

CHAPTER 1.7: ENSURING AUSTRALIA'S SPORTS SYSTEM IS OPEN TO ALL

There have always been groups in our community who have not participated in sport. Policy makers and sports administrators need to understand why some people choose a sporting life, while others are less inclined.

The barriers for many people and the impact of our changing demographics and lifestyles on Australians' engagement with sports and physical activity need to be examined so the system can be opened to all.

According to survey data¹² around 50 per cent of Australians participate 'regularly' in sport and physical activity. The 'missing half' has become a formidable policy challenge. If sport contributes to the nation's health and community cohesion, a key task for sports policy makers and administrators is to address the factors and, in some cases, the barriers that prevent participation.

The ageing of the population and the growth of immigration is significantly changing the Australian demographic. This requires strategic focus and provides opportunities for innovation across the sport system. These demographic changes will require new and different approaches and an understanding of where sport fits in the spectrum of entertainment and leisure.

Across our communities we are experiencing significant lifestyle changes and pressures which must be understood in the context of encouraging greater participation in sport and physical activity.

The Panel has identified nine areas which must be a focus of the strategic work done by the reformed Australian Sports Commission (ASC). In each area, specific strategies will be required to understand and remove existing barriers to participation and to create inclusive environments where participation can grow. This focus reinforces the primary recommendation of the Panel, that the ASC needs reform, structural change and appropriate new skills in the strategic leadership of the sports system.

¹² Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission & Department of Health and Ageing, *Participation in Exercise, Physical Activity and Sport, Annual Report 2008*, pp. 12.

The nine areas identified by the Panel are:

- **Women**—taking leadership roles in sport and recognising presence
- **Our ageing population**—supporting relevant sport and recreation and ensuring appropriate infrastructure
- **Our young people**—understanding their options and encouraging new forms of sports and physical activity engagement
- **Indigenous communities**—ensuring resources reach the grassroots and sustainable programs are built
- **The time-poor**—innovation around less structured activities
- **The disadvantaged**—tackling affordability and access issues
- **People with disabilities**—facilitating access and inclusion
- **Migrant communities**—welcoming and providing appropriate access
- **Homophobia and sexuality discrimination in sport**—new opportunities for inclusion

Women: Sports participation rates for women and men are much the same¹³. Participation is marginally higher among young males compared to females but this is reversed among older people. In many respects the issues facing men and women in sport are similar and can be dealt with through the same strategies. However, women require special consideration across the sporting system with respect to representation and funding.

Women are under-represented in leadership roles, as coaches and administrators in sporting organisations. This is an opportunity missed in this extremely competitive sector. Of 50 national sporting organisations (NSOs) that consulted with or made submissions to the Panel, only 15 had a female chief executive officer or executive director. Of the 350 identified board positions in these organisations, only 25 per cent were held by women.¹⁴ In another survey of the top 40 sporting organisations in Australia, only 13 per cent of executive positions are filled by women. With roughly the same number of participants in sport, it would be a realistic goal to have closer to 50 per cent representation of women in these leadership roles.

¹³ Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission & Department of Health and Ageing, *Participation in Exercise, Physical Activity and Sport, Annual Report 2008*, pp. 12.

¹⁴ Analysis by the Independent Sport Panel of publicly available information on board and executive positions of fifty national sporting organisations that engaged with the Panel through the Panel's consultation process. Data was accurate as at 1 April 2009.

The Panel notes the *About Time!* report¹⁵ of the 2006 Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee *Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia* (the Women in Sport Inquiry). There was strong support amongst submissions for the Australian Government to further consider and progress the key findings of the Women in Sport Inquiry. The Panel agrees and notes that acting on the recommendations of the Women in Sport Inquiry will progress this issue significantly, particularly in the context of how women perceive their participation in the sports sector.

