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Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

Response to Question taken On Notice from Senator David Pocock in relation to the Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital

1. *What are the primary barriers to bringing a first-class men's cricket team to the National Capital?*

There are several barriers (real and perceived) to bringing a first-class men's cricket team to the ACT:

- **Tradition (real):**
 - Cricket is a game that is unspeakably old and unspeakably traditional. From an Australian perspective, the Sheffield Shield was first contested in 1892/93 between New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. Queensland entered the competition in 1926/27, Western Australia was admitted in 1947/48 and Tasmania was the last team to enter in 1977 when the population was 12million. Despite the Australian population more than doubling since 1977, the male domestic competition (outside of the BBL) has not changed in 46 years.
- **Governance (real):**
 - The current governance structure of Cricket Australia (as outlined in question two) requires support of 4 of the 6 states change to instigate major change within the system. As a non- member of Cricket Australia, this is a potential barrier.
- **Funding (real):**
 - There are financial considerations that would need to be explored in relation to the establishment of a first-class men's team in the ACT. In saying this, however, introduction of such a team/program also provides revenue generating opportunities that are not currently available in the ACT. This would help to offset the expense associated with having a first-class team established in the ACT.
- **Facilities (real):**
 - Community cricket facilities in the ACT (as outline in question seven and eight), are an issue and one that needs to be addressed. It is of vital importance that premier clubs have access to and can prepare quality playing and training facilities that help to foster and develop cricketers capable of competing on the national and international stage.
- **Playing Depth (perceived):**
 - There is a perception that the introduction of a seventh male elite program would dilute the quality of the playing field/competition. We do not subscribe to this theory as there is enough 'talent' to spread across seven jurisdictions (noting that 30% of the 2021/22 contracted list did not take the field). It is interesting to note that the ACT Meteors are one of seven jurisdictions who compete in the Women's National Cricket League (the pinnacle of competitions for female players within



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Australia), even though the female player pool is considerable smaller than the male player pool.

- **Crowded Calendar (perceived):**
 - There is a perception that hosting a seventh team would create scheduling and logistical challenges. Whilst we acknowledge that there would need some degree of additional planning/preparation, this can be easily overcome by activating Winter in jurisdictions like the NT and Northern QLD where cricket can be played 365 days a year.
- **Size of the Market (perceived)**
 - The ACT is a dynamic and rapidly evolving community. Over the past 20 years, the population of the ACT has grown by 41%, driven by migration both from within Australia and Overseas. The population of the ACT is projected to increase to nearly 850,000 over the few decades, bringing in new communities and new potential members to the game. Further, Canberrans should be able to aspire to represent their Territory on the national stage, just like their State counterparts.

2. *How is the ACT represented by Cricket Australia?*

Unlike National Cabinet whereby all States and Territories are equally represented, Cricket Australia has six members (shareholders) which are the six States. The Territories (ACT and NT) are non-member associates with no voting rights, no representation on the Cricket Australia Board and no formal recognition in Cricket Australia's current constitution. This archaic model needs to be address, particularly when you consider:

- Cricket ACT has cemented its legacy on the National Capital with over a 100 years supporting community, domestic and international cricket.
- The ACT has the highest percentage of junior players playing nationally and is punching well above its weight in terms of contributing to the Australian Cricket strategy.
- The ACT has a proud history of producing talented cricketers, with 10.3% of men's state and national contracts in 2020/21 being players of ACT origin. Six players from CACT programs have been selected in Australian cricket programs over the past few seasons.
- The ACT competes on the national stage (Women's National League, National Second XI male competition, National Underage Championships for both male and female players)
- Cricket ACT has consistently demonstrated a prudent and proactive approach to organisational development and growth of the game.

3. *Should Cricket Australia's governance structure be truly representative of the entire Australian population?*

Cricket Australia's strategic plan (2022-27) is underpinned by the ultimate belief that cricket is truly a game for all, a belief that Cricket ACT also shares. In saying this, however, the current governance structure does not truly reflect this belief, in that the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory are not officially recognised in Cricket Australia's constitution. All States and Territories have a significant role to play in terms of uniting and inspiring everyone to love and play cricket, regardless of geographical boundaries. If Cricket is genuinely a sport for all that makes Australians proud (Cricket Australia's vision), then Cricket Australia's governance structure should be truly representative of the entire Australian population via representation from all eight State/Territory jurisdictions.



