



SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO CONCUSSIONS AND REPEATED HEAD TRAUMA IN CONTACT SPORTS

INTRODUCTION

Cricket Australia (CA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Community Affairs References Committee on the Inquiry into Concussions and Repeated Head Trauma in Contact Sports (the Inquiry).

BACKGROUND

CA is the national governing body for cricket in Australia. As well as having responsibility for the Australian men's and women's cricket teams, CA oversees cricket at grassroots level. CA also administers and delivers various national competitions and international tours across differing formats, age groups and inclusion categories within cricket, in keeping with its purpose to '*unite and inspire everyone to love and play cricket*'.

CA is a not-for-profit entity. Along with the state and territory cricket associations, it is responsible for identifying and generating revenue to ensure the continued financial viability of the sport. All revenue raised is invested back into the sport, either through distributions to elite players, State and Territory associations or funding grassroots programs and competitions.

As a national sport, cricket holds a unique place in the fabric of Australian life. It is one of the most popular sports in Australia, including through participation rates, match attendances and broadcast audiences (last season's Boxing Day Test drew an average audience of over 1.7 million viewers on television and the men's Big Bash League (BBL) is the most watched league in Australia on an average audience per game basis). CA will continue to grow Cricket's popularity and participation through the stated vision of being '*a sport for all that makes Australians proud*'.

GUIDELINES AND PRACTICES

Term of reference: (a) *The Guidelines and practices contact sports associations and clubs follow in cases of player concussion and repeated head trauma, including practices undermining periods and potential risk disclosure.*

CA Response: Since 2015, CA in collaboration with the state and territory cricket associations, has established policies regarding concussion and head trauma based on the International Cricket Council (ICC) *Concussion Management Guidelines*¹ and internal and external research regarding concussion. The current version of this policy, which is reviewed and revised annually, is the *Australian Cricket Concussion and Head Trauma Policy* dated 31 July 2022 (**AC Policy**).

¹ Concussion Management Guidelines, International Cricket Council, December 2020: <https://resources.pulse.icc-cricket.com/ICC/document/2021/01/21/28d8425f-cbc6-4101-b336-e567fdabc737/ICC-Concussion-Management-Guidelines-Dec-2020.pdf>



The AC Policy applies to all players and match officials participating in any CA sanctioned competitions and matches or training for such competitions or matches or training for international cricket competitions and matches and who receive a blow to the head or neck, whether by ball or otherwise. It should also be noted that in respect of players representing Australia in international cricket competitions or matches, Cricket Australia follows the AC Policy (where possible within the ICC's rules).

The AC Policy governs the:

1. protocol for assessing elite players who receive a blow to their head or neck for concussion or other head trauma and determining whether a diagnosis of concussion exists;
2. protocol for players returning to any play following the diagnosis of a concussion;
3. documentation required following any head trauma irrespective of whether the impact results in a concussion or not;
4. documentation of the return to play process following concussion; and
5. diagram clearly setting out the steps to be taken in the event of any head trauma.

In practice, CA has adopted further testing protocols to assess the impact of head trauma and concussion and inform the return to play process based on internal cricket specific research and data analysis. Apart from the Sports Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT) which is available through CA's digital platforms and feeds into Australian Cricket's bespoke medical record system, a digital neurocognitive test, known as Cognigram, is used in the assessment and return to play process. CA has also developed a multidisciplinary case management process for complex and repeated concussions that involve internal and external concussion experts.

For community cricket, CA has published and disseminated guidelines on concussion to local clubs that encourages a conservative approach to the management of head trauma.



LONG-TERM IMPACT

Terms of reference: (b) *The long-term impacts of concussions and repeated head trauma, including but not limited to mental, physical, social and professional impacts.*

CA Response: There is no cricket specific data on the long-term impacts of concussion and repeated head trauma. CA has been collecting accurate data on all head impacts from the 300 professional elite players each year for almost a decade, as well as data from elite pathway players. This data will form the foundation for ongoing research to better understand the medium and long-term impacts of cricket related head trauma and concussion, as current players transition out of the professional game.

PLAYER SUPPORT

Term of reference: (c) *The long and short-term support available to players affected by concussion and repeated head trauma.*

CA Response: Cricketers playing for Australia, the States and Territories, and Women's and Men's Big Bash League clubs (**W/BBL**) have access to an extensive support network including doctors and psychologists employed by CA and the state and territory associations. There are also external referral networks, which are utilized when appropriate, including sports doctors with extensive clinical and research experience with concussion, neurologists, physiotherapists specialising in concussion recovery, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Where appropriate, CA, the state and territory associations, and W/BBL clubs engage a multi-disciplinary team to manage complex concussion cases and support the affected players.

