

Submission from the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association Inc (AWRA)

Senate Inquiry into the reporting of sports news and the emergence of digital media

Introduction:

AWRA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the reporting of sports news and the emergence of digital media. We hope there are some positive outcomes from this Inquiry - to the present time there has not been any action on the recommendations or indeed a government response to the 2006 Senate Inquiry into Women's Sport and Recreation in Australia.

AWRA is an enthusiastic and dynamic volunteer not-for-profit organisation that was incorporated in 2005. We strongly endorse the delivery of sport, physical activity and recreation to all Australians, to build a healthier Australia and particularly wants to see a "fair go" for women and girls.

As a national non-government organisation, AWRA's vision statement is to be:

"The national body providing leadership and a voice for women and girls in sport, physical activity and recreation, to enable their full participation."

In this context there needs to be a paradigm shift so that the sport and recreation industry fully engages girls and women at all levels of involvement, from grass roots participation to leadership roles. While much has improved in Australia for girls and women in sport and recreation, there is still much more than needs to change before there is gender equity in the Australian sports industry and hence in the sports media.

Background: The Current Situation for Women in Sport in Australia

Using the Senate Report figures (2006 Senate Report *About Time. Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia*) and AWRA's National Survey in 2007 it is established that approximately 38% of women participate in sport and physical activity and although physical education and sport is compulsory in primary and most of secondary school, approximately 40% of girls drop out by the age of 16.

Women continue to struggle to achieve senior management and leadership positions in many businesses and industries and this is consistently replicated in the sports industry. Women currently hold 7% of leadership positions (CEO, President, Board positions and management) within sports organisations. Coaching and officials figures are only slightly better.

Career paths to world class sport are far less obvious for women. Women's elite teams can be perceived as having less value or they are a stepping stone for coaches to men's elite teams. The vicious circle of poor media coverage, so less sponsorship or financial support, continues to hold back national competitions and leagues, which are the key to developing pathways to elite Australian and international sport.

Media coverage of women's sport in Australia is deficient in the extreme, despite the increased quality of the performances of women athletes. Our women athletes and especially our team sports achieve at very high level and yet there is so little coverage of their feats, unless it is Olympic or Commonwealth Games where the women win the majority of medals.

Television coverage is approximately 1% for women's sport. ABC TV is the outstanding highlight. If it was not for the national broadcaster there would be hardly any free to air viewing of women's sport. Where do our young girls see sporting role models? They don't, with Australian research showing that only 8% of teenage girls claim to have a sport role model.

Print media coverage of women's sport is slightly better (ranging from 4-10% depending on where you live) and radio is actually worse than television. **In the Australian print media more coverage is given to motor racing, horses and greyhounds than women's sport!** One of the few exceptions is *The Canberra Times* which gives great coverage of its women's national league basketball and soccer teams and also demonstrates a degree of balance over a range of sports, amateur and professional.

Particular comments on the terms of reference:

- a) AWRA believes it is in the public interest that there is more coverage of women's sport in all forms of media. Currently there is no balance, with about 99% of sports media coverage going to male sport (usually professional codes of football, cricket, motor racing and golf) that is often sponsored by a media organisation. This virtual integration of media interests with male professional sports locks out amateur sports, female and male, and continues the media's historical and traditional Australian bias to male sport. The result is a complete imbalance in sports reporting and the broad casting of sports news, with commercial interests dominating and the bigger professional sports dominating.

It was hoped in the early 1990's with the introduction of cable (pay) television in Australia that there would be more coverage of women's sport but while there was an initial trend this way the situation is little changed today. ABC TV2 digital has covered the Women's National Basketball League, the W League (and done a great job too) and Bowling (male and female) and some special women's events. However, the commercial TV companies have been very slow to use their digital channels and are well behind the ABC here. Hopefully the growth of digital TV will increase media coverage of women's sport but as costs of production increase it always seems to be that it is the women's programs that get axed first. This is what happened with paytv.

Interestingly, Channel 10 has started the first digital all sport TV station in Australia. It has taken over from Foxsports and Sky TV (New Zealand) the coverage of the 2009 Trans Tasman Netball league, along with other sports such as athletics, swimming and will cover the 2010 Commonwealth games from New Delhi, India. The netball coverage is a bonus for women's sport as more people (particularly girls and women) will be able to watch elite netball on free to air television, where last season the league was covered by Fox Sports and Sky TV New Zealand.

b) the nature of sports news reporting in the digital age, and the effect of new technologies (including video streaming on the Internet, archived photo galleries and mobile devices) on the nature of sports news reporting;

The above should assist with the coverage of all sports, as long as the sports organisations produce this information or make it available, as journalists will not need to attend events but could still cover them and have access to statistics and even participants through technology assistance. Indeed, a journalist may never need to leave their office! So less time and money will be spent and hopefully that will result in a broader coverage of all sports.

AWRA will not comment on the remaining criteria as these matters are more pertinent to national and state sporting organisations. However, for your reference AWRA will include below the media recommendations from the 2006 Senate Inquiry into Women's Sport and Recreation in Australia and again make the comment that these need to be acted on by the Federal Government.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide financial support, to be administered by the Australian Sports Commission, for initiatives that provide specific opportunities for greater ongoing coverage of women's sport. The committee believes this program should administer funding of up to \$3 million per annum, and be reviewed after approximately three years.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the government consider allocating up to \$1 million to the Australian Paralympic Committee to assist with production and associated costs of televised coverage of the forthcoming Paralympics, and that the arrangement include stipulation that a condition of accessing this funding be that there be balanced coverage of male and female athletes. (Note: this referred to the 2008 Beijing Games).

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide financial support, to be administered by the Australian Sports Commission, for the training of athletes and sports administrators to better utilise media opportunities.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the government fund the Australian Sports Commission to replicate in 2008–09 the surveys and analysis performed in the 1996 report *An Illusory Image*. (Note: this study analysed the print, radio and TV coverage of women's sport).