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4. How heavily does Cricket Australia rely on the federal government for funding?

As evident through examination of Cricket Australia's annual reports, Cricket Australia does receive some support from the Federal Government. The direct level of funding currently received by Cricket Australia from the Federal Government is less than 1 per cent of total revenue (*Source: Cricket Australia*). Cricket Australia works closely with the Federal Government in a range of areas relevant to the development of the sport, from grass roots through to international.

5. What would be the effect on cricket in the National Capital if federal funding for Cricket Australia was made conditional on including the territories as full members?

At a local participation level, there would be a minor impact on cricket in the National Capital. We certainly would not want to jeopardise the growth of the game in the ACT region.

Whilst this historical governance issue does exist and does need to be addressed, it is important to note that Cricket Australia does work closely with Cricket ACT to engage with the Federal Government, particularly in relation to investment in cricket infrastructure. This includes funding for a new Centre of Excellence that would support cricket's development in the ACT and surrounds at both the community and high-performance level.

6. What will be the consequences of not improving Canberra's representation on Cricket Australia?

Cricket ACT is committed to building a thriving culture of cricket through community engagement, participation, and performance. However, this is often impacted by the limited representation and recognition within Australian Cricket. There are several consequences that should be considered, but are easily remedied with the appropriate (and equitable) level of support and recognition:

- **Participation Rates:**
 - The ACT has experienced strong and sustained growth over the past decade, and it is expected to continue to grow and evolve. It is important to note that the population of cricket age residents (those aged 5-44 years old) is predicted to grow by 21% in the ACT, the most substantial increase across Australia. The ACT also has one of the leading growth rates for the female cricketering population, projected to increase 14.4% by 2032. Cricket ACT sees this as a significant opportunity to continue to grow the game in our community and achieve Australian Cricket's goal of increasing regional and female participation bases. Capitalising on this growth will be impacted if the ACT is not fairly and equitably represented within Australian Cricket.
- **Incomplete Pathway:**
 - We currently have a significant number of players who leave Canberra to pursue their cricket in other States simply because the ACT has an incomplete male pathway. As has been well documented, Cricket ACT has bold ambitions to field





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Canberra-based sides in the men's National Competitions (Marsh One-Day Cup and Sheffield Shield) as well as women's and men's teams competing in the Big Bash Leagues (domestic Twenty20 competition) in the next few years to ensure that young Canberrans have the same opportunity as their State counterparts and that we positively contribute to fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital. Canberrans should be able to aspire to represent the ACT with pride and forge a career in their own backyard, rather than have to seek opportunities in other jurisdictions to fulfill their potential.

- **Funding/Commercial Implications:**

- Current Australian Cricket funding allocations appears to follow historical and legacy patterns, rather than having a strong alignment with the current trends in community participation and growth of the game. This has resulted in unsustainable funding allocation that impacts delivery expectations and neglect areas of high growth potential in the game. Additionally, the revenue generation possibilities that the States enjoy are not currently available in ACT which has a significant impact on our ability to help realise Cricket Australia's strategic vision for the game. Corporate funding is also not being realised at present, primarily due to the fact that the ACT does not field an elite men's team and/or W/BBL teams.

7. *Can you compare the ACT's professional cricket infrastructure to, say, Hobart's or Darwin's? Is it your sense that the National Capital has been getting a raw deal on sporting infrastructure investment?*

Whilst the Phillip Oval precinct in Woden, which houses both AFL and Cricket in the ACT, has changed the way in which high performance cricket programs are delivered in the National Capital, our facilities are still well below the national standard. We are currently oversubscribed at Phillip and will need to activate another high-performance training hub within Canberra to sustainably house both men's and women's elite programs in the future. As an example, our strength and conditioning sessions for individual programs are currently staggered due to the small size of the gymnasium, which does have an impact on things such as team cohesion, staff resourcing and programming. Additionally, we are over capacity within the office for administration/coaching staff.

