

2.2: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Findings

7. Various levels of government have developed roles in high performance and participation sport often responding to jurisdictional priorities and without reference to national strategic priorities.
8. As a consequence there is not universal agreement on the roles and responsibilities of each tier of government in high performance and participation sport.
9. All stakeholders in sport, both government and non-government, have increasing participation as a key goal, yet there is little or no co-ordination among these bodies to achieve that goal.

CLARITY OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Australian Government introduced funding programs for national sporting organisations (NSOs) in the 1970s. This funding supported high performance athletes and the administration of the NSOs. Funding for participation programs and service delivery were added over time. Similarly state and territory programs have been developed and introduced for high performance and participation programs over the past few decades. There have been varying degrees of co-operation and collaboration on the one hand and strident protection and defence of Australian Government and jurisdictional patches on the other. The current situation is that there is no nationally agreed demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of the various Australian Government and state and territory government agencies that develop strategy and implement policy and programs in both high performance and participation sport.

The current lack of co-operation and co-ordination of effort among the main stakeholders in both elite and participation arenas demands a new national approach. This will need to be agreed to at the Council of Australian Government (COAG) to bind the Australian Government and state and territory governments to the agreed split of roles and responsibilities in implementing the national sports policy framework discussed in the previous section.

PRINCIPLES OF AN EFFECTIVE HIGH PERFORMANCE AND PARTICIPATION SYSTEM (IN A FEDERATED SYSTEM)

Such a national sports policy framework needs to clearly articulate targets for elite and participation sport. How to achieve those targets, the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and a funding package should all be part of the policy.

A body is needed to implement the national sports policy framework. This body should have overarching responsibility to provide leadership in the implementation of the framework including high performance and participation sport. Rather than set up an entirely new body, the Panel is of the view that the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) can be modified to take on this task.

In this respect, the ASC needs to be reconstituted to be responsible for:

- setting standards for implementation under the parameters of the national framework
- developing and implementing strategy for achieving the objectives / targets
- allocating funding for high performance programs and possibly participation programs
- monitoring and evaluation.

The composition of the ASC board will need to be considered, as will the staff to ensure that the right skill sets are in place to meet the new objectives.

The ASC must not be compromised by conflict of interest. It cannot be both a funder and a service provider. In the elite space, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) risks being conflicted, being controlled by the ASC, as well as part of the national delivery system that the ASC funds. Similarly, in grass roots sport, the ASC currently runs the Active After-school Communities (AASC) program which operates in spaces that other areas of government and sporting organisations also work.

PRINCIPLES IN THE ELITE SYSTEM

If the objective of Australia's elite sporting system is to produce athletes to represent Australia and/or achieve international success, this demands a cohesive and co-operative approach. The primary driver for a national program must be to service the needs of the sports and the athletes in an optimal manner. To achieve this goal, the system needs to be able to reach beyond the self-interest of the various institutions.

Under the current system, issues of competition and lack of co-operation will not be solved by goodwill and better communication alone. The issues stem from the basic competing objectives, which are in turn based on funding provided by Australian Government and state and territory governments.

It is therefore necessary to change the model. The logical solution is for national programs to be supported by national funding and state/territory programs by state/territory funding, with objectives realigned accordingly. This realignment should have the objective of ensuring that not only are the top end elite programs optimised, but also the 'feeder' systems below them.

This will relieve competitive tensions in the elite network and the need for NSOs to shop their programs around the AIS and state and territory institutes of sport and state and territory academies of sport (SIS/SAS). These organisations need to be one organisation with, in effect, state/territory branches funded entirely by the Australian Government.

PRINCIPLES IN THE PARTICIPATION ARENA

In the participation arena, there are areas that are appropriately the responsibility of all levels of government but all are operating in the same spaces with little co-ordination. A simple demarcation of responsibility is required.

At the national level, the Australian Government should be responsible for setting strategy and standards of delivery for participation programs by other tiers of government. At the state, territory and local levels, governments should be responsible for delivery of sport participation programs. This may involve provision of funding from the Australian Government to enable state and territory governments to deliver programs, usually on the basis of making a contribution to the overall resources required with the balance being provided by state, territory and local governments.

