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Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

Response to Question taken On Notice from Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital – Tuesday, 20 June 2023.

Refers to [Hansard Paragraph 22](#), question from the Hon. Nola Marino, Member for Forrest (WA)

Infrastructure priorities for Cricket ACT, regarding Community Infrastructure, and Manuka Oval

Cricket ACT (CACT) has a significant role to play in terms of fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital. With appropriate infrastructure, resourcing, funding, and Australian Cricket governance reform (ie Membership for the Territories) CACT will contribute to the growth and exposure of this region, not only domestically but internationally.

CACT has recently undertaken an audit of community cricket facilities in the ACT in conjunction with Cricket Australia, as part of their national economic infrastructure study. Key community infrastructure deficiencies have been identified which currently limit CACT's ability to contribute to enhancing the significance of Australia's National Capital.

For the purposes of this response, three main priorities have been outlined:

1. Clubhouse and/or appropriate changeroom facilities at all Premier Cricket club grounds;
2. Training facilities and environments
3. Playing surfaces, and particularly the centre wicket squares of grounds used by Premier clubs.

1. Clubhouse and/or appropriate changeroom facilities

The lack of cricket clubhouses and adequate changing facilities are two fundamental gaps in the infrastructure needs of our community. 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. The facilities are dated, unfit for purpose, inadequate in terms of space, and often still only cater for one gender.

Furthermore, our Premier clubs in the ACT do not have access to or effective leasing arrangements that would allow the development of dedicated clubhouse facilities at their main home ground. The majority of clubs are spread across multiple grounds with no home.





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Outlook

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 cricketing population, projected to increase 14.4% by 2032.

By not addressing the fundamental requirement of adequate and appropriate facilities we risk losing our ability to attract junior and female participants, whilst hindering our ability to capitalise on this growth. There is a significant body of international research which has identified the strong correlation between unsuitable facilities and/or lack of access to quality facilities and participant recruitment/retention rates.

The aging, inadequate and undersized facilities in the ACT are forcing a considerable number of local players to play interstate, further limiting the ACT's and CACT's contribution to Australian Cricket. Failure to address these needs will result in lower participation rates in all critical age groups, male and female, and will significantly restrict the growth of the game in our region.

2. Training facilities

The ACT region 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 two years. This number is significant when comparing the ACT's population, funding and resources with other state and territory cricket associations.

Issues as identified

With the growing cricket community, we face an issue at both the Premier Cricket level and junior participation level regarding access and quality of training facilities. While the training facilities and environments have improved, they 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 and Territories is standard practice.

Several junior clubs in the ACT are using synthetic facilities that would fail any health and safety audit, but have little alternative given the limited availability and the ageing nature of those that do currently exist.





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Solutions

Following several considered meetings and inclusion in a recent Cricket Australia budget submission to the Federal Government, CACT's proposal for a Centre of Excellence to provide a central focal point for elite cricketers in the ACT also has broad ACT Government support.

This facility is a critical infrastructure requirement in relation to the activation of a W/BBL team in the ACT. It is also a key ingredient in the establishment of a male elite program (similar to the ACT Meteors) here in the ACT. Having a complete pathway for both male and female players in the ACT would certainly help to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital. This facility would provide a centralised high-performance home for all elite teams and programs and would cater for the burgeoning needs of a rapidly expanding cricket community within the ACT and surrounding regions.

The Centre of Excellence would have multiple benefits in that it would also support local cricket, with this innovative and versatile sporting hub providing greater community access to both indoor and outdoor facilities through the provision of flexible training options. Such a community cricket hub does not exist for any of our local clubs, thus creating a training environment of an appropriate standard for the development of ACT cricketers.

This centralised model will reduce the ongoing financial impacts for Clubs, Cricket ACT, and the ACT Government, while providing increased access for participation at all levels of cricket. It would also allow Cricket ACT and the ACT Government to entice commercial tenants to the facility, resulting in an ability to invest back into community infrastructure.

A Centre of Excellence housing elite national level teams and providing high quality, state of the art training facilities and opportunities for local clubs will boost Canberra's standing within Australian Cricket. It would come at a cost of approximately \$25-30 million and should be viewed as critical infrastructure that will be required for the ACT to compete equally on the national cricket stage.

3. Playing surfaces and turf wickets used by Premier clubs

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.

CACT acknowledges that recent weather has impacted the ability to access grounds for mowing and there is the real risk of drought conditions into the future. With that said, we receive numerous complaints of a weekend around the condition of the playing surface and the height of the grass.

This is compounded by a siloed approach to ground classification. A more collaborative approach to cricket ground classification will improve the playing surfaces and the overall experience.





