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# Bowls Australia



## Independent Sports Panel Submission

October 31, 2008





## Independent Sport Panel

### Bowls Australia Submission

#### Preamble

Bowls Australia believes sport is central to the very fabric of our nation, providing an outlet that not only fuels our patriotism, but binds our communities together.

Throughout our submission, we have outlined the key areas that we believe need addressing by the Independent Sport Panel, with a concerted focus on lawn bowls.

With almost 250,000 registered members, and another 500,000 social bowlers, lawn bowls plays a central role in the day-to-day lives of many Australians.

At grass roots level, the role of bowls clubs within Australia is even more profound, with many serving as the heart beat of their local communities.

With a mandate for change clearly evident, Bowls Australia hopes its recommendations are well received.

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

- *Identify any areas of duplication within Australia's sporting system and recommend ways to build a more efficient system.*
- *Examine the relationship between the Australian Sports Commission, Australian Institute of Sport, State and Territory Institutes, academies of sport and regional institutes and how this relationship could deliver better athlete pathways.*
- *Recommend opportunities to ensure maximum returns from talent identification programs*

Since the formation of Bowls Australia's high performance program in 2004, Australia has experienced unparalleled success on the international stage.

Over the past four years, Australia has improved its women's world ranking from number two to number one, and its men's world ranking from number five to number two.

During a golden run, it has also dominated the 2008 World Championships, the 2007 Asia Pacific Championships and the 2006 Commonwealth Games, claiming gold medals in no less than half of its events in Melbourne.

The challenges facing sport at the elite level, however, remain unsolved.



**The issues and solutions include:**

- The lack of coordination between local, state and national programs, which are providing similar services, but with no overarching philosophy. While the AIS pools the nation's best talent, the SIS/SAS network is often in direct competition with each other, and does not serve as a pathway program for the AIS.

**(Solution)** The creation of a nation wide agreement concerning the delivery of elite programs, with a central body providing the framework for the states and territories to operate under.

- The timing mismatch in the ASC's current four-year funding cycle, which concludes at the end of the up-coming financial year, creating uncertainty for NSO's, athletes and coaches. At present, Bowls Australia is unable to provide its athletes, coaches or support staff with any surety of their positions as it awaits the allocation of the next funding cycle.

**(Solution)** Adjust the funding cycle (and advice of funding amounts) back by 12 months.

- Limited financial support for athletes to concentrate on their daily training environment and competition programs is a high priority in bowls.

**(Solution)** The continuation of the Australian Government Sports Training Grant (AGSTG) and the opportunity to employ athletes as full-time contracted employees who could also be involved in promotional activities. This option would provide financial security allowing athletes the time to meet their training needs and they could also be used in the public to help promote their sport and physical wellbeing.

- The pecking order of Australian sports, as deemed by the ASC. Whilst every sport is funded differently, NSO's are currently unaware of their position in the ASC's hierarchy, and as such, are unable to demonstrate how or why they should be eligible for increased funding.

**(Solution)** The introduction of a tier system, which allows NSO's to move up and down the ASC's hierarchy based on KPI's. By meeting the agreed KPI's, which would include medals at major events, participation statistics, introduction of improved governance systems and whole of sport initiatives, NSO's would be eligible for improved funding.

- The need for closer ties to be formed between the AOC, ACGA and the ASC. Currently funding programs are being offered by the AOC and ACGA in addition to the ASC without any strong linkage between all parties.

**(Solution)** The AOC, ACGA and ASC to coordinate funding programs.



## 2. Better place sport and physical activity as a key component of the Government’s preventative health approach

- *Examine Government frameworks to ensure an on-going focus on grassroots and community sport and physical activity.*
- *Examine Government programs to increase participation rates in sport and physical activity, including analysis of existing programs.*
- *Identify and recommend opportunities to break down barriers to participation at junior, adult and senior ages with a view to making it simpler and easier for Australians to participate in the sport or physical activity of their choice, including for women, the disabled and Indigenous people.*
- *Recommend strategies to increase the effectiveness of the promotion of sport by the Federal Government to better communicate positive health and activity messages to the broader community.*

Bowls Australia is ironclad in its belief that it provides one of the most socially inclusive sports in the nation, with the unique ability to transcend race, age, religion, gender and creed.