The key elements of an overarching participation strategy are further discussed in the section *Participation in Sport*, but include:

- public awareness
- facilities
- tax reform
- coaches, officials, administrators
- after school programs
- school sport / physical education

High Performance Sport

High Performance Sport Findings

10. Many aspects of the current elite system have clearly worked well to produce outstanding international results over the past 15 to 20 years.
11. Despite these positive elements there are system failures, and, it seems likely that better results may have been achieved with a better system.
12. The Panel observed these failures in the current elite sport system:
 - a lack of co-operation and at times direct competition between key government providers—the Australian Institute of Sport and the state and territory institutes and academies of sport—even within the same sports.
 - a lack of adequate feeder programs to support the Australian Institute of Sport and the state and territory institutes and academies of sport.
 - a lack of sufficient involvement by sporting organisations in their own programs.
 - an ‘institute-centric’ approach, which largely ignores the potential of other organisations to contribute to high-performance programs.
 - fewer talented athletes flowing to the finishing schools due to:
 - i. the decline of sport and physical training in education.
 - ii. the decline in active play for children.
 - iii. the decline or stagnation of participation in sport at all levels.
 - Australian Government and state and territory government funding over recent years has not kept pace with the increasing costs of high performance sport.

ELITE SYSTEM FAILURES

National programs are supported by funding from the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and state/territory governments. State and territory governments are also responsible for state and territory programs. Inevitably, state and territory institutes of sport and state and territory academies of sport (SIS/SAS) programs become a mix of national and state and territory priorities. An example of the difficulty this creates is illustrated by the situation of head coaches of SIS/SAS programs who have potentially four masters:

- the ASC, which provides funding and has high-level involvement in the program;
- the SIS/SAS, which also provides funding and has high-level involvement ;
- the national sporting organisations, which notionally owns the program and may be providing additional funds or other resources; and
- the state sporting organisations, which may provide funding and other local support and is responsible for feeder programs.

SIS/SAS organisations contend that competition among them is helpful and desirable. It is difficult to see merit in this view unless the object of Australia's elite system is for them and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) to compete against each other for superiority. At present, sports have to shop around the AIS and SIS/SAS trying to develop a national program, potentially going to nine organisations. Sometimes they must play one off against others instead of being able to negotiate a proper outcome through one organisation.

The result is often a cobbled-together attempt to satisfy varying and at times competing interests of the AIS and SIS/SAS stakeholders. There is no clear national leader in planning and managing elite programs. An element of control is in the hands of each stakeholder. It is difficult to imagine an optimal national program arising from such a process.

The focus of both the AIS and SIS/SAS is primarily on national level athletes. However, AIS and SIS/SAS programs are only a part of the elite athlete development pathway. The success of these programs depends on the availability of talented athletes produced by the 'sub-elite' pathways, over which they generally have little direct control or input. While the AIS currently has an appropriate national focus, SIS/SAS focus is also primarily directed upwards. Closer co-operation with the feeder systems will be beneficial. It should be noted that funding for state sporting organisations (SSOs) does not come from the SIS/SAS, but from the relevant state or territory department, which may not have complementary high-performance objectives.

Identifying talent at this level is limited by resources. It is mostly conducted by coaches and not supported with the scientific rigour applied in national programs. As well, children develop at different rates, so there must be sufficient flexibility within a SIS/SAS program to identify talented athletes regardless of age.

Currently this may not be the case, depending upon program criteria. For example, if the criteria demands accepting national-level athletes only on scholarships, then the job of getting them to that level falls on community sport (and regional academies in New South Wales and Victoria) over which the SIS/SAS has little influence. This raises the question of whether talent is being identified and picked up efficiently.

In summary, while co-operation among the various institutes and academies exists, there are issues

about demarcation of responsibilities and program objectives. While these issues remain, the system cannot be optimal. World-class athletes will continue to be produced but there is likely to be an opportunity cost. A system that is better co-ordinated is likely to produce better results more efficiently.

A NEW ELITE SPORT SYSTEM

The Panel believes a new structure to address the current system failures is needed. A table representation of proposed roles and responsibilities and explanatory notes follow.

National Sports Organisations

Given the current elite sport delivery system, it seems logical to suppose that the organisations best qualified to run elite programs are the sports themselves. However, there is divided opinion on this issue.