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Issues as identified

Aged turf wickets – The majority of turf wickets in the ACT are well beyond their lifespan. The lack of staged planning to remediate turf wickets has left several in dire conditions with an inability to grow any grass.

Curation – Compounding the aged turf wickets is the inconsistent curation of these turf wickets. To enhance the quality of these facilities an effective curation management plan is required and is ideally delivered by the Cricket ACT curation team who have the expertise to effectively execute the management plan. Additionally, this would allow for an apprenticeship program to be implemented further enhancing the use of human capital to deliver improved facilities for all sports in the ACT.

Usage planning – At present, there is no planning around optimising the turf wickets. What is required in this area is to develop a winter plan for some grounds to hibernate for rehabilitation each year. This will allow effective grass growing to extend the life of turf wickets.

Outlook

To support the future progression of cricket in the ACT significant work is required to improve the turf wicket surfaces. If this work isn't undertaken, the deterioration of competitions and the standard of cricket played in the ACT will continue.

Currently we lose our top junior and senior players to other states where facilities and turf wickets are of a more acceptable standard. This is far from ideal and negatively impacts our reputation, both from a sporting code and region perspective.

Equally, our ability to host National Championships in the ACT hinges on our ability to curate turf wickets and produce playing surfaces of consistent high standard. It is unlikely that the ACT will host any future National Championships until the standard of our facilities improve.

As such, it is imperative for the game and for the continued success of ACT as a destination for these Championships that immediate work is undertaken to deliver improved playing surfaces and turf wickets. Our playing facilities and turf wickets should be a source of pride for all Canberrans.

From an economic point of view, not addressing the current state of playing surfaces will cost the ACT Government significantly, as turf wickets will require complete renovation into the future rather than remediation if addressed now.

Ultimately, if the ACT is to achieve our stated ambitions of national elite representation in male competitions to go with our existing elite female programs, our Premier Cricket clubs and grounds (and training facilities) need to be of a standard appropriate for the development of state cricketers.





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Initiatives and reports

As mentioned, CACT has bold ambitions to field 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 underpin these bold ambitions and support CACT's potential contribution to Australian Cricket, community infrastructure requires investment. To ensure this future investment is maximised, work has commenced in relation to the development of a new ten-year infrastructure strategy. The purpose of this strategy is to comprehensively understand the needs of the game to then structure a robust investment plan.

The new infrastructure strategy will be supported by the following:

- Third party consultant reports (currently building the terms of reference);
- CA economists review (in progress);
- Reporting by specialist consultants Living Turf, and
- Junior and senior cricket participation data.

The new strategy is set to be finalised in October 2023 with the aim to implement immediately. To support the aforementioned details, the following reports can be made available on request:

- Wicket table assessments for Premier Cricket grounds;
- Australian Cricket Infrastructure Fund future planning, and
- Club investment planning.

CACT can also provide the following response regarding ongoing improvements and needs for Manuka Oval.

Manuka Oval is administered, maintained, and run by the ACT Government, falling under the Venues Canberra umbrella, and serves the community as the major venue for elite cricket and Australian rules football in the ACT.

CACT's curation team oversees the ongoing preparation and maintenance of the playing surface and centre wicket. The curation team is consistently recognised for the high-quality playing environments delivered for AFL/W premiership and pre-season games, and especially national and international cricket. Manuka Oval remains one of seven regular international-quality cricket venues in Australia.

Though local cricket has a long and proud history with the venue, the ACT Government's elite sport designation and substantial hire fees imposed mean that Manuka Oval is rarely





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utilised for local and domestic cricket. Considerable community feedback is received in relation to this point.

The ground itself is nearing its own Centenary and has been earmarked for significant infrastructure improvements in the recent ACT Government Budget, delivered in late June. These improvements will include new or significant upgrades for public amenities, the ground's main entrances, and the installation of a new, permanent video replay screen. CACT welcomes this investment as it complements our elite national cricket participation ambitions.

Importantly, the ACT Government has a strong desire to reshape the eastern side of the ground, which would likely include a permanent grandstand facility with covered seating for spectators and fans, and appropriate corporate hospitality facilities, all designed to enhance Manuka Oval's current reputation as the best boutique cricket ground in Australia. Whilst these improvements would deliver obvious benefits for cricket (and other sports) and is supported by CACT, it would certainly help to elevate the National Capital and connect more people to Canberra, domestically and internationally.

Concluding Remarks

Through the support and advocacy of both Federal and Territory Governments, CACT can unlock its potential and increase its contribution to Australian Cricket and the broader ACT community, which will ultimately contribute to fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital.

