

# **ACHPER Submission to the Senate inquiry into**

## **Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia**

(16<sup>th</sup> June 2006)

The **Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation** (ACHPER) commends Senator Kate Lundy for her leadership in establishing the 2006 inquiry into *Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia*. In its submission ACHPER has chosen to address those sections of the Terms of Reference that are most aligned with its Mission to promote healthy lifestyles for all Australians and particularly to study and promote its areas of focus: Health Education, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport, Dance, Community Fitness or Movement Sciences

ACHPER is a national professional association representing people who work in the aforementioned areas. It is a membership based non-profit organisation, governed by a Volunteer Board comprising professionals from educational and community sectors. It has a strong network of state and territory branches that serve members through a range of professional activities.

ACHPER is committed to programs and projects that are both commercial and educational. Funds generated from such activities are used for further projects and member services. Specifically ACHPER:

- Advocates and lobbies for the promotion and provision of health and physical education, sport, recreation and dance;
- Undertakes research and provides an advisory consultancy service; and
- Conducts teacher and community based sport and recreation professional development programs nationally, on a state and territory basis and regionally.

### **ACHPER's commitment to Women in Sport and Recreation**

Historically ACHPER has strong links to the physical education of girls and women. Indeed, the establishment of tertiary physical education in Australia can be traced back to initiatives of the National Council of Women which lobbied during the 1930s for a suitable

course of study at the University of Melbourne which commenced in 1937 (Kentish, 1983, p. 1). ACHPER was founded in 1956 as the Australian Physical Education Association and changed its name in 1970. In 1979 under the leadership of the late Wendy Ey ACHPER established a Special Interest Group for Women and Sport and published its first policy statement on Women in Sport and Recreation (AJHPER, 1979) Members of the Special Interest Group went on to take leading roles in the sport feminist movement during the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including presidencies of both State and national organizations such as the Sportswomen's Association of Australia and the Womensport West. In 1980 the first Women in Sport "Fit to Play" conference was held and Alf Colvin and Elaine Chesworth were members of the organizing committee. In 1984 ACHPER was a co-sponsor with the Confederation of Australian Sport (for which Wendy Ey was a Director) of the *Women and Competitive Sport* Conference held at the University of New South Wales. At the same conference, the then Minister for Education and Youth Affairs and the Minister assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, Senator Susan Ryan, used her presentation of the Fritz Duras Memorial Lecture "to announce a new initiative by the Government to improve the recognition of the contribution of Australian sports women" (Ryan, 1984). That 'initiative' became the *Women, Sport and Media Report (1985)*. ACHPER members including the current National Executive Director were key personnel in the research and documentation of the Commonwealth School's Commission Project *Girls Achievement and Self-Esteem: The Contribution of Physical Education and Sport* which operated at State and national levels for three years from 1985-87 (Oldenhove, 1988). Through its publications (*The ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*), professional development programs/conferences and advocacy ACHPER has continued to emphasise best practices for providing appropriate physical education for Australian girls and women.

### **Health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities**

Currently ACHPER works in partnership with Jump Rope for Heart (National Heart Foundation) and the Active Australia Schools Network (Australian Sports Commission) and has representation on the National Obesity Task Force and is thus well informed on the poor standards of health and physical activity of many schoolgirls. It is anticipated that one of the outcomes of the Senate Inquiry into Women and Sport will be a substantial list of agencies and individuals who are working to address the health needs of girls and women.

*Recommendation 1:* That a register be formed of those agencies and individuals who advocate for improved health for girls and women and that this register be used by relevant

government bodies for the formation of task forces, advisory councils and review panels to oversee future initiatives to improve girls' and women's health by increasing participation in physical activity including organized sport.

*Recommendation 2:* The Federal Department of Health in partnership with the Australian Sports Commission and the Office for Women review the list of submissions to the Senate Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia with a view to bringing agencies and individuals together to share their expertise and develop a national plan to be actioned by the agencies applying their respective expertises to use resources efficiently.

### **Accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organized sport**

ACHPER notes that the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry give emphasis to organised sport by which it is assumed to mean sport organized by National and State Sporting Organisations (NSOs and SSOs respectively). ACHPER believes that consideration must be given to the provision of quality physical activity, sport and recreation programs in schools as a means of equipping schoolgirls with skills and knowledge essential for them to confidently participate in organized sport.