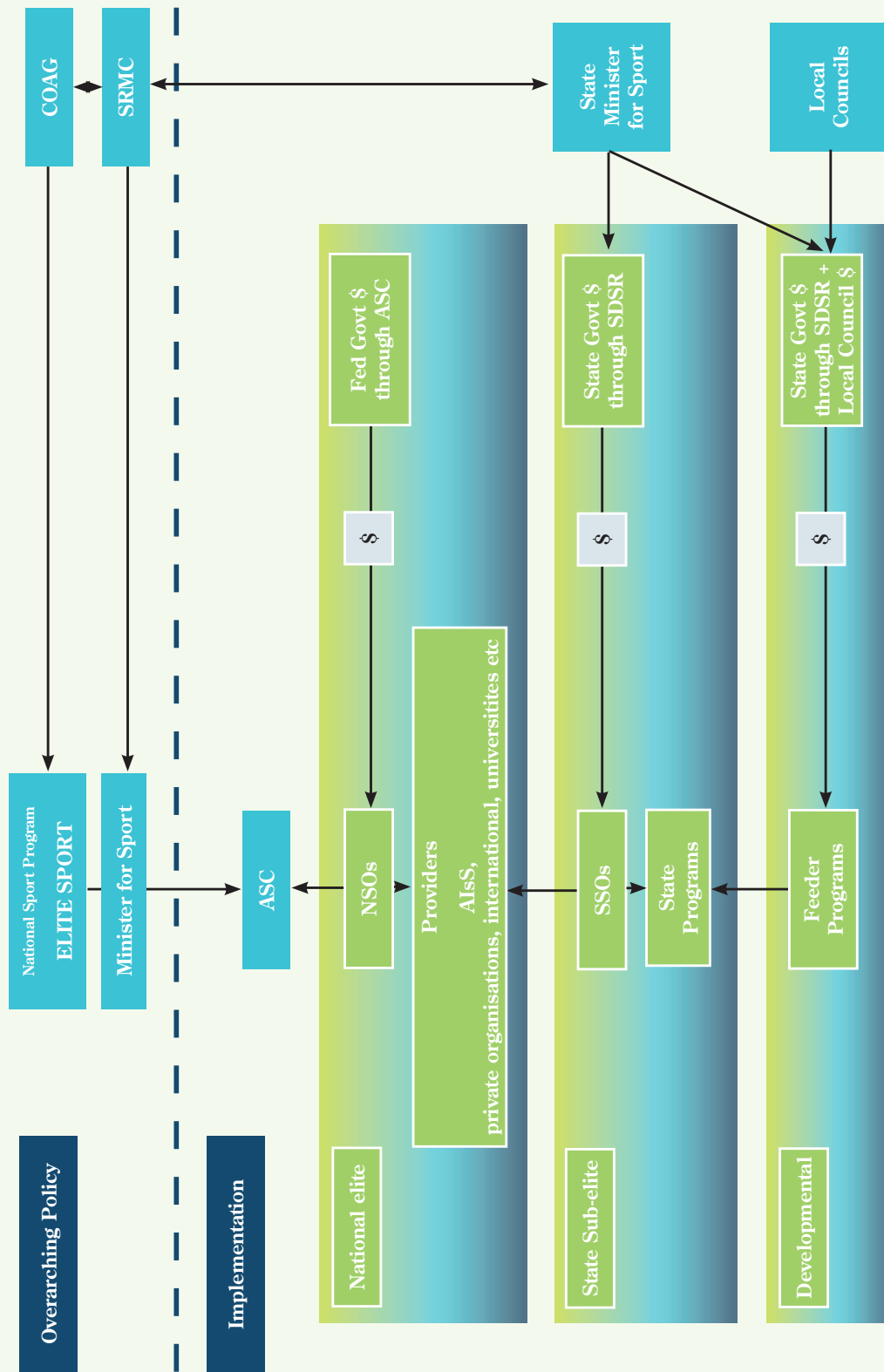
At the commencement of the *Olympic Athlete Program (OAP)* funding in 1993, the elite programs of many sports were under-resourced and well behind world's best practice. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) took a necessarily interventionist approach with national sporting organisations (NSOs) to ensure that substantial program improvements came with the extra funds.

To a certain degree, this approach persists. NSOs are often not part of the final decision making process for programs in their own sports in the elite network. It is 16 years since the OAP funds (which ceased in 2000) and derivations of that program started to flow, and if NSOs that have received major funding during that time have not acquired the expertise to manage their own sports then something is seriously wrong. A number of sports have run highly successful programs for many years, albeit in association with the elite network. The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and the state and territory institutes and academies of sport (SIS/SAS) contend that it is important to maintain control of elite programs from the point of view of protecting government investment. While noting the need for oversight of sports to ensure appropriate accountability of government funds, it is time to give sports more say in their own programs.

There are a number of sports that are capable of taking responsibility for their own programs but the capacity of sports to run themselves under the new paradigm will need careful assessment by the ASC.

In the future, an NSO should develop its plan covering high performance programs and community participation with guidance from the ASC. It would then apply to the ASC for funding. The ASC would then allocate funding. The NSO could then 'buy' services from various providers to deliver elite programs, the NSO choosing from current providers such as the Australia Institutes of Sport (AISs) but also universities, private operators, and overseas bases.

Table 1: A New Elite Sport System: roles and responsibilities



The NSOs would then report outcomes to the ASC whose job would include monitoring and evaluation. The provision of funding in the first place would be subject to adequate plans and targets being in place. Provision of funding will give the ASC leverage to push sports to focus on participation strategies as well.

Other sports may require an approach that involves more control and input and this should be assessed on a case by case basis.

