

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INDEPENDENT SPORT PANEL

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.

- The issue is not necessarily one of duplication *per se*, but of ensuring the most appropriate people/agencies are managing the sporting system at each level and that athletes are supported in the best daily training environment (DTE). Duplication is not always a bad thing and can produce benefits which exceed costs (eg perceived duplication which promotes competition which pushes performance to higher levels). However, inefficient duplication does need to be eliminated where possible.
- Athletes must find the right fit for their overall lifestyle needs (e.g. coaching, sporting, education, employment, family, social) – this does not necessarily occur in one, centralised location if the athlete development pathway is to be best supported. This may be particularly so for Indigenous athletes from the Northern Territory where displacement from family and different climatic conditions can sometimes be detrimental to development.
- For example, the Northern Territory Institute of Sport's (NTIS) function is primarily to support athletes, in their home environment, at the development and emerging elite levels (predominantly 15-19 year olds) and then encourage relocation to other State Institutes/Academies of Sport (SIS/SAS), the AIS and other national programs when they are ready and willing to do so. This approach includes providing support to developmental level athletes in popular NT sports where national league/professional sport clubs do not have a sufficient presence in the NT (e.g. AFL, Rugby League, Rugby Union). The NTIS also has a role to support elite athletes who, for various reasons, need to be located in Darwin or Alice Springs at that stage of their athletic career.
- The key is to ensure the AIS, SIS/SAS and regional academies are working towards a common goal and playing their part in supporting each (relevant) sport's athlete (and coach) development pathway at varying levels within a coordinated and collaborative framework.

Examine the relationship between the Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Institute of Sport, State and Territory Institutes/Academies of sport and regional institutes and how this relationship could deliver better athlete pathways.

- There will be fragmentation, ineffectiveness and inefficiencies in the system without an agreed, stakeholder accepted, overarching strategic management framework. Such a framework must clearly identify national high performance objectives and the complementary role that the ASC, AIS, SIS/SAS and regional academies play in supporting National Sporting Organisation (NSO), athlete and coach, development pathways whilst also recognising jurisdictional differences.
- Inclusive, strong leadership is required from a collaborative body such as NESC to ensure that athlete (as well as coach, official and administrator) development pathways are aligned and the roles of stakeholders are clearly defined.
- Notwithstanding that a strength of the Australian high performance system is the domestic rivalry between states/territories, this needs to be kept in perspective and consist of inbuilt mechanisms to prevent unhealthy competition between the AIS, SIS/SAS, etc. for limited national resources.
- Ensuring that an appropriate collaborative body, such as NESC, enables members to jointly participate in the planning and support of NSO (and State Sporting Organisation; SSO) high performance strategies would give confidence to members, remove inefficiencies and prevent the criticism and sense of frustration that occurs.

Recommend opportunities to ensure maximum returns from talent identification programs.

- Athlete talent identification and development (TID) must be aligned to existing athlete development pathways within sport, and geared towards strengthening the capacity of NSOs and SSOs to nurture talent. While acknowledging talent pools can be shallow in a number of sports and thus a specific focus on fast tracking talent and talent transfer is required, it should not be at the expense of ensuring adequate support is provided to traditional athlete development pathways in sport.
- Any effective athlete TID program must also be supported by better resourced coach TID programs. Greater numbers of qualified and experienced coaches at all levels of the athlete development pathway will ensure more effective and efficient athlete TID occurring across sports. This requires support to volunteer and career-oriented coaches through a sufficiently resourced national coaching body. Similar initiatives are also required for officials (and to some extent administrators) in order to identify and develop talent in the overall system.
- While TID programs can be directed nationally, under an overarching strategic management framework (as mentioned earlier), it must be run and jointly resourced in partnership with NSOs, SSOs and the SIS/SAS network. The operations of the national Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program provides a good example of how this could be structured.
- Despite recent initiatives such as the National Indigenous Talent Identification program, pathways for Indigenous athletes – particularly those living in remote areas – are limited. This is a great shame as there is a rich pool of untapped potential that could be identified.

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.

- As with elite sport, there is a need for an agreed, stakeholder accepted, overarching strategic management framework that clearly identifies national objectives and the complementary role the ASC, State/Territory Departments of Sport and Recreation, along with Health and Education etc., play in supporting a vibrant and sustainable community sport and physical activity system.
- If the sport and physical activity system is adequately resourced and managed, the desired health will transpire. In contrast, a focus (and concentrated spend) on health through sport, will not ensure an effective and efficient sport and physical activity system.
- There is still a lack of coordination of resourcing of federal, state/territory and local government initiatives. This has led to both duplication and gaps, with the impact that optimal outcomes have not been achieved in the community sport sector. This is particularly so with respect to Indigenous sport programs in remote areas.

Examine government programs to increase participation rates in sport and physical activity, including analysis of existing programs.

- The beauty of sport and physical activity is that people can and do participate through a myriad ways (i.e. community clubs/school/work based competitive and non-competitive/social club systems, organised and non-organised options, membership and non-membership based structures), dropping in and out, in a variety of roles, at different levels, and at different stages of the life cycle. As a result, it is very difficult to accurately measure who is participating in what types of activities and in what ways, for example. This makes program development and evaluation challenging.
- At present there is ad hoc development and delivery of sport and physical activity participation programs at both national and state/territory level as well as across different sectors (e.g. sport,

health, education, justice), that tend to run for relatively short periods. Often these appear, in general, to be based on flimsy evidence, at best, and are poorly evaluated, if at all.