On the funding issue, the financial squeeze on women's elite sports is likely to be even more severe than for their male counterparts. The Panel commissioned research into the drivers of commercial sponsorship in sport¹⁶. While sport properties still resonate strongly with male audiences, females are less likely to resonate with women's sport than with other entertainment properties. As a result of this, women's sport will continue to find it more difficult to attract corporate sponsors and media support. This view, expressed here in a preliminary fashion, should be fully explored by the ASC. If it is true, the case for government financial support for women's sport grows. The Panel notes in this context that only two per cent¹⁷ of televised sport is women's sport but women won 57 per cent of Australia's gold medals in Beijing¹⁸.

Our ageing population: Over the next 20 years, Australia's population will undergo some dramatic shifts that will pose enormous challenges and opportunities for promoting sport and recreation.

Australia will have many more young children but it will have lesser growth of numbers in the 35 to 64 year age bracket and a more than doubling of people aged over 65.¹⁹

The relative contraction in the mid-age category spells trouble for sports that rely mostly on parent volunteers to staff their programs. Still, the growing 'grandparent' age group provides opportunities to draw them in as volunteers.

A special focus on older people is now warranted, encouraging them as volunteers and participants. We must support sports and physical activities that meet the needs of older Australians. In the past, the ASC's financial support has gone primarily to young athletes who are engaged in Olympic sports. Virtually nothing has gone to lifetime sports like golf, bowls and tennis or to sports organisations with programs for older people. This needs to change.

15 Parliament of Australia, Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee, *About Time! Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia*, September 2006.

16 Gemba Group, *Australian Sport—Commercialisation, Challenges and Opportunities*, August 2009, pp. 22.

17 Australian Government, *Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Directions*, pp. 7.

18 The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP (Minister for the Status of Women), Speech for International Women's Day—Women's World Cup, North Sydney Oval, Sydney, 8 March 2009.

19 KPMG, *Impact of Demographic Change: The Future of Sports Participation in Australia*, August 2009, pp. 38.

The young: Young people participate in a wide range of sports. Their participation in more traditional sports is being affected by their increasing involvement in ‘non-traditional’ sports, which involve physical activity and participation rather than formal competition. The Panel was consistently informed that this is a significant trend with decreasing participation rates in the more traditional, team based sports marked by formal structures and competitions.

Teenagers have changing priorities as they complete school, begin to work and become more involved in other activities. They also have competing commitments. Teenagers have become more involved in computer based activities and social activities and place less emphasis on participating in sport.

There is a lack of sporting role models who are accessible to teenagers and that may be having an impact. For young women in particular, self esteem and body image issues may play a role in keeping them away from sport.

Many drivers are at play in changing the way in which young Australians engage with sport and physical activity. The Panel was provided with compelling evidence of the range of entertainment and recreation activities with which sport now competes, the emerging trend of greater emphasis on other social activities, and the rapidly changing dynamic of family life²⁰.

Elsewhere the Panel has made recommendations about the need to reunite sport with the education sector, and the ASC should take a lead role in designing innovative strategies for the greater sporting participation of our young people. This must include understanding the role of all relevant institutions, including universities, technical colleges and other places of learning.

Demographic analysis commissioned by the Panel confirmed the need for specific and focused attention to be given to the engagement of young people²¹. In the next 30 years, Australia will experience a significant growth in children and young people. If we are to properly engage those young people and promote their involvement in sport and physical activity we require a considered strategic plan, utilising all available assets and focusing on the role of community based sport as a priority.

Indigenous communities: The potential for sport to contribute to ‘Closing the Gap’ in Indigenous health and well-being is widely recognised. The Panel has consulted with Indigenous stakeholder groups, including organisations that deliver sport and physical recreation services to Indigenous communities.

²⁰ Gemba Group, *Australian Sport—Commercialisation, Challenges and Opportunities*, August 2009, pp. 14.

²¹ KPMG, *Impact of Demographic Change: The Future of Sports Participation in Australia*, August 2009, pp. 38.

There is an opportunity for the ASC, in partnership with governments, NSOs, business and many others, to define the sustainable and strategic role of sport in delivering health, educational and employment opportunities for Indigenous people and communities.

