

**JOINT SUBMISSION BY**

**THE CYCLING PROMOTION FUND & CYCLING  
AUSTRALIA INC**

**TO THE CRAWFORD SPORT PANEL OF INQUIRY**

**7 November 2008**



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## OVERVIEW

This joint submission of the Cycling Promotion Fund (CPF) and Cycling Australia (CA) to the Crawford Review recognises the broad and important role cycling can play in achieving Government's aim of building a healthier Australia as well as supporting and improving the outcomes of sport.

Emerging challenges include changing lifestyles and an ageing population. In the face of trends in declining physical activity levels, cycling participation has been growing around Australia and in 2006 more than 1.6 million adults cycled an increase of 244,000 since 2001 (ERASS 2002, 2006). Cycling is the fourth most popular physical activity for adults in Australia, and is unique in that participation can be undertaken by wide variety of people of different ages and fitness levels. Even older Australians keep cycling once they start, the most recent participation figures for cycling show a continued high participation rate among those least likely to be physically active (35+) and a resilience in the age cohort 55-64 who have maintained recent participation levels (ERASS 2006, 2008).

There are a number of factors which have contributed to this increase. They include; a greater awareness of the health benefits of cycling, an ability to integrate cycling into people's daily life, campaigns to encourage people to cycle and improved infrastructure.

This submission recognises the capacity cycling has to play a pivotal role in increasing physical activity across the community; from recreational and sporting to purely incidental and everyday. By doing so, cycling can support the Government's aims of building a better and healthier Australia, as well as supporting and improving the outcomes for the sport.

The cycling sector includes a national grassroots network of competitive cycling clubs and non-competitive community bicycle user groups (BUGs) providing a broad range of cycling activities sought by the public. All are well positioned to contribute to increasing physical activity in the community. BUGs in particular are active at a community level in promoting cycling to new riders and improving conditions for cycling, but the Cycling Promotion Fund and Cycling Australia acknowledge that both competitive and non-competitive groups currently lack the capacity to respond to the strong and growing interest and demand for a wide range of cycling activities at the entry levels in the community and that better coordination is required to address this interest.

Increasing cycling will also be beneficial in other areas. A recent CPF study commissioned by the Department of Health and Ageing (Bauman 2008) showed that current levels of cycling in Australia save \$227.2 million per year in health costs alone. Other savings include a reduction in the cost of traffic congestion of \$63.9 million and \$9.3 million saved in transport 'externalities' such as greenhouse gas abatement.

The CPF and CA contend that not only will investment in the elite side of the sport provide benefits and sustainability for Cycling Australia's athlete performance internationally (the subject of a joint submission from the CAOS group of Olympic sports), but that investment in reinforcing the community capacity to get more people cycling will provide significant long term benefit for both the sport and entire Australian community.\

The CPF study identified key strategies that address the barriers to greater cycling participation, all of which would provide individual and population level benefits and could be addressed using the model presented in this submission.

CA and the CPF recommend that a community partnership capacity be established to coordinate and support community organisations with a range of services that already exist. This model would include local community partnership managers who would be responsible for both service coordination and evaluation of outcomes.

## RESPONSES TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

**Please note:** the Cycling Australia joint submission with the major Olympic sport organisations has responded to this term of reference. A copy of that submission, *Coalition of Australian Olympic Sports Joint Submission to Sports Panel*, can be accessed at: [www.sportpanel.org.au/internet/sportpanel/publishing.nsf/Content/Coalition+of+Australian+Olympic+Sports](http://www.sportpanel.org.au/internet/sportpanel/publishing.nsf/Content/Coalition+of+Australian+Olympic+Sports)

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

Cycling provides an unparalleled opportunity to engage Australians in a physical activity that; a) has grown strongly for several years, b) is the fourth most popular physical activity in Australia c) shows similar participation levels among older Australians (55-64) as younger ages of 25-34 and 35-44 (ERASS 2006), who are normally age groups least likely to engage in physical activity.

Current Government frameworks that support an on-going focus on grassroots and community sport and physical activity through cycling are uncommon, active community cycling groups are disconnected from broader networks and many very successful state and local programs that could be rolled out in a wider context are restricted in reach because of this.

The opportunity exists to support local and community based organisations to reach potential cyclists and respond to current demand, and many more workplaces, schools and other organisations could be supported to access the services to encourage, train and support new cyclists.

