

# **AUSTRALIAN WATER POLO INC. SUBMISSION TO INDEPENDENT SPORT PANEL**

## **Preamble**

The sports system and the delivery, particularly of high performance sport, is almost completely dependent on the support of the Federal Government, with the exception of some major professional sports.

Being from a team sport I am very conscious of the significance that team sports play in the ethos of all (most) Australians. Following the Athens Olympic Games 2004 there was talk of a possible redirection of funding support away from team sports to individual sports on the basis of the return (in medals) that those sports have the possibility of delivering. This fortunately did not occur.

## **Considerations in response to Terms of Reference**

### **1. Ensure Australia's continued elite sporting success**

#### **Australian Sports Commission**

- Historically sport was overseen on a federal basis by the Department; the disastrous performance at the Montreal Olympic Games 1976 was the catalyst for the establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in 1981 even though an institute of sport had been mooted prior to 1976; the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) was established in 1985 and assumed the responsibility for administering and funding of sport; subsequently its roles and responsibilities were laid out in the Australian Sports Commission Act 1989; the profile of the ASC vis-à-vis the AIS was never great until the ASC in effect "absorbed" the AIS in 1989 and the AIS became a program of the ASC; since that time the ASC has burgeoned into a very large establishment (and bureaucracy) and now is a most appropriate time that the roles and responsibilities of the ASC be redefined.

#### **Unity of Purpose**

- The "Unity of Purpose" to provide a pathway to deliver high performance sport was clearly evident following the successful bid in 1993 to stage the Sydney Olympic Games 2000, with all agencies focusing attention on the one aim even to the extent that parochial interests, including the SIS/SAS networks which are often the captive of state governments, the AIS along with the ASC and AOC to provide a pathway to deliver high performance sport which post 2000 has clearly dissipated into a fragmented approach to the delivery of sport and of high performance sport in particular. New leadership by an over arching independent body may address this or alternatively there may need to be a political solution.

### **Audit of Sporting Facilities**

- A complete audit of all sporting facilities is an essential requirement for sport in this country and while individual sports can address their own particular requirements such a task is clearly a role for either the Commission or Department to undertake.

### **Timing of Funding Delivery**

- The period post the Olympic Games is critical for many sports with employment contracts of coaching and support staff expiring. Following the Athens Olympic Games 2004 we, as a sport, were not aware of our funding until June 2005, receiving funding advice from the Commission for 2005/06 and indicative funding levels for 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09. Accordingly many staff (particularly coaches) were employed to 30 June 2005 and conditionally post 30 June 2005 subject to advice as to funding received. It must be understood that such a system is not conducive to either the retention or employment of staff (particularly coaches). Not only did this occur post Athens Olympic Games 2004 but appears that again this will be so following the Beijing Olympic Games 2008 such is "manna from heaven" for our international competitors. Our sporting system (including the intellectual property lost) is so much the poorer simply because we are unable to align the delivery of our funding appropriately.

### **Athlete Support**

- The Direct Athlete Support (DAS) available to assist and support athletes leading to the Sydney Olympic Games 2000 was a critical ingredient and clearly instrumental to the success achieved in 2000; no such scheme prevailed during the next quadrennium until the introduction in 2005 of the Australian Government Sports Training Grant (AGSTG) and whilst clearly targeted to possible medal chances at the Beijing Olympic Games 2008, the AGSTG provided vital support to our athletes and was responsible not only for the retention of athletes within the system but also assisted greatly athletes to balance their daily training requirements vis-à-vis work and/or study commitments. Unfortunately this scheme ceases on 30 June 2009 and representation needs to be made to continue this or similar in addition to an enhancement of same.

### **Advocacy for Sport**

- There is currently no advocacy group for sport in Australian following the demise of the Confederation of Australian Sport and whilst never representing all sports it did fill a niche and was a voice for sport. Special interest groups including the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) have lobbied successfully for additional funding. The ASC, because of its charter and being an extension of government, is limited in what it is able to do, accordingly, the establishment of an advocacy body for sport is essential. It is possibly a responsibility of sport to pursue this objective.

## **2. Better place sport and physical activity... preventative health approach**

- Whilst the delivery of health services remains a State Government responsibility, this seems to be the appropriate level at which to address the issue of grass roots sport. Grass roots physical health and recreation begins in the school yards and the schools curriculum. Again, a State Government area of responsibility. The Federal Government's role should be that of an overseer, to ensure that there are

broad guidelines of the amount of time dedicated to this activity, and that each child has the opportunity to meet these guidelines. One of the challenges is to have the State Governments and their health departments recognise that physical activity will reduce the long term costs of remedial medicine. It requires some input of funds to ensure that these opportunities are provided, however, the return on this investment may be long term, beyond the term of that current government.

- Dropout from sport and physical activities seems to be highest at the teenage level and this needs to be overcome for both the health of these people, and for the health of our sporting codes. One reason for this dropout, may be the perceived body image which has pervaded our society. If we can address the issue by way of making these young citizens feel comfortable about themselves, we will eradicate one of the most insidious of reasons for not continuing with physical activities.

### **3. Strengthen pathways**

- When looking at maintaining teenagers interests in sport, we find that there are a variety of impediments and other options for their time. Many sports experience the difficulty of transition from school sport to club based sport. The establishment of internet data bases giving easy access to information on where to find clubs and sports is critical and sports need to become fluent in communicating with this age group. A peer group system for athletes to bridge the gap between schools and club sports would be great advantage and might have a reward of some form attached to the success rate.
- One sub-heading of the terms of reference is the effective support of coaches, officials, umpires etc. Could the Sport Panel consider a recommendation to allow out of pocket expenses for this volunteer group be claimed as a tax deduction? Whilst this allowed for professional coaches, referees, all other volunteers are out of pocket, unless they are compensated by the sport, which is rare.

### **5. Identify opportunities**

- There are several examples of funding for sport and recreation which derive from lotteries, casinos, poker machines and other legislated sources. There seems to be an opportunity to look further at these sources to hypothecate a percentage of tax revenue to the well being of sport and recreations.
- In addition a further opportunity may be made to make fees payable to sporting organizations tax deductible or alternatively a lump sum claim could be made for each dependent child engaged in physical activity pursuits; both of the above may encourage and facilitate the continued engagement of children and others in physical activity and/or sporting pursuits.

John D Whitehouse  
Secretary General  
Australian Water Polo Inc