Providers: The Australian Institutes of Sport (AIsS)

The key shift in this model from the current structure is the separation of the AIS from the ASC to be merged with the SIS/SAS into a single body (the Australian Institutes of Sport or AIsS). It will have a separate governing board and a charter to deliver high-performance outcomes at the national level and the capacity to deliver high-performance outcomes at state and territory levels when required. This arrangement should ensure a national approach, eliminating the current issues around co-operation and competition.

Providers: Engagement of other organisations

There are opportunities for the sport sector to more closely engage with other sectors to mutual advantage. Universities, for example, own sporting facilities, have departments relevant to elite sport (sport science, medicine) from which research and student placements might be accessed. Universities may even offer opportunities to host national or state/territory level programs in the same manner as the AIS/SIS/SAS do now. Indeed a number of universities currently provide more funding to elite sport programs than some of the SIS/SAS network do.

Co-operation with other industries may offer opportunities. In an example of this, the AIS has been working with the Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organisation (CSIRO) on sport science programs in recent years, with encouraging results. Partnerships with 'Information Technology' companies may identify initiatives applicable to sports. There are likely to be many other examples.

Sporting organisations, at all levels, governments and communities need to make more effort to identify and take advantage of opportunities across sectors.

The current system works against such broader engagement. With NSOs reliant on both national and state/territory government funds for their programs, they are forced to use national and state/territory government institutions whether this is optimal or not. NSOs are unable to take advantage of opportunities outside this system. The new funding model will assist in fixing this problem.

High performance program delivery

Under this model, the process will be:

- NSO develops high-performance plan
- NSO applies to ASC for funding
- ASC makes a grant to the NSO
- NSO 'buys' from providers
- NSO reports to ASC
- ASC monitors and evaluates
- State and territory programs feed national programs, and developmental programs feed state and territory programs.

At each level, the relevant government is responsible for funding: national funding for national programs, state/territory funding for state/territory programs and local funding for local programs. This arrangement will overcome the competitive disputes, lack of co-operation and overlapping priorities among and within providers, which currently exists at the national level.

With the power of funding, the NSOs will choose the most effective agencies to deliver their programs. This potentially includes current providers, (the new amalgamated AIsS), but also other potential providers, such as universities, private operators, and overseas bases. The AIsS would be a provider like any other. If the sport is best served by being delivered through the AIsS, then so be it. If it is not, then so be it. Only in this way can optimal programs be developed.

The initial centralised concept of the AIS is long past its usefulness. Flexible delivery has been happening for many years, not just within Australia but internationally. The ASC has recognised this with development of the Eurohub to service athletes training and competing in Europe. Many athletes spend significant periods of each year overseas training and competing with the best athletes in their fields. This trend will certainly continue, as athletes not only chase competition, but also income in overseas leagues which offer better returns than in Australia. Flexibility is more than ever a cornerstone of elite programs, including the ability to meet the needs of athletes overseas as well as athletes in Australia. This is a logical extension of that process.

All levels must be interlinked. There is little long or even medium-term sense in having a national program without feeder programs. Fully established pathways must be in place as a precondition of hosting a national program. A national program will attract the best athletes, coaches and support staff in the country and the interaction with them and their state, territory and local level compatriots will benefit all levels, creating a centre of excellence.

High Performance Co-ordination

While responsibility for athlete preparation rests with the NSO, there is still a need for co-ordination of programs that run across all sports. These include:

- elite coaching and high performance management programs
- career and education services for athletes
- facilitation of international activities
- sport science and sport medicine
- research and development
- information and communication technology.

The AIS should provide the co-ordination of these programs across sports:

- **Elite coaching programs**—Coaches benefit from exposure to the methods and techniques of others, not just within their own sport but across sports. High performance managers too, benefit similarly and can learn from experiences of others in different sports. Cross-fertilisation of high performance personnel is to be encouraged and it is logical that this be co-ordinated on a national basis.
- **Career and education services for athletes**—The Athlete and Career Education program is a well established program reaching athletes in the entire AIS/SIS/SAS network, sensibly coordinated by the AIS. This program assists athletes in many ways, including in work, education and transition from an athletic career to society in general. It is also clear that relevant sporting organisations and government agencies responsible for these athletes have practices in place to attend to the mental health and wellbeing services. For example, the AIS has in place the Athlete Counselling Services that provides psychological services and programs aimed at enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of AIS athletes.

The Panel conducted a survey of high-performance athletes. When asked whether Australian sports people have the pastoral care and athlete development necessary to support them in pursuit of their sporting goals, 65 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed. Of the balance of those surveyed 21 per cent were neutral on the proposition that there is sufficient pastoral care, and only 17 per cent either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposition.

