



Netball HQ, 191 Johnston Street  
Fitzroy, VIC 3065  
PO Box 13285  
Law Courts VIC 8010  
T: (+61) 3 8621 8600  
F: (+61) 3 8621 8625  
infonet@netball.com.au

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## **Netball Australia submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's inquiry into concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sports**

Netball Australia (**NA**) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Government's inquiry into concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sports (the **Inquiry**).

### **1. NETBALL AUSTRALIA**

NA is the national governing body for netball in Australia and is a full member of the International Netball Federation Ltd (**World Netball**).

World Netball regulates and governs the sport of netball globally, with responsibility for establishing the Rules of Netball and the various rules and regulations for the conduct of international netball matches.

NA is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, with eight Member Organisations (being each of the State Sporting Organisations responsible for the conduct of netball in their respective State/Territory).

NA owns and operates the Suncorp Super Netball competition (the **SSN**).

NA is responsible for:

- organising and administering the Origin Australian Diamonds (the **Diamonds**), Australian 21/Under and pathways programs and the participation of these teams at World Netball and international events, including the Commonwealth Games;
- managing and conducting the SSN;
- the promotion of Netball for commercial, government and public recognition and benefits; and
- the conduct, promotion and management of netball throughout Australia, through and by the Member Organisations.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

Traditionally, netball is classified as a non-contact sport.

The modernisation and professionalism of the sport has seen an increase in the standard of athletes and competitiveness in professional netball matches, particularly in the SSN and elite

competitions.

While the prevalence of concussion in netball remains low, NA recognises that the impacts of head knocks, and Sport Related Concussion (**SRC**) has increasingly become a significant public health issue.

### 3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

NA makes the following submissions in response to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

#### a. The guidelines and practices contact sports associations and clubs follow in cases of player concussions and repeated head trauma, including practices undermining recovery periods and potential risk disclosure

Since 2014, Netball Australia has released information and guidelines on sport related concussion (**SRC**) to its elite competitions (as distinct from programs), including the National Netball Championships (**NNC**), the SSN (previously the ANZ Championship from 2008 to 2016), and Australian representative teams.

NA's guidelines, position statements and policies on SRC have been, and continue to be, modified and enhanced based on medical research and advice.

NA's latest Policy & Position Statement on Concussion in Netball was released in September 2021 (the **Policy & Position Statement**). The Policy and Position Statement is further supported by the following policy documents:

1. Policy and Guidelines for Management of SRC: National Programs & Suncorp Super Netball Competition (the **National Program/SSN Concussion Guidelines**); and
2. Policy and Guidelines for Management of SRC: National Netball Championships and Australian Netball Championships September 2021 (the **NNC/ANC Guidelines**).

The Policy & Position Statement provides general advice to community netball participants.

In establishing the Policy & Position Statement, NA understood the need to guide the response and treatment of concussion at national level events and competitions through competition specific guidelines for the national programs, the SSN, as well as NA's pathway programs (the **National Netball Championships** and **Australian Netball Championships** (the **NA Elite Programs**)).

The Policy & Position Statement follows the general principles of management outlined in the Consensus Statement from the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Concussion in Sport and will be updated following the release of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Concussion in Sport that took place in October 2022.

These documents are publicly available at [netball.com.au/integrity-policies](https://netball.com.au/integrity-policies).

NA also promotes and relies on the use of guidelines produced by peak medical bodies, including the Australian Sports Commission (**ASC**) and Australian Institute of Sport (**AIS**) with expertise in SRC to different stakeholders within the sport including players, parents, coaches and medical staff. These resources are available at [www.concussioninsport.gov.au](https://www.concussioninsport.gov.au) (the **Government Resources**) and are referred to in the Policy & Position Statement.

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

The Policy & Position Statement addresses the long-term impacts of concussion and repeated head trauma.

