

**Committee Secretary  
Senate Environment, Communications,  
Information Technology and the Arts Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia**

**June 2006**

---

**A SUBMISSION MADE TO THE SENATE  
ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION  
TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE  
BY  
THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR  
WOMEN IN SHOOTING AND HUNTING (WiSH)**



**WITH REGARD TO THE  
INQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND  
RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA**

---

## **Introductory Statement**

The International Coalition for Women in Shooting and Hunting (WiSH) is pleased to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia.

WiSH is a women's lobby group with supporters throughout the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the United Kingdom, North and South America, and Africa. Our primary aim is to achieve improvements in the wellbeing of women. For the most part our activities pertain to awareness-raising and securing increased provision of services to support women who have been victims of violence.

However, the wellbeing of women is by definition a multifaceted issue. Ensuring that each and every woman has access to a range of means through which to enhance her physical and mental fitness delivers not only positive individual outcomes, but also wider social benefits.

Although the stereotype that only men participate in shooting has been allowed to persist, the reality is that women have long taken part in the safe and responsible use of firearms. Ever-increasing numbers of women are joining a diverse range of shooting disciplines.

As such, WiSH welcomes the Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia. This submission focuses on a select set of matters relating to the ability of Australian women to participate in shooting, and to the promotion of shooting as a sport for women.

I would be delighted to provide further comment on any of the issues raised in this submission, if that pleases the Committee.

*Submitted by:*

Ms Samara McPhedran

(BA Hons 1 Psych)

Ph: 0415 963 189

*On behalf of:*

The International Coalition for

Women in Shooting and Hunting (WiSH)

PO Box 184 Ballarat, Vic., 3353

## **Executive Summary**

- Participation in sport and recreation activities delivers significant health benefits, including enhanced psychological wellbeing, self esteem, and confidence.
- Shooting provides these benefits to women in the same way as any other sport.
- Participation in shooting promotes equitable interaction between persons from diverse backgrounds.
- Age, diversity, and differing physical abilities (including disabilities) do not impede participation.
- Shooting provides a sport for women who may have physical limitations that preclude their participating in other sporting activities.
- Shooting is highly regulated. Legislation should not discourage participation, but should instead encourage participation within a sensible framework.
- Legislation must permit interested women to gain an introduction to shooting, and should also ensure that the participation of women is not impeded by undue requirements.
- Current efforts to encourage women in shooting are insufficient, especially in comparison with efforts to facilitate the involvement of women in various other sports.
- Increased promotion of shooting as a sport for women, in the same ways that other sports are currently promoted to women, would be desirable.
- Clubs and associations promote shooting to women on a local and/or regional scale, but assistance to reach a wider audience would be beneficial.
- It is important that small clubs receive equal recognition as larger or elite-level clubs for their shared ability to provide benefits to women.
- Modelling efforts on the VicHealth 'Partnerships for Health' model would provide positive outcomes.
- Women's sport requires greater media coverage.
- Failure to cover a diverse range of sports may foster stereotypes and detrimental gender-role assumptions, which may affect young women in particular.
- Increasing the amount of coverage of women's sports entails creating public demand for coverage.
- Creating public demand relates to recruiting participants, as well as engaging in efforts to interest future generations.

## **(a) The health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities**

It has long been recognised that participation in sport and recreation activities does not just deliver physical health benefits, but can also significantly enhance psychological wellbeing, self esteem, and confidence. Shooting is no exception to this rule. For women who take part in shooting, the benefits are numerous.

Shooting can be undertaken as an individual, or as an individual within a team (for example, women's "doubles" competitions, or interclub/interstate/international competitions between larger teams). Whether in organised competition, an informal day at a shooting range, or otherwise, participation in shooting provides women with an extended social network – just as any other sport provides. This network includes interaction with other women, men, and juniors, as well as offering a variety of club-based social events.

Women who participate in shooting come from a diverse range of backgrounds and from all walks of life. Diversity represents no barrier to participation. Therefore, partaking in shooting sports promotes equitable interaction between persons from many cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Shooting is unique among sports in that age and differing physical abilities (including disabilities) provide no impediment whatsoever to participation.

Indeed, shooting provides a sport for women who may have physical limitations that preclude their participating in other sporting activities. Similarly, women of mature ages who may no longer feel physically able to participate in other sports, or may no longer be comfortable with the physical demands of those activities, can still engage in shooting. The ability for all women to participate as equals, regardless of their personal, physical, or other differences, provides significant social and individual benefits for the women involved and can in turn contribute to increased self esteem and confidence.

At the individual level, shooting inherently fosters mental discipline and high levels of concentration. Rewards also come through self-competition, and from the sense of achievement derived from measurable improvements in performance over time.