However the Panel is concerned for the mental health and well-being of athletes from commercially successful sports and from government funded high-performance sports. Mental health issues among athletes and associated problems are regularly documented in the media.

The concern of the Panel is that such services are not evidently in place for athletes at lower levels of the athlete pathway, or for elite athletes that have not succeeded and are no longer on high-performance or commercial sport programs. The Panel is of the view that there is a clear role for commercial sports and for governments to create a regular dialogue on the mental health requirements of these athletes. Mechanisms that provide some level of monitoring and support of athletes outside of current mental health frameworks need to be put into place.

- **Facilitation of international activities**—With so many of Australia’s athletes in a wide range of sports spending more time overseas, there is a clear need to ensure that they are properly serviced and have access to high quality training and competition.

There is a clear case for initiatives such as the ‘Eurohub’, a centre for athletes to live and train in Italy, with high quality servicing. This enables athletes to compete in competitions in Europe without returning so frequently to Australia to access what they need.

Sports can also benefit from the experiences of others in different parts of the globe without being in a centre. Recommendations on training venues, accommodation, local service providers, travel arrangements etc can result in better outcomes and cost savings.

Facilities such as the ‘Eurohub’ and collation of other international information, is best handled with a national approach.

- **Sport science and sport medicine, Research and development, Information and communication technology**—A focus on sport science and medicine has served Australia well in elite sport. World leading approaches in athlete servicing and innovations from research and development have meant that Australian athletes are often better prepared and equipped than their competitors. This has been one of Australia’s competitive advantages, going some way to overcoming the odds of competing successfully against countries with access to far larger talent bases.

It is clear that strong support for sport science and medicine must continue as one of the fundamental pillars underpinning elite performance.

There was very little feedback or input on the subject of sports sciences, medicine and technology throughout this review process. However, the Panel notes the submission from the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) outlining shortcomings in the co-ordination of sport science as a result of the current independent nature of the AIS/SIS/SAS network. The new structure, where these organisations are brought together as a single entity, should solve these issues.

In addition to the AIS Sports Science and Medicine Centre, there are other agencies with personnel and resources that can contribute to research and development in sport. Universities and the CSIRO and even sport manufacturing companies, could all play a role in progressing sport science and medicine.

Information and communications technology is a rapidly advancing field. New innovations make possible high level communication with athletes and support staff spread around the globe. Transfer of data invaluable to training, performance and competitor analysis is now possible in real time. This is particularly important for Australian athletes, many of which spend considerable periods of time abroad. The status of Australia's capacity in this area needs to be examined across the elite network and, if shortcomings are found within an amalgamated system, then plans need to be developed to address them.

High Performance Implementation

This structure represents a fundamental shift in the way that both Australian Government and state and territory governments seek to achieve outcomes in elite sport. With the ASC, AIS, SIS/SAS and state/territory departments of sport and recreation all affected, the Panel is under no illusion that change will be easy. Opposition will be likely. However, the fact that the change will be difficult does not mean that it should not be undertaken. An overwhelming majority of submissions and consultations suggested change must happen.

Concerns about NSOs having the power but not the capacity to deliver high-performance programs are diminished by the fact that the power in the system remains with the funding body, the ASC. The criteria for funding an NSO's high-performance program will include assessment of the capacity to deliver or a path to get there. This will need to be on a case-by-case basis. Some NSOs will require little involvement, others will need assistance and some may not be in a position to deliver. The degree of management or oversight will be expressed in the funding agreement between the ASC and the NSO. The short term object will be for NSOs to be in a position to deliver their own programs if they aren't already.

Also integral to the agreement will be processes for ongoing monitoring and evaluation involving all parties, including targets to be met and the ability for the ASC to intervene if this process uncovers major issues.

The Panel recognises that the AIS/SIS/SAS may have structures in place including facilities and personnel that, under the new system, are not guaranteed to be used and there is a risk some capacity may be a wasted. However, this is not an issue that is specific to a proposed new system. In the past, various elite programs have moved from place to place as circumstances change. Athletes move of their own volition from time to time to be with different coaches or train with other athletes. Initially, when the system is restructured, there may be a greater than usual change, but this will be a transitory spike in an existing and ongoing process.

If this proves to be the case, resources should be redirected to the new objective of providing greater commitment to the feeder systems—there should be little overall wastage, but rather a redistribution to a more effective system.

It is noted that the current system has no long-term certainty in any case. Australian Government funding has not been provided over a long term (approximately 25 years) to NSOs for their elite programs, so at any time programs in the network are under threat of closure or change. Longer funding periods have been proposed in a number of submissions and there is a strong case to do so. An Olympic cycle is four years, but it takes far longer than that to prepare an athlete to this level. Indicative funding should be provided to relevant NSOs on a rolling cycle of five years, with ongoing and rigorous evaluation. Funding issues are described in more detail later in this part.