Local community bicycle user groups (BUGs) are active and providing a wide range of cycling opportunities. Some have recently been approaching Cycling Australia to be incorporated for insurance purposes to allow their continued existence which indicates additional assistance is required in the sector.

A 2007 survey of BUGs (Cronin 2007) found less than a quarter of respondent groups offer any sort of training for bike skills, only half have any sort of online means of communication with their members and they would like help promoting cycling. Most BUGs mix regular local participation rides with advocacy for cycling, and more than 90% have a relationship with their local government. It is quite clear that BUG's provide an important grassroots service to bicycle riders and can potentially play a greatly increased role in promoting and encouraging cycling.

The key elements exist now and could be leveraged better to support and increase cycling include national strategies and other elements such as a national community cycle skills program (AustCycle). The AustCycle model provides a clear method for the invested resources in training to be directly tracked to physical activity outcomes through its voucher system, allowing comprehensive data to be collected and utilised to assess health, physical activity and cycling outcomes.

The CPF and CA recommend that a community capacity be established to coordinate and resource community organisations through a range of services that already exist and can be easily implemented and rolled out. Training and participation opportunities or events could be funded on a simple funded voucher system, as mentioned above.

***Term of reference no. 2 continued ...***

Local community partnerships managers would be responsible for service coordination, marketing, promotion and evaluation of outcomes so that benefits to Government and the sport could be tracked and reported. Managers could potentially be based in departments of sport & rec, the Australian Bicycle Council or local government jurisdictions.

This model leverages the strong national networks and expertise found in the sport and recreation cycling sector accessed through the CPF, CA and state cycling organisations. Internationally, changes in sport and recreation policy to a multi-sectoral approach have been successful in reversing the decline in physical activity. Changes to the provision of services and utilisation of sporting facilities in Finland have been driven by changes in public funding creating new and increased opportunities for physical activity (Vuori et al 2004). Not only were municipal 'sport secretaries' funded in local government settings to drive the local sport and recreation agenda, but funding created more sport and recreation opportunities locally in much the same way as this submission is proposing that community partnership managers be established at the local level. A whole of government commitment has also been made to promote physical activity for health.

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

The memberships of Cycling Australia and other cycling organisations are only a small percentage of the overall number of people who cycle. This works against providing a seamless pathway from grassroots community cycling and non-organised activity to elite and professional sport. The massive recent growth in cycling participation provides significant potential to involve more new riders in activities which motivate people to take up cycling and or maintain their riding through evidence based programs such as skills training, encouragement programs, regular local riders, cycling events and other participation opportunities.

***Programs to get more people riding***

The CPF, CA and other organisations have been active in developing national initiatives in training, behaviour change and promotion that can provide key services to lower the barriers and encourage greater participation in cycling. Much more could be done to support and resource community organisations to assist Australians who need some encouragement and social support to take up and maintain riding. Programs include organised social or community recreation riding, riding to work, skills, road safety and training and schools cycling.

***Building capacity through community partnerships***

Partnering with local and community organisations for the provision of such programs would provide more opportunities to reach people who are contemplating cycling but have not taken it up and the large majority of riders who do not ride in organised activity. Evidence suggests that such initiatives are effective in increasing physical activity levels through cycling (Bauman et al 2008) as well as increase the attractiveness of being a member of a cycling organisation.

**Please note:** the Cycling Australia joint submission with the major Olympic sport organisations has also responded to this term of reference in an elite sport context and argued for strong support to reinforce our capacity to train and retain coaches, scientific and support staff who are crucial to our elite and professional success.

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

**Please note:** the Cycling Australia joint submission with the major Olympic sport organisations has responded to this term of reference.

#### **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.**

Increasing the ability of the local club and community cycling sector to reach more Australians will be a major driver to encourage and 'mainstream' cycling. The reach and popularity of any sport or recreational activity has a direct impact on its ability to attract funding, provide sustainable commercial opportunities and diversify its funding base.

The facilitation of grassroots cycling through the provision of human and practical resources based in the local community addresses the increasing demand for a variety of cycling programs and services due to increasing numbers of Australians choosing to ride a bike.

Not only does a national framework exist to guide investment in cycling, the Australian National Cycling Strategy 2005-2010 (Austroads 2005), but so do both state and local government cycling plans and many proven encouragement programs and services. They simply need to be linked better to have a significant impact to increasing population level physical activity via people riding bikes in this country.

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