

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT SPORT PANEL

INTRODUCTION

Football Federation Australia (FFA) welcomes the Federal Government's appointment of the independent expert panel (Panel) to "*investigate the reforms required to ensure that Australia's sporting system remains prepared for the challenges of the future*" as announced by Minister Ellis in August 2008.

FFA thanks the Panel for the opportunity to meet with it on 28 October 2008. In light of this scheduled meeting, FFA provides below an overview of the key points it would like to discuss with the Panel and looks forward to expanding on these points at our meeting.

Our submission touches on three main areas – the role of Government (principally Federal) in sport; the organisation of government as it relates to this role in sport and current priority areas.

1 ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN SPORT

Recognising the importance of sport to the people of Australia, and therefore to government, and given the Federal System applying in Australia, FFA considers it appropriate that the Federal Government play a significant role in the following areas of sport. It is also recognised that, whilst these areas need to be clearly identified and delineated, they are interdependent to a degree – accordingly this is taken into account when considering the organisation of sport in section 2 below:

"Elite" or "high performance" sport:

- This covers international competition, and the athlete development pathway into national teams. FFA considers that, consistent with current practice, this is a priority area for the Federal Government. Whilst it would also include some involvement of State Governments (e.g. State Institutes of Sport) this involvement needs to be under clear Federal Government leadership and direction to maximise the competitive advantage to Australian sport, and minimise duplication.
- The National Sports Organisations (NSOs) should be the Government's major partners in the area of elite sport with such partnership approach ensuring that government acts consistently with the strategic plan set for a sport by its NSO. This should be (and has been) a major area for government funding because of the well established benefits to the nation which derive from international sporting success. "Professional" sports should also share in this

support, as the majority of their activity is not revenue raising, especially in the area of talented athlete development. As discussed below in section 2, in an organisational sense given the unique focus and highly specialised technical aspects of elite sport we consider there is real merit in responsibility for “elite” or “high performance” sport (including the development of talented athletes), resting with a specialised separate federal government agency e.g. the ASC or the AIS or a new body.

- Success of Australian individuals and teams in elite sport on the international stage delivers significant impact and benefits across all sport. As such and given the ever-increasing competitiveness of elite sport at the international level, the Federal Government plays a critical role in funding Australia’s participation at this level.

Community sport:

- This covers mass participation in sport including players, and clubs, volunteers, coaches, referees etc. In this area FFA considers the Federal Government’s role is best directed at providing leadership, direction, and some resources, with the main activity residing with State and Local Governments. NSOs and State Sporting Organisations (SSOs) should partner government in this activity.

Specific health and social objectives

- Whilst arguably a natural and inevitable consequence and benefit flowing from both community and elite sport, FFA submits that this area warrants identification of key objectives and focus in its own right. It covers fitness, health (e.g. obesity), social cohesion, community building and support for disadvantaged groups. As with community sport, FFA considers this is an area which could significantly benefit from Federal Government leadership and direction for implementation at community level. A key component of Federal Government involvement would be the development of National programs. NSOs and SSOs should partner government in these activities, although some activities may fall outside the scope and capabilities of sporting bodies.

Sports facilities

- This covers both major facilities for major events, and community sports facilities. FFA would be interested in discussing with the Panel the concept of development of a National Sport Facilities Plan by the Federal Government – incorporating an audit of available facilities, a scoping of required facilities, a program to develop such facilities, and funding to support the improvement of current facilities and the development of new facilities.
- State and Local Government involvement would be required, but in line with the National Sport Facilities Plan. The Plan could cover the development

and maintenance of “active” sports facilities rather than passive recreation facilities. At the moment, no particular federal government agency is tasked with responsibility for this important area, which we consider will become increasingly a necessary complement to the other activities herein discussed.

Major events

- Government support is unarguably required to attract and support major international events to Australia. Whilst State Government funding is quite competitive and effective in supporting some events, Federal Government support is also appropriate and necessary where the events are of major international significance – e.g. FIFA World Cup, Commonwealth Games, Olympic Games etc.

SECTION 2 THE ORGANISATION OF SPORT IN AUSTRALIA

As noted above, there are a range of discrete but interrelated areas of sport where the Federal Government plays a key role. In order to ensure maximum focus and efficiency, appropriate prioritisation, development of expertise, knowledge and consistency, FFA believes there is scope for a review of the optimum model for the Federal Government’s performance of its role in these areas. A model which we would like to explore with the Panel is one designed with reference to the following two fundamental principles:

1. elite sport requires a discrete, highly specialised controlling body focussed on the development of elite athletes and utilisation of technical and scientific expertise;
2. the consolidation of all the other areas of sport identified in section 1 above could ensure the relevance and role of sport in Australian society is appropriately recognised with consequent levels of resourcing, priority and consistency of treatment between each identified area.

Accordingly FFA would like to put forward for consideration and discussion with the Panel the following points.