The ‘branding’ of athletes has been a major issue between the AIS and SIS/SAS since the system came into existence. Which athlete should wear which logo at what event is a distraction that needs to end. With more and more athletes spending greater periods of each year overseas, it matters less anyhow.

To provide recognition for state and territory funding, dual branding under a single national system will be straight forward, for example the AIS-NSW. The arrangements should be solidified in athlete agreements under principles expressed by the AIS.

There should be minimal impact on the ability of the states and territories to source and service local sponsors and indeed the national structure may provide the AIS with greater leverage to generate national level sponsorship. Government commitments will be made under the COAG agreement and should not be affected.

Regardless of the common sense in the new approach, it is possible that some states and territories will not agree. Ensuring that everything is done to secure agreement in the first place is essential. An important part of this will be seeking the support of the sporting sector.

Based on submissions received, the new system should be welcomed by the majority of sporting organisations. With predictions of worsening elite results unless something is done coming from this sector, the AOC, Australian Paralympic Committee, NSOs, state sporting organisations (SSOs) and other sporting organisations should be expected to be vocal in their support. It will be interesting to gauge the maturity of the sector in this respect. Generally, submissions reflected an understanding that the system must change. Whether the sport sector is able to galvanise a co-ordinated response is uncertain.

The SIS/SAS and AIS may provide the sternest opposition, as the new system will reduce some of their autonomy and open the market to other providers. Aside from logical necessity, there are or could be some levers available to generate support from all parties. Firstly, as state/territory elite programs are dependent on Australian Government funding, this could be made dependent on states/territories agreeing to the new system. States and territories will then have to choose either to fund their SIS/SAS on their own, close the program or be a part of the new system. Secondly, there is a need for overall increased funding. If states and territories want some of that funding to be spent in their jurisdiction, then they will need to be a part of the national system. Finally, as outlined later in this part, the Australian Government might implement other new funding streams, for example a facilities fund, which may also come with a proviso of being part of a national system.

An optimal system will be effective only if it is funded to succeed. Targets for elite success are discussed in an earlier section. Regardless of which targets the Australian Government adopts, it is clear that costs are rising and removal of current duplication will only go part way to solving the issues. If the Australian Government decides current rankings are to be maintained then additional funding must be provided.

One of the fundamental principles of successful athlete programs is ongoing and frequent exposure to international competition. In the lead up to the Sydney Olympics, Australia hosted a large number of international competitions as athletes were keen to train and compete in Australia as part of their preparation for the Olympics.

Australian athletes now have to seek most of their international competition experience overseas. This is far more costly in many ways—it is not just about airfares. An effective international program requires support personnel including, coaches and managers travelling with the athletes. It also includes sport science and medical support either travelling with the unit or sourced locally. Some sports have special needs—transport and storage of sailing boats and rowing shells for example. All athletes need training venues.

These and other factors add up to the fact that the same level of funding now buys less international competition than before. The Panel is not able to put a figure on what governments should provide for elite sport. This is dependent on decisions made with regard to what constitutes elite success and which sports are likely to bring that success. The Panel notes that the AOC has undertaken a significant exercise in identifying the resource needs of sports in order to achieve 'Top Five' success at the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. The Panel is not in a position to second guess these figures, but notes that they may need to be revisited if targets change. The work done by NSOs in developing these figures will be invaluable when undertaking the exercise of putting their high performance plans to the new ASC.

Participation in Sport

Participation in sport Findings

13. The goal of increasing participation has generally been seen by stakeholders primarily in the light of the 'sporting pyramid': that more participants mean more talent available for elite programs.
14. Little attention has been paid by stakeholders at all levels to the importance of increasing participation to bolster the sustainability of sporting organisations or as a mechanism to address health issues in the population.
15. Sport has potential to contribute in a major way to improving the health and well being of the community. This potential is underestimated by all levels of government and as such is under resourced and addressed in an ad hoc manner.
16. Government funding targeted at increasing participation has primarily been provided to national sporting organisations and state sporting organisations—a top down approach. A more holistic approach which includes investment at a local level is needed.
17. Government funding has, at all levels, been primarily provided to sporting organisations on a sport by sport basis, virtually ignoring the multi-causal nature of the issue.
18. There is a dearth of robust data on participation in sport and the agenda is confused with obesity, the roles of unstructured and structured physical activity and participation sport versus elite sport—all relevant and at times competing issues.

It is clear that participation sport is a complex problem. There are many stakeholders: all tiers of government and a number of government portfolios, as well as sporting organisations at national, state/territory and club level. There are many inter-dependent issues and different opinions on how to solve them.