Sport is a proven way to engage Indigenous young people but is under-resourced, and often not connected with other engagement programs. Sports facilities and resources are minimal in most remote communities. Much is being spent but little actually reaches the communities with much of the resources being absorbed in administration. Government departments and non-government organisations (NGOs) often use sport to achieve other social outcomes but they are not coordinated with sports infrastructure leading to wasteful, duplicated and ineffective outcomes. Put simply, there are too many missed opportunities in the lack of a coordinated strategy using sport as a means of delivering significant benefits to Indigenous Australians.

Vast amounts of energy and time of community development workers is absorbed in applying for grants and making acquittals to multiple stakeholders. The costs and time of dealing with remoteness and long distances pose enormous challenges. The Panel observes that a return airfare from Sydney to Los Angeles is now cheaper than a flight between many regional centres in Australia.

All levels of government are involved in the delivery of sport and recreation services to Indigenous Australia. The general view is that a combination of limited funding, a duplication of activities, limited strategic direction and limited understanding of the Australian sports industry has resulted in an inefficient, fragmented and under-resourced approach.

Concerns were also raised that funding is committed through annual application-based grant processes. These have historically supported one-off, short-term activities that limit the development of genuine community capacity and undermine the potential for sustainable community-run sport programs.

Less than 25 per cent²² of Australia's Indigenous people live in remote areas and so this is an issue that involves capital cities as well as regional Australia. And the Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population. Over half is under 30 years old.

The ASC needs to work with various stakeholders to address the problems described above. Sports, particularly those that are popular in Indigenous communities, have a special role in supporting education and employment strategies and are valuable contributors to building social capital in communities. There is great potential here for new collaboration and the expansion of programs which have demonstrated their success, but struggle to attract sustainable long term funding and commitment.

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2006, cat. no. 4705.0.

Sport offers one of the most efficient and trusted pathways for success for many Indigenous people and communities. We underplay its significance in Australia and fail to take advantage of one of our clearest opportunities to deliver successful social outcomes—it's not just about Aboriginal role models in sport—it is the total pathway of health, setting clear goals, aligning sporting opportunities with responsibility around education and employment.

NSOs should be encouraged to further their commitment to Indigenous athletes. With the growing numbers of elite Indigenous athletes, there is a significant opportunity to support a number of them who wish to work with their communities after they retire from full-time competitive sport.

The time-poor: The two-income and single parent families are on the rise. This creates more families that are “time-poor” and leaves little time for sport. For some, exercise is ‘purchased’ at a gym although this is unlikely for those who are financially, as well as time, poor.

For many, their own schedules are generally incompatible with organised sport. Exercise has to be squeezed in where it can. Building greater flexibility into the timing of exercise programs and fixtures will help. While some traditional sports are expanding, the growth areas include activities such as walking, running, cycling and aerobics/gym exercise, essentially activities that can be done on an individual basis. There is substantial growth in the number of people engaged in non-structured physical recreational activities, such as skateboarding, skiing, golf, cycling and in more informally organised competitions such as mixed indoor cricket, netball and volleyball.

Elsewhere in this report, we have noted that many traditional sports organisations have an ambivalent view of these ‘fast food sports’. Many NSOs have ignored them and failed to grasp the participation and commercial opportunities that accompany them. From a sports policy point of view, there are at least two implications to be explored. Firstly, public investments in non-traditional assets such as bike paths and skateboard parks are important, as are the tennis courts and cricket grounds. And secondly, the NSOs should be encouraged to develop more flexible products at club level, less organised around traditionally structured competition fixtures.

The disadvantaged: Social background, gender and disability all have a strong influence on the scope and quality of early experiences of sport. Club sports are made up mostly of children from middleclass backgrounds, which is due in part to cultural traditions but also because participation requires adequate disposable income to pay for fees, uniforms, equipment and transport.

The link between lower income families and low participation in sporting activities has been noted elsewhere. *The Children and Sport* report found a strong correlation²³ between participation and family income. The parents of junior sport participants were predominantly in white-collar occupations.