During the recent Travelex NSW Open, one of the benchmark events on the Bowls Australia calendar, this was clearly evident by the presence of New South Wales’ Jo Hunter and Queensland’s Kelvin Kerkow in the main field.

During a remarkable career, Hunter, who is confined to a wheelchair, has collected a swag of medals at the Australian multi-disability championships and came within a whisker of reaching the quarter-finals of the able bodied women’s singles.

While Kerkow, who bowls with a walking stick after being struck down with Guillan-Barre Syndrome as a child, overcame all odds to win gold in the blue-ribbon singles at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

While improvements continue to be made, including the introduction of Bowls Australia’s “Women In Sport” program, which aims at making the game more attractive to female participants by breaking down the barriers when it comes to dress regulations, the times they are able to play the game and how long it takes them to complete a game of bowls, challenges remain.

The issues and solutions include:

- The duplication of delivery between the Active After-schools Communities (AASC), clubs, zones, regions, state departments of sport, SSO’s and NSO’s.



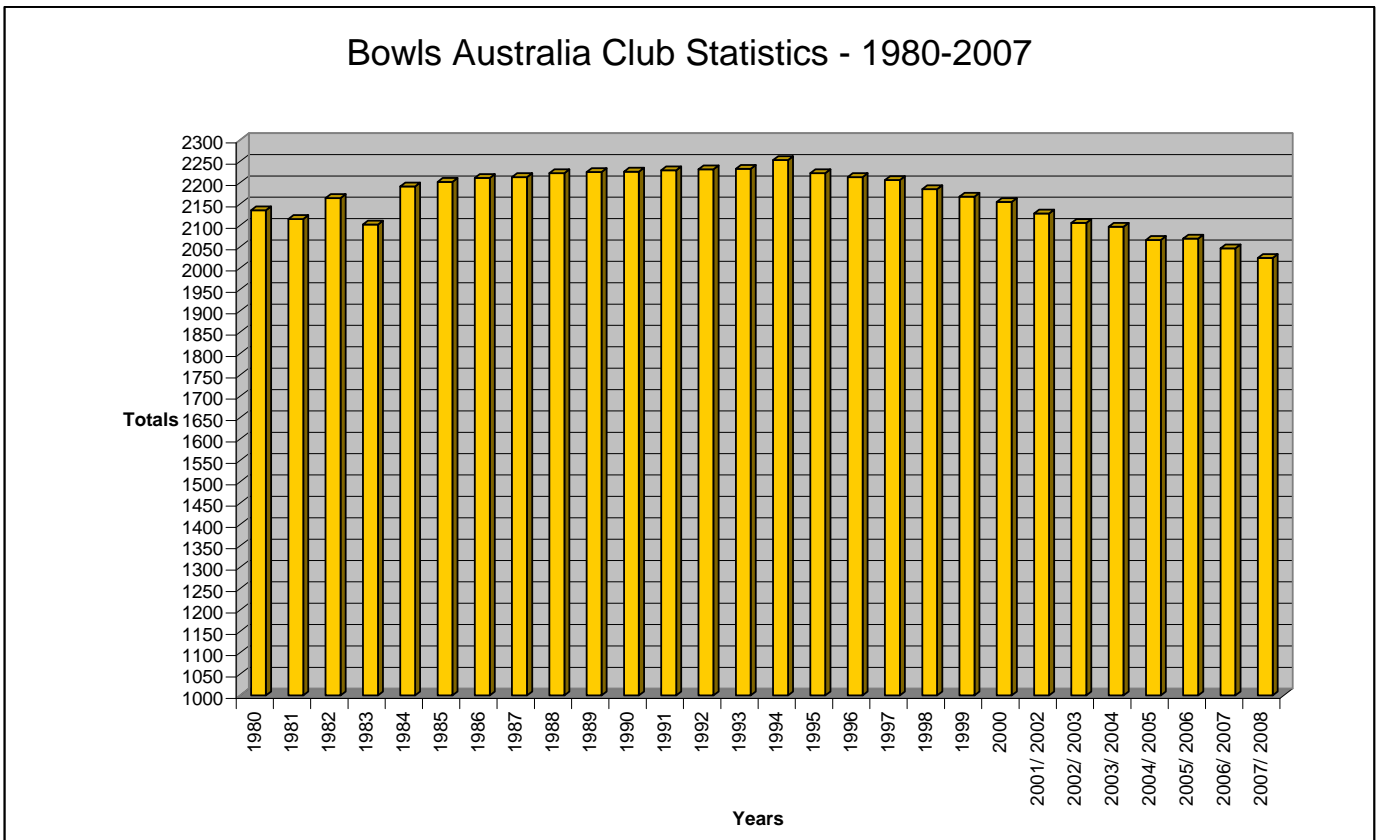
**(Solution)** The introduction of closer ties between the AASC to create sustainable links between AASC and clubs, along with greater consultation with NSO's prior to the implementation of sporting programs.