Noting these difficulties, the Panel has approached the issues of participation by attempting to:

- better define the problem
- outlining what action is required
- how this action could be implemented.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM OF PARTICIPATION

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and all state and territory departments of sport and recreation have as an objective increasing participation in sport. Sporting organisations at all levels have the same objective. However, there is no overarching strategy and very little co-ordination.

The delivery of sport is the responsibility of local clubs affiliated with state sporting organisations (SSOs), affiliated with national sporting organisations (NSOs). All levels of government currently provide assistance to help this system deliver outcomes in both elite and participation fields. What is required is better co-ordination in the provision of this assistance.

A robust evidence base enables a clear identification of the problem. Unfortunately, for a major sector of the Australian economy there is an extraordinary dearth of robust data on participation in sport.

Commonly held perceptions such as the impact of cost, influence of role models and major events, need to be unequivocally resolved, as does the most basic of information on participation numbers in sport. From time to time there are reports in the media about the cost of sport preventing children from playing and a number of submissions supported this. However, other data³⁹ suggests that cost is a minor factor only. There seems to be a general view among sporting organisations and governments that role models are important in attracting young people to sport. This can be seen in the efforts of major professional sports to work with their athletes to address binge drinking, illicit drug use and other societal issues. However, the extent that role model behaviour does or does not impact on the decisions of parents and children to participate in a given sport is not well understood. There is also a view, shared and promoted by cities and nations the world over including in Australia, that major sporting events lead directly to increased participation in sport as a legacy, yet this is not supported by research.⁴⁰

³⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Participation in Sports and Physical Recreation Survey (2005–06)*, cat. no. 4177.0.

⁴⁰ Stephen Frawley, A.J. Veal, Richard Cashman and Kristine Toohey, University of Technology Sydney, School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism, Faculty of Business, *'Sport For All' and Major Sporting Events*, February 2009.

If the baseline data is poor, it is very difficult to construct appropriate strategies and impossible to properly evaluate programs.

That said, it is known that participation in sport is dependent on a number of factors and there is no reason to wait before acting.

The sport agenda is also confused with obesity, food intake, physical activity versus sport and participation sport versus elite sport; all relevant but at times competing issues. Effective action is unlikely to be taken to address a problem confused with other issues.

Physical activity (or more accurately physical inactivity) is part of the obesity issue but not the only part—along obviously with what you eat. Sport or structured activity is part of the inactivity issue but not the only part—along with active living strategies such as walking to the bus, taking the stairs and other similar activities.

Sport should not be regarded as ‘the solution to obesity’ or ‘the solution to physical inactivity’ because it alone cannot be. Rather, sport has a critical role to play in strategies to address these larger issues. In this context, the Panel supports the Australian Government’s move to include sport within the health portfolio. This places sport, particularly community based sport, in the Australian Government’s preventative health agenda where it belongs.

It is important for the Australian Government to now use this opportunity wisely and invest the necessary time in making the policy linkages between sport and preventative health messages and issues.

The sport sector has, in recent years, attempted to use the potential of sport to address physical inactivity and obesity issues as leverage for government support, without much success. The Panel supports these efforts, with a caveat. The intent of government support must be clear. Participation needs to be seen as an end in itself, not as a means to bolster the future elite programs or as an adjunct to talent identification. In an environment of fiscal restraint, it will continue to be extremely difficult to convince departments of treasury and finance at both the Australian Government and state and territory level to increase funding for sport if the primary argument is to win international medals.

In this context, the traditional ‘pyramid model’ for sport needs to be rethought, as it is based on and encourages continued focus on elite sport. The pyramid model implies age specifics in that there is a narrow age group that can reach the highest level, therefore those levels below it are primarily a progression from juniors through to senior elite. It therefore excludes people who are participating but have no interest in progressing to higher levels of competition. The assumption in the present system is that all aspire to progress but that only people who are talented enough get through.

The sport sector may see all of that in the pyramid model, but it needs to understand that decision makers outside the sector may not share this view.

If sport is to take its rightful place in the preventative health agenda, the reasons for increasing participation must be clear and understood by the sports industry—to have more people, more active, more often—and clearly articulated beyond the sport sector.

That is not to say that sporting organisations should take their eye off the elite ball. NSOs need to ensure that talent identification programs work efficiently through a sound national pathway. But that is a separate issue—an elite sport issue. Participation for the sake of participation will feed these programs as a matter of course.

A well articulated call for action is required which clearly and concisely states the reasons for increasing participation in sport, the actions required and the targets to be achieved. These must be clear to stakeholders and well publicised to the public. Only then will there be prospects of a co-ordinated government approach backed with sufficient funds to make a difference.