The costs of participating in sport and recreation are said to be increasingly onerous for many working families. Sports are facing escalating costs. Insurance costs are increasing and facility owners (including local government) are moving to more commercial charges for use of their facilities. The sporting clubs themselves struggle with replacement of volunteers with paid support.

In many sports there is a greater demand for higher quality facilities which come at costs not easily absorbed by local sporting organisations. Hockey is an extreme example where the use of expensive synthetic pitches has become the norm. The drought is providing serious challenges to tennis courts, cricket and football grounds around much of the country.

Insurance costs illustrate the problem. The 2002 Senate Standing Committee on Economics *Inquiry into the impact of public liability and professional indemnity insurance cost increases*²⁴ showed that sport and recreational organisations have been disproportionately affected by increases in the cost of public liability insurance. These increased premiums are being passed on to the participants at the grassroots level. This issue continues to place financial burdens on community sporting clubs.

The cost of sport participation has increased by much more than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or inflation. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)²⁵, the CPI increased in Australia by 36.6 per cent over the 10 years from 1998–99 to 2008–09.

The data suggests the ABS sports participation expenditure class (that includes sporting club subscriptions and registration fees) increased by up to 69.4 per cent over the same period.²⁶ A broad and informal analysis conducted on behalf of the Panel by the Australian State Sports Federations Alliance (ASSFA) shows an average increase in costs of 92 per cent across 15 randomly selected local clubs and sporting organisations.

Participation involves costs for boots, uniforms, bats, racquets, gloves and protective helmets, or the petrol required to transport children to venues. For many families these escalating costs are

23 Tim Olds PhD, Jim Dollman PhD, Kate Ridley, Kobie Boshoff PhD, Sue Hartshorne, Simon Kennaugh University of South Australia, Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission, *Children and Sport—the full report, A report prepared for the Australian Sports Commission, a research report by the University of South Australia*, 2004.

24 Parliament of Australia, Senate, Senate Standing Committee on Economics, *Inquiry into the impact of public liability and professional indemnity insurance cost increases, A Review of public liability and professional indemnity insurance Report*, 22 October 2002.

25 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index series*, cat. no. 6401.0

26 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Consumer Price Index series*, cat. no. 6401.0

increasing burdens on family budgets and limit their ability to support children participating in multiple sporting competitions and physical activities. Some sport and physical activity groups have tried to support families by reducing registration fees when several children from the same family participate in a sport. This comes at the expense of the club through loss of revenue or increased expense for other families.

A task for the ASC is to consider how these costs can be contained and whether forms of assistance to the poorest families can be devised to encourage participation.

The Panel understands there are a small number of postcode areas in Australia where a disproportionately high level of social disadvantage is to be found. If sport is a positive force for community health and social inclusion, it may be possible to test its effects where its impacts are most needed.

Persons with disability: There were calls for more funding for sporting and other organisations that provide services and support to athletes with disabilities at both the elite and community level.

Appropriate levels of funding should be made available to community organisations to increase participation in physical activity by marginalised or isolated groups, such as people with a disability. It was suggested financial support should be ongoing.

Consistent with other areas of sport, there was a call for a better co-ordinated approach to sport for people with a disability. There is the need to ensure all sporting organisations adopt an ethos of inclusion for people with a disability.

Better coaching for athletes with a disability is an area that needs improvement. There should be general inclusion of related training courses for coaches in all sports for people with a disability. Some submissions said it should be mandatory for ASC coaching courses to include a component on coaching and training athletes with a disability.

The cost alone is prohibitive for many people who want to try different sports. The cost of specialised equipment, for example specially fitted out chairs, is extremely high and a barrier to participation for people with a disability.

The ability of sports for people with a disability to capture the sponsor dollar has always been difficult and this is becoming increasingly so as the pool of corporate funds shrinks in the current economic climate.

Also at the community participation level, there are difficulties experienced by athletes with a disability participating in sports with able bodied athletes. The basic skill levels required are different and that makes competing practically impossible, and does not encourage involvement.