- The lack of fundamental motor skills that is prevalent amongst our school children. While sport is compulsory at some schools, this is not the case across the board, and is without doubt contributing to the health issues and the obesity epidemic experienced by young Australians.

**(Solution)** The introduction of compulsory sport in the school curriculum. With many working families currently placing their children in after-school care, the opportunity to extend the school day by an extra hour to incorporate sport into the curriculum should be explored. The extra time could be directly allocated to sport and delivered through a combination of the AASC and the sport network.

- The preservation of facilities, and in particular, our clubs. Over the past decade, close to 200 bowls clubs have been closed in Australia for one reason or another, leaving members lost to the game (a table demonstrating this trend is provided below). Recently many bowls clubs in NSW have been threatened with large increases of up to 1000% in their commercial rates by the NSW government.

**(Solution)** A national facilities audit, which would assist in the maintenance and upgrade of our clubs with a focus on lighting, environmental practices, water usage and the prevalence of synthetic surfaces and their suitability to sport. The government should re-visit the facility proposal "A Place to Play" which included recommendations to improve facilities at the community level.





- The lack of multi purpose venues and partnerships between sporting organisations remains a challenge for the industry.

**(Solution)** Create incentives for the establishment of multi sport venues/hubs where sporting organisations are able to optimise their facilities and create economies of scale.

- The lack of water available to sporting clubs across Australia

**(Solution)** The reintroduction of the Australian Government Community Water Grants program, as well as encouraging sporting clubs to utilise synthetic surfaces. With Australia currently in the midst of a crippling drought, the lack of water that is available to sporting organisations, and in particular bowls clubs, is a pivotal issue. By encouraging clubs to reduce their reliance on main water by providing access to water tanks and synthetic greens, the entire nation is able to benefit.

### 3. Strengthen pathways from junior sport to grassroots community sport right through to elite and professional sport

- *Examine the capacity of the system to ensure optimal and efficient delivery of the athlete and coach pathway for any given sport.*
- *Recommend the most effective support and recognition for the coaches, officials, umpires, administrators and volunteers who keep our community clubs alive.*
- *Examine how relationships between the Commonwealth Government and National Sporting Organisations, State Sporting Organisations and Australia's peak representative bodies at key multi-sports competitions may be strengthened to deliver better performance outcomes.*

In recent years, Australia's international rivals have invested heavily in its sporting programs, and bowls has not been isolated from this trend.

Malaysia's emergence as an international and school participation superpower can be largely attributed to the money it has invested in the development of their pathway, while the UK block has also poured significant amounts of money into their programs.

Recently, England has appointed its first high performance coordinator and received 450,000 pounds for its 2010 Commonwealth Games campaign.

The issues and solutions include:

- The lack of professional opportunities that are available for Australian coaches, as well as retaining our best and brightest.

