

**SUBMISSION TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER AFFAIRS INQUIRY INTO THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT
TO INDIGENOUS WELLBEING AND MENTORING**

The Queensland Government has a strong commitment to improving the wellbeing of Indigenous people. Sport and recreation activities play a vital role in helping us close the gap in health and wellbeing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as they can provide a meaningful diversion for children and youth at risk, teach important life skills and encourage healthy lifestyles.

Local governments are also intricately involved in the development and provision of sport and recreation services to improve Indigenous wellbeing, especially in areas with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. If the intent of the Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring is to gather information on all contributors and suppliers, it is recommended that the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs widen the terms of reference of its Inquiry to include the contribution of state, territory and local governments.

In addition, the Committee may benefit from ensuring the terms of reference include provisions for the Inquiry to also collect anecdotes, quotes and community examples of how sport has contributed to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring. Solely focusing on the Closing the Gap targets, figures and performance measures can at times provide a narrow view of the impact sport and recreation programs have at the community level.

To provide the Committee with an indication of the Queensland Government's use of sport to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a brief summary of four programs that the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (the Department) delivers is provided below. The four programs are:

- Sport and Recreation Active Inclusion Program;
- Indigenous Grants Program;
- Learning Earning Active Places (LEAP) Strategy; and
- Indigenous Community Sport and Recreation Program.

These programs foster greater participation, education and training, and volunteer development and recruitment to increase access to sport and active recreation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

There are of course many other services utilising sport that are provided through Queensland Health and the Departments of Education, Training and Employment, Justice and Attorney-General, Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs.

Sport and Recreation Active Inclusion Program

The Sport and Recreation Active Inclusion Program, which has now ceased, provided funding to support the delivery of sport and recreation opportunities for individuals and groups facing barriers to participation within the community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than \$4.6M in funding was approved over the life of the program for projects to support sport, recreation and healthy eating initiatives (directly or indirectly) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Indigenous Grants Program

The Department's Indigenous Grants program funds numerous sport and recreation activities and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Department is currently providing \$1.3 million in funding over three years to the sports of Australian rules football, hockey and rugby league to improve program delivery, education and access for remote communities in Cape York and the Torres Strait.

In hockey alone, this commitment has helped over 3,000 people from remote and Indigenous communities participate in competitions and over 100 people have participated in community coaching and officiating courses. Of this latter group, seven have completed their coach accreditation and 34 have completed their community umpires course. The remaining 70 have partially completed their accreditation to be coaches and officials.

This partnership with the state sporting organisations has enabled the expansion of the existing programs delivered by these organisations across the north of the state and the three year commitment provides certainty for planning and regular community delivery.

The contribution of these sport and recreation programs to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is often reported in terms of participation numbers and other statistics, yet some of the most significant evidence comes in the form of anecdotes. For example, the Principal of Aurukun State School and the Police Liaison Officer who reside in the community of Aurukun acknowledge that sport and active recreational activities assist with lowering the regularity of crime and behavioural problems of youth in Aurukun. They also recognise the level of self-esteem improves with the youth who pride themselves in their sporting prowess.

When interviewing local stakeholders in Woorabinda, the Gladstone Observer reported in 2011 that "Rugby League is a priority in Woorabinda. Woorabinda comprises about 1,200 people and everyone is excited about the prospect of seeing their boys run around. It's a dry community now and alcohol and sport isn't the greatest. People know what is required and they cannot wait. It'll make the community again".

Although there are many outcomes from these projects that demonstrate the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring, one of the best documented is as follows:

The Queensland Government provided funding contributions to Hockey Queensland to assist it document the participation of the first Indigenous hockey team in an international event. The Remote and Indigenous Hockey Program (RIHP) received assistance from a range of stakeholders to enable the RIHP Rubies to travel overseas to participate in the Singapore Sixes. The tournament is now in its 18th year featuring 60 teams from Singapore, Thailand, Australia, Malaysia, Germany, England, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Japan.