Cold Canberra Winters unfortunately impacts our ability to get on turf when most other jurisdictions can. Tasmania have undertaken significant research and development initiatives in relation to hot-house turf curation and can now train all year round, which is a fantastic outcome for Tasmanian cricketers. ACT cricketers, however, must leave Canberra for a period of time to access turf training facilities, because we simply cannot afford to explore such initiatives. Darwin's all-weather facilities are impressive and enable players to train year-round, even during the wet season and extreme heat. Further, Tasmania must be commended for the quality of their turf playing facilities and clubhouses. They hosted the 2022/23 U17 National Male Championships where the grounds were in immaculate condition and were certainly of a much higher standard than any in the ACT.

Outside of Manuka Oval, lighting infrastructure that is conducive to elite male and female training and game play is non-existence. Whilst this does have implications for ACT players who are required to transition between day and day/night games, this has broader



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implications from a climate change perspective. As temperatures continue to rise during Summer, cricket will need to expand its nighttime offerings and therefore lighting infrastructure, like what is available in most other jurisdictions, will be a priority.

Cricket ACT certainly supports the notion that the National Capital has been getting a raw deal on sporting infrastructure investment, especially when you consider the extensive capital works that have been undertaken in neighbouring New South Wales towns like Queanbeyan, Googong and Jerrabomberra. Cricket ACT certainly supports any federal government initiative associated with revisiting and/or recalibrating the distribution of infrastructure funding/investment because if we do not address the issue of ageing infrastructure, the gap between the ACT and all other States and Territories will continue to widen and future generations will simply miss out. Additionally, it also decreases our chances of hosting National Championships moving forward.

8. *At the community cricket level, how are we doing in the National Capital in terms of access to ovals, clubhouses and amenities like women's change rooms? How does the ACT's community cricket infrastructure compare with the other jurisdictions?*

The quality of cricket infrastructure (and sporting infrastructure in general) is poor in the ACT relative to other jurisdictions. Most facilities available for cricket were built in the 1950s and 1960s and do not have suitable changeroom and toilet facilities for men, women, boys, and girls. Several facilities are dated, unfit for purpose, inadequate in terms of space, and often still only cater for one gender. Not only does this have an impact on our ability to recruit and retain cricket participants, it also impacts our ability to achieve health, social and economic benefits linked to participation in community sport.

With a growing cricket community, we face an issue at both the Premier Cricket level and junior participation level regarding access and quality of training facilities. Training facilities and environments are not keeping pace with the growth and future direction of the game of cricket. Only one of the eight ACT Premier Cricket clubs has an ability to train on turf facilities, and even that facility is severely aged and in need of significant curation improvements. Access to turf training facilities for Premier clubs in all other States is standard practice. Several junior clubs in the ACT are using synthetic facilities that would fail any health and safety audit, but they have no alternative given the limited availability and the ageing nature of those that do currently exist.

Unfortunately, playing surfaces in Canberra are not adequately maintained for cricket. In fact, the recent facilities audit undertaken by Cricket Australia suggested that our facilities are some of the worst in the country. Again, this has a significant impact on our ability to recruit and retain players of all abilities and ages and impacts our ability to host National Championships.

The availability and quality of sporting infrastructure does influence patterns of sport activity, so it is of vital importance that we continue to invest in community sporting infrastructure. Further, we cannot underestimate the importance of providing safe, inclusive and appropriate facilities as community sporting infrastructure can be much more than just a place to play sport.



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9. What barriers do you see to more fully activating Manuka Oval?

From a local and domestic perspective, the costs associated with using Manuka Oval have increased significantly over the years. As a result of escalating costs, there has been a reduction in the amount of local and domestic content played at Manuka Oval. The ACT Meteors will not play at Manuka Oval this year as it is too cost prohibitive. In fact, no ACT teams or competitions will be played at Manuka this season. We cannot underestimate the impact this has had and will continue to have on ACT cricketers and ACT cricket programs, particularly in terms of diluting the home ground advantage as a direct result of not being able to access Manuka.

Whilst Manuka Oval is still considered one of Australia's best boutique grounds and often awarded top marks by the International Cricket Council from a curation perspective, the ground will need to evolve for it to continue to attract international content. Cricket ACT has publicly supported the enhancement of the eastern side of the ground which could include a permanent grandstand facility with covered seating for spectators and fans, and appropriate corporate hospitality facilities. Such works would help to activate Manuka Oval and in doing so, would certainly help to elevate the National Capital and connect more people to Canberra.

