of roles and responsibilities. Whilst the Panel acknowledges that this will be a difficult result to achieve, the time has come to acknowledge that the current complex and competitive system is one of the greatest inefficiencies in delivering elite success on the world stage.

The easy solution is to leave the institutes separate and, as in the past, attempt to achieve collaboration across the system through the work of various committees. But this is not the best option. The current structure is limited because collaboration is voluntary and may not always be forthcoming.

The Panel's view is that if we are to have any chance of maintaining elite success internationally we must think nationally. Furthermore, as the world shrinks and other countries invest in training facilities, we can expect more of our most elite athletes to spend more time overseas. The overseas training 'Hubs' will become even more important but this also makes disputing who 'owns' our most elite athletes even less sensible. The duplication which is inherent in the state/territory focus is now one of our greatest opportunities for reform.

The AIS was itself a product of the need for innovative reform, and has been much admired and copied. The time has come once again to grasp the opportunity for reform, define a national system and give it every chance of success.

Any offer to the states and territories should be based on the following propositions:

- The Australian Government should assume financial responsibility for the SIS/SAS, reaching agreement with the states and territories on how this is done.
- The states and territories can still claim star performers as their own. We all know that the public cares less about where the athletes train than where they are from.
- The state and territory located AIS facilities will still be accessible for local programs that the states and territories may wish to develop and fund.

- The Australian Government will pass over to the states and territories the management of any direct service delivery programs at the local level such as the Active After-school Communities (AASC) program. This is in keeping with the principle that the states and territories should have responsibility for delivery of state and territory based programs.
- The proposed structure offers the states and territories some protection from the risk of being left with 'stranded assets' as the sports system moves from being supplier-driven to user-driven.

Combining the institutes would relieve competitive tensions in the elite network and the need for NSOs to shop their programs around the AIS and SIS/SAS. The institutes need to be one national body with state and territory located branches funded entirely by the Australian Government.

State and territory based programs should be funded and managed by the state and territory governments, with Australian Government contributions where appropriate, with the objective of identifying and preparing athletes for progression into national programs. Similarly, local and regional programs should be funded and managed by state, territory and local governments, again with Australian Government funding support, with high performance programs having the objective of identifying and preparing athletes for progression into state and territory programs.

Later in this report, the Panel is clear that providing greater funding to the NSOs will be a further step towards 'sport controlling sport'. In future, the NSOs will 'buy' services from the AIS as they see fit.

The opportunity for significant rather than incremental change is at hand.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 The Australian Institute of Sport should be removed from the Australian Sports Commission and amalgamated with state and territory institutes and academies of sport, into a single Australian Institutes of Sport (AIS), funded by the Australian Government, and with the existing combined funding levels.
- 3.2 For elite sport, the Australian Government should be responsible for support of national level programs, state and territory governments for state and territory level programs and in association with local governments for developmental programs.
- 3.3 State and territory based programs should be funded and managed by the states and territories (even if with Australian Government contributions) with the objective of identifying and preparing athletes for progression into national programs.
- 3.4 Where appropriate the Australian Government and state and territory governments should negotiate appropriate arrangements for use and control of existing facilities used by state and territory institutes and academies of sport.
- 3.5 Australia's high-performance sport system should be based on the principle that elite programs be delivered at optimal locations—and the system must facilitate the engagement of other providers such as universities and private organisations where appropriate.