*Recommendation 3:* A review of the school based physical activity programs to determine the extent to which schoolgirls are exposed to:

- Skills and knowledge essential to participate in organized sport in the broader community;
- Female teachers as role models of active women;
- The effectiveness of single sex or co-education classes in physical activity especially in promoting lifelong participation;
- Best practices appropriate to Aboriginal, ethnic and cultural diversity;
- Programs such as sport education which include information and experience on successfully making the transition from school to organized sport;
- Opportunities to participate in school teams in competitions organized by SSOs (or their regional affiliates); and
- School policies and practices which support the training and competition of elite schoolgirl athletes without compromising their academic pursuits.
- The opportunity to be made aware and linked to community based sport and recreation programs through their school and other agencies.

ACHPER is well aware that many schoolgirls and female tertiary students undertake part-time paid employment in the latter years of their secondary school education and post-secondary education. Much of this employment is in the retail and hospitality industries. The hours of employment offered in these industries often clash with the fixtures of traditional organized sports many of which have shown a decline in membership numbers. One response has been the emergence of pay-to-play sport which is outside the jurisdiction of the NSOs and SSOs but which is organized and available at more flexible times. Pay-to-play sport also appears to suit the busy schedules of mothers and women working flexible shifts.

*Recommendation 4:* The definition of organized sport be broadened to encompass pay-to-play sport.

*Recommendation 5:* Data be obtained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to determine the extent to which girls and women are participating in organised pay-to-play sport.

*Recommendation 6:* Data be obtained to determine the extent to which pay-to-play sport provides equal employment opportunities for women in administration and officiating.

### **Portrayal of women's sport in the media**

Australian sport is fortunate that two decades ago the fledgling ASC in conjunction with the Office of the Status of Women saw fit to appoint a Working Group to report on women, sport and the media. In addressing this Term of Reference ACHPER believes it is appropriate to reflect upon the 1985 inquiry and then to make some specific comments on current media practices.

#### **Women, sport and the media (1985)**

The 1985 report *Women, sport and the media (WSM)* drew attention to the plight of Australian sportswomen and especially the lack of media coverage. In particular the WSM recognised that improvements in media coverage would necessitate “structural change” and it charged both sports organisations and governments “to examine ways in which decision-making mechanisms can be made more sensitive and responsive to the needs of women in sport.” (p. 3) In other words, for changes to occur in the ways in which sportswomen were portrayed by the media, the emerging sports bureaucracy had to be considered (given that the ASC was only established in 1984). Fortunately, the government acted on many of the recommendations from WSM Report and gave women in sport a voice and visibility.

The WSM Working Group was particularly effective because it undertook community consultation which in turn “increased the community’s awareness of the problems faced by women in sport.” (McKinna, 1985, p. 11). ACHPER recognizes that resources allocated to the current Senate Inquiry are limited and is disappointed that communication of the Inquiry’s existence and call for submissions has not been widely publicized.

*Recommendation 7:* Adequate resources be given to widespread publication and dissemination of the Senate Inquiry’s findings.

Above all, the WSM Report resulted in the creation of the Women’s Sport Promotion Unit (WSPU) within the ASC to oversee the change process and provide a reference point for all other changes. This key agency was essential when there were a raft of recommendations awaiting action. For a short period of time the WSPU provided leadership that helped many Australian sportswomen understand their situation and find ways to make changes. The *National Policy and Plan for Women in Sport* (1987) gave clear directions for improvements. Sadly, over time the WSPU (with several name changes and relocations within the ASC) has been decimated. The existence of this current Senate Inquiry indicates that the demise of the WSPU was premature and that there is still a need for a dedicated, well resourced unit within the ASC to address issues that particularly impact upon girls’ and women’s participation in sport and recreation in Australia.

*Recommendation 8:* Re-instatement and generous funding of a dedicated women and sport unit within the ASC.

*Recommendation 9:* The aforementioned unit be given responsibility for drafting a National Strategic Plan for Women in Sport.