**(Solution)** Create a funding pool for a National Coaching Director for NSO's, who could oversee national courses, curriculum and resources, as well as extending the AGSTG to coaches and the creation of more scholarship positions.



- The non alignment between NSO's and SSO's including the lack of whole-of-sport initiatives.

**(Solution)** Reward NSO's who are willing and able to implement whole-of-sport initiatives and create economies of scale. For example, a national insurance program, junior development programs and demonstrated improved governance systems.

#### 4. Maintain Australia's cutting edge approach to sports science, research and technology

- *Examine the capacity of the system to ensure provision of cutting edge technology, innovation, sport science, sports medicine, applied research to underpin sport performance and development, including ways to maintain Australia's position as leaders in anti-doping.*
- *Examine the current partnerships in place within these fields and recommend any potential partnerships.*

Since the introduction of our high performance program, Bowls Australia has come a long way in its approach to sports science, including an off-green support team that consists of a full-time sports scientist, as well as sport psychologists, mentors and a nutritionist.

At an elite level, however, the coordination of resources across all sports remains ad hoc. With many players within the SIS/SAS network researching similar advances, unnecessary duplication is occurring, while failing to optimise our potential.

The issues and solutions include:

- The inability for non-Olympic sports to gain access to the SIS/SAS network. While NSWIS boasts a thriving bowls program, the request for services and programs to be provided to elite bowlers in other state institutes/academies continues to be rejected, even under a pay as you go system.

**(Solution)** The introduction of a pay as you go system for NSO's to provide support to its elite athletes, who wish to utilise the services of the SIS/SAS network, but are not currently catered for.

- The inability to coordinate our research across the nation

**(Solution)** The introduction of defined roles in sports science and sports medicine within Australia and especially at the AIS and throughout the SIS/SAS network.



5. Identify opportunities to increase and diversify the funding base for sport through corporate sponsorship, media and any recommended reforms, such as enhancing the effectiveness of the Australian Sports Foundation.

While the Australian Sports Foundation has been in existence for more than 20 years, its profile within the sporting community is yet to be realised, despite having the potential to grow much needed funds into formulated projects.

BA understands the continued need to develop products (grassroots and professional content) that fit the changing patterns of consumer interests and media channels, which in turn will open up new advertising interest and therefore sponsorship opportunities.

The issues and solutions include:

- Access to non-government funding opportunities

**[Solution]** Lifting the public profile of the ASF and outlining what it can do for NSO's and their members, as well as implementing the Australian Sports Federations Alliance's 'Physical Activity Tax Rebate Initiative', which allows parents and guardians to make tax deductions that are associated with their children's eligible sport or recreation.

- NSO's to become more financially self sufficient.

**[Solution]** NSO's to focus on more commercial activities as well as creating initiatives to grow revenue. Over the past 10 years, Bowls Australia has implemented a national licensing program which now generates more than \$600,000 that is reinvested into the sport targeted at employing development personnel and implementing programs.

NSO's who can demonstrate an understanding of what is required to better commercialize their sports, especially the products which bring the story to life for TV and sponsors, should receive up front funding to develop this consumer franchise element of their sport, as opposed to the participation franchise element. The reason is that over time these NSO's will become less reliant on ASC funding.

- The distinct lack of consumer research and insights that underpin decision-making in Australian sport.

**[Solution]** As an industry, the lack of quality research is alarming compared to the entertainment industries that sport competes with (music, electronic video-gaming, film etc). As it is an extremely expensive exercise and yet critical to making consumer-oriented decisions, this is an area the ASC may be able to fund on behalf of the sports which need it but can not afford it.



## Summary

Australian sport is currently at a junction. In this submission we have outlined a number key issues and solutions that should be considered by the Independent Sport Panel.

Bowls Australia is a committed partner of the Australian Government to make sport a healthy, vibrant and relevant option for all Australians.

Bowls remains a key player in delivering sporting and physical activity opportunities to meet the objectives of all levels of government.

I look forward to meeting with members of the panel and elaborating on this submission.

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