LIABILITY OF SPORTING ORGANISATIONS

Term of reference: (d) *The liability of contact sports associations and clubs for long-term impacts of player concussions and repeated head trauma*

CA Response: CA's proactive approach to concussion research, prevention and management reflects the emphasis it places on athlete well-being and the duty of care it owes its athletes.

ROLE OF SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS & CLUBS IN DEBATE

Term of reference: (e) *The role of sports associations and clubs in the debate around concussion and repeated head trauma, including in financing research.*

CA submission: CA has meaningfully contributed to research and related work regarding concussion and repeated head trauma.



Some examples of work and research CA has undertaken and financed, are:

1. Funding a full-time research position with a strong focus on concussion and head/neck trauma. CA led concussion related research has been published in several peer reviewed journals.
2. CA's Head of Sports Science & Sports Medicine and Chief Medical Officer dedicate a significant portion of their workload to the management and study/research of head trauma, concussion and neck injuries. The Chief Medical Officer also meets regularly (fortnightly to monthly) with Chief Medical Officers of other sports to discuss topics of interest across elite sports in Australia. Concussion and head trauma is a consistent topic of discussion at these meetings.
3. Engaging external consultants to assist with research and development projects related to head related trauma and concussion, and the ongoing development of the Concussion and Head Trauma Policy.
4. Leading the British Standards Institute (industry standard certifier for cricket helmet standards) in the development of a standard for neck protectors to be fitted to helmets to improve player protection.
5. Collaborating, and fully funding, the research and development into the size of neck protectors required by players and developing three different sized neck protectors to suit player requirements.
6. Funding and leading cricket specific concussion research projects that have been published in international peer reviewed medical journals.
7. CA collates 3-monthly and annual head trauma and concussion reports from the elite cricket competitions used to inform prevention and management approaches to concussion, as well as ensuring adherence to the AC Policy. This data is also used to evaluate and update the AC Policy.
8. CA were the first cricket playing nation to bring in a concussion substitute in an elite domestic cricket competition which became a trial, observed by all other cricket playing nations and adopted by the ICC for all international cricket. The rules have now been changed in all elite cricket to allow for concussion substitutes.



DEFINITION OF CONCUSSION

Term of reference: (f) *The lack of a consistent definition of what constitutes 'concussion'.*

CA Response: There is no universal definition of concussion, but the AC Policy for elite and professional cricket clearly outlines a decision-making process required after a head impact, including tests that lead clinicians to the diagnosis in cases where it is not definitive. CA utilizes additional tests (neurocognitive) to assist with diagnosis that are not widely used by other sports to improve detection of concussion. These tests have been validated for cricket through internal CA research.

FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Term of reference: (g) *The prevalence, monitoring and reporting of concussion and long-term impacts of concussion and repeated head trauma, including in First Nations communities.*

CA Response: Currently, to CA's knowledge, there is no cricket specific data on the long-term impacts of concussion and repeated head trauma. As indicated earlier in the submission, CA is collecting head trauma and concussion data with the view of medium and long-term analysis to better understand the impacts of concussion on all players, including those from First Nations communities.

COMPENSATION MECHANISMS

Term of reference: (h) *Workers, or other, compensation mechanisms for players affected by long-term impacts of concussion and repeated head trauma.*

CA Response: The player contract between CA and/or state and territory cricket associations and elite players contain provisions dealing with injury payments (a form of income protection), along with provisions dealing with the payment of excess medical costs during and after the term of their employment.

AWARENESS RAISING

Term of reference: (i) *Alternative approaches to concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sport and awareness raising about its risks.*

CA Response: CA provides annual education sessions with players around concussion. This annual education includes reports of head impact and concussion statistics, latest concussion research, concussion related rule changes and the importance of accurate reporting of systems and management of concussion.



At a community cricket level, CA publishes Head Trauma and Concussion guidelines that take a conservative approach to management of head impact and concussion. CA also make recommendations regarding the use of helmets and neck protectors in community competitions, with additional recommendations that local associations that govern community cricket competitions adopt the same compulsory use of helmets as the elite cricket players.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Term of reference: (j) *International experiences in modifying sports for children.*

CA Response: CA is not aware of modifications in Australia or abroad to the way cricket is played for children as it relates to concussion. Australian Cricket's recommended management of concussion in children is in alignment with international consensus statement recommendations and includes a conservative approach to concussion management compared to adults.

At an elite and community cricket level, it is a requirement that all junior players **are** required to wear cricket helmets while playing cricket. Whilst cricket helmets do not eliminate the risk of concussion, they do reduce the likelihood that that head trauma will result in concussion.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information or clarification required on any matters raised in this submission can be directed to Brett Wood, Head of Government Relations, Cricket Australia at .