

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION:

This submission is made on behalf of the Women in Sport Media Group (WSMG) which was established in 2005 because of the concerns of its members about the inequity that exists in the coverage of sportswomen in the national media. The aim of the Group is to gain more recognition for Australia's sportswomen and teams, especially when it is known that Australian women athletes and teams are top performers at the international level. With greater awareness of their outstanding achievements and participation by the community, sponsorship and other funding will flow to sporting organizations for the conduct of high performance women's competitions as well as the support of grassroots level sport and recreational activities for women and girls. Greater attention from the media will provide more role models and household names as well as some sensational events to motivate girls to participate in sporting activities and give greater equity to the female sporting population.

Members of the WSMG include some of the nation's most respected sporting administrators and athletes, namely Pam Tye OAM (Australian Sports Commission), Lorraine Landon (Acting CEO Basketball Australia), Lindsay Cane (former CEO Netball Australia), Frances Crampton AM (President NSW Sports Federation), Ann Mitchell OAM (Former President Women's Cricket Australia, and current Director Australian University Sport), Johanna Vescio (Co-Chair International Working Group on Women in Sport, and Director Sport Management at the University of Technology Sydney), Sue Crow (CEO Softball Australia), Imke Fischer (President WSRNSW, and Researcher in Sport Management at Australian Catholic University), Rina Hore (Director Cricket NSW) and Cheryl Salisbury (Captain of the Soccer Matildas).

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

WSMG would like to comment in particular on the portrayal of women in the media and address the criteria in Part c of the Terms of Reference for this Enquiry.

The needs as the WSMG has established are as follows:

- There is a need for recognition of Australian sportswomen throughout the year so that there is an interest and appeal created for attending women's sports events and/or trying the sport;
- There is a need for regular reporting of results from women's national league and international competitions so that the community, especially sport followers, are informed and up to date with their team's performances;
- There is a need for regular articles/stories about Australia's sportswomen to be published and shown on television to promote them to the community—one-off articles every now and then have little impact and will not influence the younger girls to participate;
- Live radio/television coverage will give more drama and tension to high performance women's sport rather than late night replays that do not have the same impact and fail to attract the community or potential sponsors;
- Women's National League teams contain some of the greatest athletes in the country and they deserve better crowds and audience on the radio, television and internet through more extensive promotion and publicity;

- Players in the National Leagues need to be compensated or paid for their training and match performances yet the National Sports Organisations typically do not have the budgets to manage this semi-professional situation;
- All media outlets need to promote and publicise women's sport including free-to-air and pay television as the current position of leaving it to the ABC and SBS does not attract a mass of the community.

If these needs could be met, then there would be a greater awareness of women and girls' participation in sport and recreation and hence greater motivation for all generations of women (seniors to children) to emulate them by getting fit and remaining healthy. In order to positively change the culture, the media needs to be committed to playing a significant role in representing women in sport to the general community.

STRATEGIES:

After a Think Tank with prominent sports administrators and key media personnel held in Sydney on 3 May 2006, the WSMG has identified the education of the administrators in National Sports Organisations (NSOs) and State Sport Organisations (SSOs) who are responsible for the management of their women's divisions as the first priority. Womensport and Recreation NSW has subsequently drawn up a proposal to establish a series of regular media workshops each year to address the issue, having a group of experienced journalists and media producers on hand to work with sports administrators on how to gain media coverage and sustain it. However, it will be important to emulate these workshops nationwide in order to have an effect and government support in ways such as providing Tertiary Certificate Courses on Working with the Media through the Department of Education and Training would lead to a genuine improvement in the marketing of all sports.

With the understanding that all major women's sports events such as National Leagues and International Tests etc should be available on free to air as well as pay television, the WSMG plans to organize a series of conversations between the key decision makers in the programming areas of television and the CEOs and marketing Managers of the various NSOs and SSOs. The aim of these "conversations" will be to reach an understanding of the benefits of promoting women's sport for the television stations and to develop a better relationship between the media chiefs and the sports bodies so that they might come to accept a minimum standard of coverage for women's sport in their media outlets.

WSMG acknowledges that more research needs to be done on the statistics relating to the coverage of women's sport by the media and the lack of crowds or audience for most women's sporting events (except when part of an Olympic or Commonwealth Games). However, it has been ascertained from anecdotal and informal survey sources that the current media coverage for women's sport amounts to less than 10% of the total sports coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio and television which shows little improvement since the findings of the Research Report "An Illusory Image: A report on the media coverage and portrayal of women's sport in Australia" commissioned by the Australian Sports Commission in 1996. There is a good reason then for saying that the stage has been reached where government intervention is required in order to change the media culture. There has been little increase in the quantity or quality of media coverage for women's sport in the past 20 years and

WSMG believes that targets or quotas (**say 30% of total sport coverage devoted to women's sport by 2009**) may be necessary in the short and mid-term to encourage the media to play its role more effectively in providing an equitable coverage of women's sport. Further, it is strongly recommended that the research on media coverage for women's sport be updated to investigate if there has been any improvement since the late 1990s.

It is also important to realize that Australia has won the bid to host the International Conference on Women and Sport in Sydney in 2010 and in the Bid document it was stated that one of the key issues thought to be instrumental for the advancement of women in sport is improved media coverage in terms of both quantity and quality. The Sydney bid envisaged putting forward a Blueprint for the implementation of legislation in relation to women's sport coverage as its main legacy from the Conference.

WSMG has looked at other strategies to improve the current situation in the media and will be encouraging sports organizations to pursue the hosting of certain joint events in key venues and combining their marketing eg Trans Tasman events for women in basketball and netball, cricket and softball or soccer over the same weekend at venues such as Telstra Stadium in Sydney as well as women's events back to back with men's events on the same weekend eg WNBL and NBL or WNCL and Cricket ING game. Ultimately each sport will have to take the responsibility to give equal treatment to all their members and decide on the best way to increase the promotion of their women's events.

SUMMARY:

In summing up, the WSMG believes that the 2006 Senate Enquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia is being held at a crucial time for women in sport. The huge success of Australian sportswomen on the international stage, the intense competition between National League teams and the interest in promoting health and fitness to the wider population opens up a whole new area of potential stories which to date has remained largely untapped. We ask the Senate Enquiry to bear in mind the important role that the media can play in bringing these stories to the general community so that there is a burst of interest in participating in sport and recreation. We urge the Enquiry to bring the benefits of **regular** increased media coverage on women's sport to the fore in its report and to recommend the adoption of strategies that will change the media scene for women in sport.

On behalf of the Women in Sport Media Group,

Ann Mitchell OAM
Coordinator

12 June, 2006