Hockey Queensland recognised that the Rubies were positive role models for young women and provided an opportunity to promote a range of positive health messages. The Department funded the production of a 30 minute DVD that captured the journey these young girls made from their local hockey fields to the international competition in Singapore. The DVD has now been recognised nationally by the Australian Sports Commission and internationally in the Beyond Sport – Team of the Year awards in London as a project that has successfully used sport to create positive social change. The DVD is being shown in communities across Queensland. Hockey Queensland has shown a 25 percent increase in its participation since the release of the DVD. The Department understands that RIHP is currently in discussions with the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) to turn the DVD into a documentary.

The copy of the DVD from Hockey Queensland is publicly available at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/RIHPHockey?feature=guide> and the report on the Rubies project can be found at: <http://www.remotehockey.com/about-us/2012-program-reports/>

Learning Earning Active Places (LEAP) Strategy

The Queensland Government recognises the value of working with non-government organisations by targeting sport and recreation activities. The aim of the Learning Earning Active Places (LEAP) strategy is to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage in urban and regional Queensland by improving access to education, employment, health and housing opportunities. The LEAP strategy is a rolling three year strategy, with the first program of action from 2011 to 2014. Subsequent programs of action beyond 2014 will be released in accordance with the Queensland Government's commitment to the Closing the Gap initiative through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The five objectives of the strategy are to:

- Strengthen the capabilities (health, wellbeing, education and skills) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—*focusing on individual development.*
- Increase access to social, economic and cultural opportunities and address the barriers to participation—*improving access to services.*
- Promote healthy lifestyle choices that lead to positive long-term change for families and communities—*supporting prevention and early intervention approaches.*
- Strengthen relationships and connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider Queensland community—*promoting social cohesion and reconciliation.*
- Support stronger cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in cities, towns and regional centres—*supporting cultural growth and awareness.*

The department contributed \$1 million in 2011-12 to fund over 50 sport and recreation projects across the state as part of an integrated Queensland Government response to meet the five objectives of the strategy. Specific outcomes of the projects will be known as the reports are submitted towards the end of the calendar year, but the principles of the initiative, using sport as a vehicle to achieve a range of outcomes, have already been integrated into the Indigenous Community Sport and Recreation Program.

Indigenous Community Sport and Recreation Program

Over the past three years, the Queensland Government has been working with the Queensland Police Citizens Youth (PCYC) Welfare Association to deliver sport and recreation activities for Indigenous Queenslanders in 38 Indigenous communities across the state through the Indigenous Community Sport and Recreation Program. The program represents a commitment of \$4 million per annum for the next three years.

In recognition of the geographical and cultural characteristics of the Torres Strait region, the Department developed a partnership with Tagai State College, the Torres Shire Council and Torres Strait Island Regional Council to deliver sport and recreation services. Tagai has been funded \$380,000 per annum for three years to employ nine sport and recreation officers in the Torres Strait.

An upgrade to the Kangaroo Indoor Multipurpose centre at Woorabinda has been completed. The upgrade included new amenities and change rooms, office accommodation for the PCYC, kiosk servicing the stadium and the new pool, enhanced security and vandal resistance and other works to complement the projects proximity to the new swimming pool project.

Summary

The Queensland Government has consistently invested funding with local governments, sport, recreation and community organisations to strengthen participation opportunities for Indigenous people. A consistent challenge in achieving increased participation is coordinating the diversity of effort and funding that occurs particularly in remote communities and engaging community members to identify sport and recreation needs.

Sport and recreation clearly contribute to Indigenous well being however often the challenge of supporting services in remote locations dilutes the success of programs. By developing local capacity and coordinating effort it is considered the challenges, while still significant, can be offset and healthy active communities attained.

Queensland is currently undertaking efforts with 38 Indigenous communities to form Sport and Recreation Reference Groups (SRG) which will act as a coordination point comprised of key stakeholders in the community. The SRG will develop a community sport and recreation plan as the focus of effort for the organisations looking to provide support.

This model is designed to match community needs to service provider skills and resources through a coordinated process. The model will be trialled in 2013 to assess suitability and potential for broader roll out.

Sport and recreation programs are well accepted and acknowledged by communities as being particularly useful in addressing their needs with such activities often one of the key drivers in Indigenous communities that potentially break down barriers that may exist within these communities. Sport and recreation activities alone will not resolve issues within Indigenous communities however these activities have the potential to provide a significant impact on the lives of individuals in those communities.