In practice the WSPU quickly recognized that the volume of work was far greater than its limited resources and so it actively networked with equivalent units in State and Territory based Departments of Sport and Recreation. As well the WSPU collaborated with non-government organizations such as Womensport Australia, Womensport West, Womensport and Recreation NSW. Thus there was a national network of government and non-government agencies. It should be noted, however, that funding for non-government agencies was often derived from sources other than sport, for example, the Office of the Status of Women, provided most of the funding for Womensport Australia. ACHPER is aware that in Canada, for example, the government provides very generous funding to the

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport (CAAWS) and a similar scheme would be appropriate in Australia.

*Recommendation 10:* Recognition and support be given to non-government agencies whose mission is to specifically address the needs of girls and women in sport and recreation.

*Recommendation 11:* The ASC (specifically its revitalized Women and Sport Unit) take leadership in supporting and strengthening the network of government and non-government agencies and NSOs/SSOs including regular meetings.

### **Media coverage 2006**

Since the initial WSM Report comprehensively documented the abysmal portrayal of Australian sportswomen in the media there have been a series of studies which have shown small but significant improvements in both the quantity and quality print and television coverage. However, coverage is still disproportionate in terms of numbers of participants and total population.

*Recommendation 12:* Ongoing annual (or biennial) research into coverage of women's sport in all forms of media

One of the recommendations from the WSM was a call for more female sports journalists to cover all sport. Positive changes have been made and ACHPER commends those media outlets which have female sports journalists and particularly those which have given women key roles such as the ABC in Perth which has Karen Tighe as the sport anchor for the weekday evening news and the Hopman Cup tennis tournament. However, women sports journalists are still far fewer than men.

*Recommendation 13:* Promotion of sports journalism as a viable career for women.

*Recommendation:* Research to determine the numbers of women working in sports media and their status.

A number of awards have been instigated to recognise quality coverage of women's sport and female sports journalists. ACHPER applauds these positive steps.

*Recommendation 14:* Expansion of efforts to recognise quality coverage of women's sport and female sports journalists.

Of particular concern is the fact that netball, as the highest participant sport for girls and women, does not have extensive television coverage. Ironically, in recent years the scheduling of netball on television often concurred with peak participation times on Saturday afternoons. Similar problems have also been noted with women's basketball and lawn bowls. More recently netball has been relocated to the ABC second/digital network which is not as readily available. It appears that more explicit requirements ought to be set by the Australian Broadcasting Authority to set minimum standards for the amount of television coverage of women's sport.

*Recommendation 15:* The Australian Broadcasting Authority establish minimum but fair standards for the amount of women's sport shown on television.

*Recommendation 16:* Special support for the televising of women's sport to ensure scheduling at times that do not clash with peak participation times.

### **Women in leadership roles in sport**

Quality coaching, officiating and administration are essential to the success of organized sport and recreation for Australian women. ACHPER supports initiatives by national and State government authorities such as the ASC and the various Departments of Sport and Recreation to assist women develop relevant skills and knowledge. In particular ACPHER commends the ASC for its Sport Leadership Grants for Women and urges the ASC to invest more financial and human resources in the scheme. In the past the WSPU/ASC worked collaboratively with the Office of the Status of Women (now the Office for Women) which was able to provide a broader understanding of the all the issues impacting upon the lives of Australian women and this partnership should demonstrate that shared leadership produces benefits for sport and women.

*Recommendation 17:* The ASC continue its Sport Leadership Grants for Women with increased funding.

There is however another component to preparing women for leadership roles in sport and this is through the education system be it Vocational Education and Training (VET) in secondary schools, TAFE or universities. Courses are now available in coaching, sport

management and sport sciences (and sports journalism). This is another form of participation and one that ought to be examined to ensure that women can access such courses and on successful completion obtain relevant employment.

*Recommendation 18:* Data be collected to determine the extent to which schoolgirls and women are accessing formal qualifications appropriate to the sport industry through VET, TAFE and universities.

*Recommendation 19:* Data be obtained from ALL components of the sport industry to determine whether the number of women working in the industry to support the safe participation of all Australians.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities**

*Recommendation 1:* That a register be formed of those agencies and individuals who advocate for improved health for girls and women and that this register be used by relevant government bodies for the formation of task forces, advisory councils and review panels to oversee future initiatives to improve girls' and women's health by increasing participation in physical activity including organized sport.

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### **References**

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