While the prevalence of concussion in netball is low, accurate diagnosis and management are needed to ensure that a concussed netballer is appropriately identified, managed and safely returned to play.

The Policy & Position Statement recognises that the diagnosis of concussion and subsequent return to play is based on an individualised medical assessment conducted by a medical practitioner in accordance with the protocols and principles set out in the Policy & Position Statement.

NA conducts regular education across players, coaches, medical practitioners and other support staff across the NA Elite Programs to ensure that each can recognise common symptoms of concussion (including delayed concussion), the importance of reporting and return to play protocols.

Community netball participants are referred to the Government Resources.

**c. The long and short-term support available to players affected by concussion and repeated head trauma**

Long and short-term support is available to all players within the NA Elite Programs that may be affected by concussion and repeated head trauma through NA's welfare network which is coordinated by the Head of Wellbeing Strategy and includes the SSN Team psychologists, SSN Team doctors and the AIS Mental Health Referral Network (**MHRN**).

**d. The liability of contact sports associations and clubs for long-term impacts of player concussions and repeated head trauma**

Any question around the liability of sports associations and clubs requires consideration of the breadth of causation and variables in this area and it is therefore not for NA to provide specific comment.

NA's position is that any legislative framework require careful consideration and may not cover all circumstances and cases.

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

NA relies on the medical research and advice of medical professionals in respect of concussion and repeated head trauma, including the various International Conferences on Concussion in Sport that have taken place.

NA also relies on support, advice and research available through the ASC and AIS.

**f. The lack of a consistent definition of what constitutes 'concussion'**

NA relies on medical research and advice to define 'concussion', including advice that will be released following the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Concussion in Sport that took place in

October 2022.

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

The Athlete Management System (**AMS**) is NA's electronic medical records system. In respect of injuries, the following data is recorded in the AMS – the injury, the mechanism of injury, date of injury, date of return to full training and date of full injury resolution.

Team medical staff (physiotherapists and doctors) are responsible for entering all injury data, including any concussion, into the AMS.

This data is also analysed and an annual report, the SSN Injury Epidemiology Report, is prepared in conjunction with the AIS.

The data demonstrates that the prevalence of SRC in NA Elite Programs is low.

The 2022 SSN Injury Epidemiology Report (which captured data from the 2022 SSN season) reported 2 concussions.

In the 2021 SSN season, 2 cases of concussion were reported.

Over half of all concussions (n=13, 59.1%) reported since 2017 have occurred during games with roughly a quarter resulting from training (n=5, 22.7%).

NA continues to monitor the prevalence of SRC in the SSN and NA Elite Programs as well as recovery and adherence with return to play guidelines.

**h. Workers, or other, compensation mechanisms for players affected by long-term impacts of concussions and repeated head trauma**

NA has Collective Player Agreements (**CPAs**) in place with the Australian Netball Players Association for netball players in the SSN and Australian Diamonds squads. These CPAs provide various benefits and support to all SSN and Australian Diamonds squad members.

**i. Alternative approaches to concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sport, and awareness raising about its risks**

As identified above, NA conducts regular education across players, coaches, medical practitioners and other support staff across the NA Elite Programs raising awareness of the risks of concussion and repeated head trauma in netball.

NA is supportive of consulting with the ASC and the AIS on any sport specific government initiative, that raises awareness of the risks of concussion and repeated head trauma.

**j. International experiences in modifying sports for children**

As a non-contact sport, at this point in time, NA does not believe modifications to the Rules of Netball are required for junior netball participants.

The Policy & Position Statement refers to all community netball participants to ASC and AIS resources.

**k. Any other related matters**

NA does not have any further comments at this time.

**4. CONTACT**

If you have any questions in relation to these submissions or any Netball Australia's position in relation to other aspects of these submissions, please contact Bryan Wilson, Head of Strategic Projects, Netball Australia. Details are below:

Bryan Wilson  
Head of Strategic Projects  
Netball Australia  
Mobile:  
Email:

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