Currently many people with a disability participate in sport outside a structured sporting organisation. This results in a missed opportunity for both the individual and the sports organisation.

Important programs such as Sports CONNECT²⁷ exist. This is a national framework that builds pathways for people with disability to get involved in sport by creating and developing relationships between sports and disability organisations.

Through the work of Sports CONNECT more people with disability are recognising the many social and health benefits resulting from involvement in sport. At the same time it is important that sports organisations continue to develop awareness of the significant benefits of involving people with disability either as participants, administrators, volunteers, coaches or officials.

Our migrant communities: Today, around 25 per cent of the Australian population (around 5.3 million people)²⁸ were born overseas and that percentage is even higher in Sydney and Melbourne. A language other than English is spoken in 20 per cent of homes²⁹. These numbers will increase further over the coming decades and the source of migrant intake is also shifting from Europe towards Asia and the Middle East. Today, after English, the most commonly spoken language in Australia is Chinese, followed by Italian, Greek, Arabic and Vietnamese.

ABS survey data³⁰ suggests that ethnic minorities and people born in non-English speaking countries are more likely to have lower participation rates in sport and physical activity. It is difficult to engage new migrants in sport at all. First-generation migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds show low levels of participation.

There are many barriers to migrant participation associated with cultural differences.

Although language is the most significant, migrants often prioritise earning a living during the process of settlement and do not have the time for social or leisure activities. Other barriers also include the availability of culturally appropriate community programs, such as the issue of mixed groupings in exercise classes. The sporting preferences of migrant groups may be in less accessible sports such as badminton and table tennis.

There are great challenges here for social inclusion but there are opportunities for sport to contribute to building a better society. The sports sector, through the NSOs, should be encouraged to work with migrant groups to a greater extent than it has done to date.

²⁷ www.ausport.gov.au

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Migration, Australia, 2006–07* cat. no. 3412.0

²⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing, 2001*.

³⁰ For example, ABS data from the 2005–06 Multi-purpose Household Survey indicated that only 36 per cent of people were born in southern or eastern European countries and 38 per cent of migrant from north African and middle eastern countries participated in some kind of physical activity.

The Panel believes that in its role in advising the Australian Government on issues of social cohesion and the social participation of migrants in Australian society, the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) should consider the unique role of sport in this regard and work with the ASC to design specific strategies to encourage greater participation and engagement.

Homophobia and Sexuality Discrimination: State and territory anti-discrimination laws within Australia recognise the equal rights and respect due to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and sport is covered by these state/territory laws. The Panel was advised that researchers have recently identified sport as a significant site of homophobic discrimination, and that gay, lesbian and bisexual athletes face significant unique challenges. These range from dealing with the impacts of homophobia, the concealing of sexuality, and the resultant impacts on sporting performance and opportunity.

In research conducted in Australia in 2004, an increasing number of same-sex attracted young people indicated that they felt discriminated against due to their sexuality, with sport identified as an unsafe environment. Those who suffered abuse or discrimination fared worse on every indicator of health and well being.

The Panel believes that this is an area which has been largely neglected in sports policy and where the ASC can play an important role in working with researchers and the sports community to better understand the issue and work to build appropriate strategies for more inclusive outcomes.

Recommendations:

- 7.1 The Australian Sports Commission, in consultation with Australian Government, state and territory and local governments and agencies and appropriate experts, should develop strategies as a matter of priority in the nine key areas identified by the Panel. In each category, the Panel has made specific comment on the key issues to be addressed and these should provide the context in which strategies and recommendations are designed and communicated across the sporting system. In some instances, this would involve the setting of targets, the undertaking of new research and analysis, and significant community consultation.
- 7.2 The Australian Government should choose several geographic areas across Australia where many or most of the nine issues exist and contribute to significant social disadvantage, and design projects which place sport, recreation and volunteering at the centre of plans to improve community outcomes. This would involve collaboration with the state, territory and local governments and agencies responsible for indicators of disadvantage in partnership with national sporting organisations, non-government organisations and communities.