- However, if specific nationally agreed goals and objectives are identified, suitable programs can be developed, properly co-ordinated (based on evidence where possible) and implemented at the local levels. With appropriate evaluation, those that prove successful should be provided with continued funding and support to ensure there is a sustained commitment to overcoming current unhealthy lifestyle attitudes and behaviours that may take generations to change.
- The fact that most sporting structures are based around volunteers and the numbers of volunteers is reducing is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed.

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.

- While much has been reported on “barriers” to participation (such as lack of time, cost, access, etc.), these are only perceptions in most cases (for example, it could be argued that lack of time, cost and access are simply excuses, easily overcome if the person makes regular participation in health-enhancing physical activities a high priority in their life). That is, very little research has been undertaken to determine the actual validity of these perceived barriers. Similarly, very little research has been undertaken to determine the best combination of strategies/programs to effectively address these issues over the long-term (e.g. strategies to make regular participation in physical activity a high priority in one’s life would likely be based around promotional and educational messages, while reducing costs would likely be based around tax incentives and subsidies). As such, one of the necessary responses needs to be to improve the continuity and quality of promotion as foreshadowed below.
- Greater levels of funding are needed to support not only facilities development but also organisational (governance and management) and pathway development (of athletes, coaches, officials and administrators) for all sports, as well as simplifying processes and relationships at the community level to avoid duplication of effort and excess bureaucracy.
- There are particular barriers for Indigenous people living in remote areas, including; lack of facilities, lack of expertise, remoteness, harsh climatic conditions and other social issues in communities. To make inroads, it is vital that the Indigenous Sports Program (ISP) is better resourced and expanded.

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.

- An independently appointed, industry represented body is required to lead a nationally coordinated promotion strategy and be the high level advocacy group required to ensure adequate attention (not lip service) is given to the matter.
- Promotional campaigns, in combination with effective program delivery, must be evidence-based and appropriately funded on a sustained basis. For example, compare the anti-smoking, alcohol and safe sex campaigns (which are relatively well funded and run over a long period of time in order to impact on behavioural and attitudinal change across society) against the *Life Be In It* promotions (ran for a few years in the early 1980s) and the *Active Australia* strategy (that ran for a couple of years in the late 1990s/early 2000s). In between and since, there has been different, ad hoc and spasmodic promotional efforts at national and state/territory level around sport and physical activity.

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.

- When the underpinning structure of the system relies largely on a volunteer work force it is unrealistic to believe it is achieving optimal and efficient outcomes. Government, at all three levels, must ensure key roles within NSOs, SSOs and Regional Sporting Organisations are operating under appropriate governance and management structures that are run by qualified and experienced personnel with adequate resources.
- Relevant training and development programs for volunteers are required but also for career-oriented coaches, officials, administrators, sport scientists and researchers which lead to meaningful, appropriately paid employment opportunities – not only to encourage interest in these roles but to ensure good qualified and experienced people are retained within the system.

Recommend the most effective support and recognition for the coaches, officials, umpires, administrators and volunteers who keep our community clubs alive.

- As these people, in general, are intrinsically motivated it is important to ensure (as above) appropriate support and development opportunities for both volunteer and career-oriented aspirants are provided.
- To ensure the system is not only kept alive but achieving optimal and efficient outcomes (with positive health, social and economic benefits for the community) is it actually acceptable that it relies so heavily on volunteers? By way of contrast, it begs the question, would parents be willing to send their children to a hospital or a school if it was staffed primarily by volunteers?
- From an NT perspective, with remote communities in particular, a robust club/volunteer structure is lacking and will be difficult to establish. In the absence of this framework, the importance of the ISP as a substitute is further reinforced.

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.

- Having clearly identified, agreed goals is necessary to ensure resources are distributed accordingly and that respective organisations/stakeholders manage their specific responsibilities. This would help avoid duplication of effort/roles.
- A continued focus on strong governance at all levels is also critical for sustained and effective service delivery.

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 and applied research to underpin sport performance and development, including ways to maintain Australia’s position as leaders in anti-doping.

- Under a national leadership framework – with clearly identified and accepted objectives and goals – the AIS, in collaboration with SIS/SAS and the University sector, should lead the field in applied research relating to innovation and technology in sports science and sports medicine. This would be enhanced by a system that ensures better information, knowledge and skills sharing and avoids unnecessary duplication.
- To be truly at the cutting edge of sport innovation, it is vital that the AIS/SIS/SAS network has the capacity/resources to work closely with the “creative” research community in academic, commercial and government sectors external to sport.
- The capacity to support pure, on-going research positions in addition to research-practitioner/service provider roles and post-graduate scholarships also needs attention.

- The anti-doping area is best managed by ASADA with budget commensurate with operational requirements and comparable with investment required for community and high performance sport development.

Examine the current partnerships in place within these fields and recommend any potential partnerships.

- Similar to athlete development and support, research funding and work should not be confined to a central agency but be distributed to where the most appropriate environment, facilities and staff are located. For example, the AIS supporting heat-related research through the NTIS' National Heat Training and Acclimatisation Centre, rather than running separate projects in Canberra.

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.

- The capacity to leverage sponsorship funding that exceeds the time and effort required to service, is far easier for sport organisations that have the profile and exposure value (through nationally televised competitions for example). There are, however, many sport organisations at national, state/territory and local level that are not attractive to corporate sponsors and, therefore, need alternative strategies and solutions to ensure adequate levels of funding are available to encourage growth and development (at least to the stage where they are capable of attracting worthwhile sponsorship). An exercise to examine the utility of tax deduction incentives and subsidies for sport organisations and participants, if not already done, is just one step that must be undertaken.
- The reality is, if Governments are going to continue to espouse the virtues of sport and its capacity to provide positive health, social and economic outcomes in the community, they must ensure the system is adequately supported (on all fronts, but especially financially) from top to bottom.