But who must make that well articulated call for action? The sport industry has a multitude of competing interests—sporting organisations, various levels of government, different government departments. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) and the big professional sports have the most influence at present, but are not truly representative of the sport sector in its entirety. Sport as an industry does not have a strong co-ordinated voice and is unlikely to have one in the foreseeable future. Co-operation between stakeholders is ad hoc at best, with a lack of co-operation between and within sport, health and education sectors at all levels. This leads to a lack of coherence and consistency in policy objectives, their associated programs and subsequent outcomes. What successful lobbying that has occurred in the sport sector has been done by the AOC in the elite arena. It is no coincidence that elite sport receives significantly more funding than participation initiatives at the national level.

There is a clear need for a single body to make a clear statement. The earlier discussion on a national sport framework elaborates on this point.

ACTION REQUIRED TO IMPROVE PARTICIPATION

Barriers and motivations to sports participation are inter-dependent, yet efforts to increase participation have been implemented in a piecemeal fashion. For example, efforts to enhance coaching and to assist clubs with administration have and are being made but without a concurrent co-ordinated attempt to address the lack of facilities. If there is nowhere to play, no amount of coaches will help to increase participation.

Strategies must be clearly articulated and acted upon in a co-ordinated fashion. It is only a combination of all actions together that will lead to success.

In this respect, the sport sector can learn much from action that has been taken in the area of tobacco control. Successful strategies to reduce smoking have been clearly articulated and acted upon in a co-ordinated fashion. It is a combination of all actions together that has led to a decrease in smoking and smokers marginalised.

The three pronged approach to the anti-smoking movement resonates with sport participation and public awareness, supported with community level programs and backed with legislation or regulation:

- **Public awareness**—There have been consistently delivered, ongoing and evolving media campaigns against smoking, whereas campaigns on the benefits of sport have been almost non-existent. Any campaigns that have been run with the objective of increasing physical activity focus on unstructured activity, not sport, despite the opportunities offered in this field by sport.

To people on the street, the benefits of sport participation are probably not widely known, beyond 'getting fit'. People participate more by assimilation or association rather than through targeted efforts to educate and encourage them. The objective should be to help people make a conscious decision to participate.

A nationally co-ordinated media campaign would seem a logical and necessary component of any serious effort to increase participation.

- **Community level support programs**—Media anti-smoking campaigns have been backed up by government funded initiatives such as the QUIT program. These programs take advantage of the increased public interest in quitting smoking generated by the campaign, and enable people who wish to quit to obtain help.

In contrast, there has been little effort to ensure that sporting organisations have the capacity to take advantage of interest generated by campaigns to increase physical activity, or major events such as the Olympics and Commonwealth Games which seem, intuitively, to be great opportunities missed. As is mentioned elsewhere there is no real evidence that these events automatically translate into increased participation.

Ensuring that sporting organisations have the capacity to absorb new participants and develop programs to leverage off events and campaigns is an essential part of the strategy mix.

The elite sport system can be delivered at a national level for national level athletes, since the cohort is very small and under the control of national organisations. The same is not true for the vast majority of sport participants. NSOs and SSOs (with the

exception of the professional codes), are generally not well placed to deliver sport at a local level due to the large distances that must be covered because of the geographical size of Australia, as well as a lack of resources. While technically through their local competitions many participants are affiliated with the SSO and through it the NSO, the reality is that local sporting organisations are responsible for delivery of the great majority of sport in Australia. Unfortunately, many suffer from lack of capacity in all forms and are unable to effectively deliver. This is addressed later in this part.

Research indicates that interventions to increase both unstructured physical activity and sport participation are best delivered locally through building capacity in the community. This implies that funding to increase participation should flow from governments direct to community level sport. At present, Australian Government funding is generally provided to NSOs and similarly most states and territories provide funds directly to SSOs, rather than at the grass roots level where it is most needed and where research indicates it would be most effective.

- **Legislation and regulation**—Smoking has been the subject of increasing regulation: frequent and substantial price rises due to increased taxation, restrictions on availability, bans on advertising and sponsorship, requirements for warnings on packaging and declaration of no smoking areas.

The tools of regulation will need to be used in a different fashion in efforts to increase participation. It is easier to regulate against something than it is to encourage something. However there are potential avenues: examples include tax breaks for participation fees, tax breaks for sporting organisations to reduce costs and setting (and applying) minimum requirements for school sport / physical education.

There are four key needs that must be satisfied to enable participation out of the above discussion. These needs are intertwined and are:

A Reason to Play	Challenge: Motivating people and removing barriers to participation
A Place to Play	Challenge: Availability and quality of facilities
The Ability to Play	Challenge: Physical skills and physical activity patterns
Support to Play	Challenge: Sufficient high quality coaches, officials, administrators and volunteers