## **(b) The accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities**

*(iii) Constraints, including strategies to overcome the constraints that may prevent participation*

Shooting is, in many regards, one of the most accessible sports available to women given that physical ability and age<sup>1</sup> are largely irrelevant.

However, it must be acknowledged that the degree of legislation surrounding the ownership of firearms renders shooting an unusually highly regulated sport. It is important to recognise that legislation should not have at its heart the goal of discouraging participation, but should instead aim to encourage participation within a sensible framework. This is a key consideration of any strategy designed to deliver the sustainable accessibility of shooting sports to women.

It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that suitable provisions exist within legislation to permit interested women to gain an introduction to the shooting sports under appropriate supervision, prior to deciding whether to continue to invest further in the interest. It is also vital to ensure that the participation of women who have made the decision to develop their interest in shooting, and who have been deemed by police as suitable persons to own firearms, is not impeded by undue requirements that place overly excessive demands upon participants.

An example of an impediment to the continued participation of women in shooting is Australia Post's newly formulated policy prohibiting the international carriage of firearm parts. This in turn will render the legitimate acquisition of firearm parts (for example, replacement or custom-made items) difficult and less economically viable than desirable, particularly for 'entry level' women shooters. This may in turn discourage women from ongoing involvement with their chosen sport. Clearly, this type of impediment needs to be overcome if women shooters are to have continued fair access to their required equipment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that this comment refers to women over the age of 18. Younger women are, however, entirely able to participate under appropriate adult supervision if they acquire a 'junior' permit. State/territory variations apply.

*(iv) The effectiveness of current state and federal grant programs that encourage participation*

Current efforts to encourage the participation of women in shooting are patchy and largely insufficient, especially in comparison with efforts made to recruit and ensure the continued participation of women in various other sports.

An exception to this shortcoming is the excellent range of assistance offered by the organisation 'WomenSport' (see [www.womensport.com.au](http://www.womensport.com.au)), whose aim is to promote sport to women and deliver funding and assistance to women's sport, regardless of what that sport may be.

It is suggested, therefore, that increased efforts be made to promote shooting as a sport for women in the same ways that other sports are currently promoted to women. Particularly, endeavours to overcome the misconception that shooting is a sport for men only, perhaps by highlighting the many successes of Australia's high profile women shooters, are strongly recommended.

While clubs and associations can undertake promotional efforts on a local and/or regional scale, government assistance to reach a wider audience would be highly beneficial. It is important that small clubs receive equal recognition as larger clubs in any undertakings of this nature. Although smaller clubs may not have the resources to provide elite-level infrastructure, it is vital to recognise that small-scale and elite-level clubs, training, and competition do not differ in their ability to deliver to women the benefits of participation.

A noteworthy example of a successful partnership between government and shooting clubs is the VicHealth<sup>2</sup> initiative 'Partnerships for Health'. This scheme provided funding to shooting clubs in support of programs such as 'Shooting for All', which encourages women and men with physical disabilities to participate in shooting. The program has proved popular, and has received strongly favourable media coverage. Modelling future state and federal grant programs on the VicHealth model would undoubtedly provide equally positive outcomes in other parts of Australia.

---

<sup>2</sup> VicHealth refers to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, a statutory authority of the Victorian Government.

## **(c) The portrayal of women's sport in the media**

### *(v) Strategies to improve the amount and quality of media coverage for women's sport*

Women's sport, across the board, requires greater media coverage in order to equal the degree of exposure given to men's sport. It is unquestionable that the current level of coverage of women's shooting is inadequate. As a consequence, it can be argued that women may be less likely than men to be aware of the tremendously broad range of sporting options available to them in modern Australian society. It is possible that young women in particular are affected by the lack of coverage of women in sport, as well as by the associated stereotypes and detrimental gender-role assumptions that may be fostered by a failure to provide coverage of women taking part in a diverse range of sports.

Arguably, the most viable way to increase the amount of media coverage of women's sports in general is to create greater public demand for such coverage. The creation of public demand relates in turn to recruiting an increased number of participants in a particular sport, as well as engaging in efforts to interest future generations (through appropriate school-based strategies, for example). It is likely that grant schemes with this end in mind would prove beneficial in terms of generating subsequent changes in media coverage.

The matter of improving coverage of women's sport must be acknowledged as somewhat self-fulfilling: media exposure increases public interest in sport, public interest creates the demand for media exposure. The essential question thus becomes one of supporting strategies to increase women's participation in sport, in order to create greater demand for coverage of women's sport, to further increase women's participation. Consequently, prioritising focus on points (b)(iii) and (b)(iv), discussed above, is likely to deliver the additional outcome of improved media coverage of women in sport.