1. The NSO should retain its central position of authority in the sport with which it has been charged as governing. The Federal Government, through its funding, should provide support for the NSO, and conduct partnership activities with it. For example, in the elite sport area, the AIS should be seen as a joint venture between the NSO and the government. The government should also have an appropriate influence in the sport reflecting its investment such as monitoring good governance and financial responsibility.

- 2 In elite sport, the government's involvement is shared by the AIS and other areas of the ASC. This could be rationalised to one specialised body, which could have a funding arm and a training/athlete development arm. These are areas of sport where, because of the clear imperatives of on-field success, the dedicated focus of the responsible body (and accordingly skill-set) is one of technical excellence rather than the broader public policy and community objectives of other areas. As such we believe that whilst the director of this government body would report to the same Minister the body should remain autonomous and have a separate funding stream than the general sports government body discussed immediately below.

- 3 In relation to the other areas of sport we have identified we consider that the role of sport has reached the level of significance to warrant oversight by a dedicated government agency, possibly even establishment of a Federal government Department of Sport. For example, this department could have separate divisions for each of the various areas – community sport/development; health and social objectives, facilities and major events.
 - These divisions could have the necessary links to other departments, e.g. Education, and to relevant State departments.
 - NSOs would still be partners with the Department in implementing some programs in this area.
 - As regards sports facilities, we understand that currently the ASC has no mandate to be involved in the development of facilities. Given the increasing pressure and demand for this area of sport to be addressed in a structured, equitable and holistic way across the country we suggest the establishment of a dedicated division to deal with Sports Facilities, within for example a newly formed Department of Sport, administering an appropriately responsible system with the necessary checks and balances.
 - Major events. Again, as things currently stand, neither the ASC or any other federal government agency has a particular role in supporting major events. Again a division to deal with this program within a newly formed Department of Sport could ensure it receives the necessary priority as well as achieving and supporting other relevant government policy objectives, such as for example, complementing government strategy and activity in the area of facilities and infrastructure.
 - The consolidation of all these separate but related areas within the one dedicated department could bring with it the added benefit of an individual responsible to the Minister for all areas of the government's involvement in

sport. This could give to NSOs and others dealing with these areas of sport a clear single ultimate authority for all questions related to sport. Ideally the Director General would have significant influence over State Governments' sports activities through targeted funding conditional upon delivery of national programs.

4. State Governments.

Any activity undertaken by the State Government in elite sport (sport with an objective of international competition, rather than purely national competition) ideally should be aligned to and directed by the Federal Government agency for elite sport, acting in partnership with the relevant NSOs. In particular, the State Institutes of Sport which have as their objectives international sporting success, should be under the direction of the national agency, in implementing the national plan of the NSOs concerned. This can be achieved if federal government funding is provided directly to the State Institutes for the national outcomes they are seeking to produce, predicated on taking direction from, and working with the national agency and the NSOs. In effect the State Institutes are partners in this objective, but need to be committed to and subject to national direction.

In the other areas of sport, the objective should be to achieve similar cooperation and consistency across State Government agencies, most practically through the provision of federal government funding (on a shared basis) for the implementation of national objectives in community sport, health and social objectives, facilities development and major events.

SECTION 3 CURRENT PRIORITY EMPHASIS

FFA identifies two current critical priorities – facility development and maintenance of our competitive position within the global market for the Panel's consideration.

Facility development

Whilst recognising the importance of all the five areas of sport where government activity is essential, at the present time, FFA would emphasise that the area in need of urgent attention at government level is that of facilities. New development in our cities does not include sufficient attention to active sport needs, as opposed to general recreation needs. Existing facilities are not in the best situation to maximise their use by sports, through drought, lack of lighting, lack of accessibility (schools after hours etc) and maintenance.

To this end, the significant benefits to be achieved through participation in sport (including in the areas of health, community capacity and social cohesion) are

being under-realised as a result of the growing pressure on and under-supply of facilities. For example, in Victoria this year, Football Federation Victoria had to turn away more than 10,000 people from playing football because of the lack of available facilities.

In our view, the concept of a National Sports Facility Plan, with appropriate funding, underpins and complements other imperatives of government involvement in sport.

Global competitiveness

Australia has a world-recognised and long-standing reputation as playing above our weight in the area of international competitiveness. It is widely recognised that the historical position we have enjoyed is threatened by advances and investments being made by other countries most of which have much larger population (and therefore funding bases) than Australia. As a participant in the largest sport in the world, football, this is an acute challenge that FFA faces in such areas as elite player development and retention as well as recruitment and retention of world-class coaches and referees.

To maintain or improve Australia's position (in both Olympic and non-Olympic sports) will require targeted programs. Consideration could be given to for example, special tax incentives to enable employment/retention of the best coaches and other technicians within sport.

FFA appreciates the challenges and complexities raised by many of the issues facing sport in Australia. The above raises a number of key issues that we perceive and which we hope to be a useful starting point for further discussion at our meeting with the Panel.

Football Federation Australia
22 October 2008