

WRNSW Inc. SUBMISSION TO SENATE ENQUIRY INTO WOMEN'S SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA

Introduction:

Women sport and Recreation NSW Incorporated (WRNSW) is the peak non-government / non-profit organisation for girls and women in sport in NSW.

Women sport and Recreation NSW aims to:

- Improve the status of women and girls in sport, recreation and physical activity.
- Encourage increased participation in sport, recreation and physical activity.
- Provide a platform and a socially supportive network for individuals and agencies in order to share problems and solutions.
- Lobby decision makers on issues relating to females in sport and recreation.

Indeed, our Mission Statement calls for the promotion of full participation, access and equity for all women and girls through sport and recreation in order to sustain a healthy and active lifestyle.

The organization was formed ten years ago as a membership based non-government volunteer organisation to provide programs and services to increase female participation in all aspects of the sports industry. Membership is approximately two hundred with an Executive Committee of eleven volunteer board members, three of whom are males.

Research shows young women start dropping out of organised sport at a high rate, from 15 years of age. In some of the more training intensive sports, this drop off occurs at an even earlier age. This is not generally redressed by a commensurate increase in active recreational pursuits.

It is indeed very pleasing and timely that the Senate has decided to undertake such a detailed review. However it is of some concern that the time frame allocated to the capture of information, analysis phase and rendition of a final report is very tight. WRNSW appreciates the opportunity to address the Senate enquiry and this submission will briefly cover some of the issues detailed in the extensive Terms of Reference. WRNSW would hope that the Senate takes the opportunity to review progress against the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) National Policy on *Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity* in the conduct of this Inquiry.

Participation and Wellbeing:

It is not intended to repeat in this submission the obvious benefits to be obtained through a regular program of sport and exercise. These are well documented elsewhere and clearly underpin Government policy and initiatives. Looking at some of the strategies which may have been employed to implement the ASC policy, we can comment as follows:

- **Policy**—Participation in sport, recreation and physical activity at all levels should contribute to the complete physical, mental and social wellbeing of women and girls.
- **Health:**

Strategy--Provision of accessible health information to Sports organisations. State Sporting Organisations (SSO's), appear to be addressing this in variable ways. At the elite or high performance level, team or squad members have access to Institutes/Academies of Sport programs which seem to cover this aspect fairly well. However, below this level, at say the state qualifier level, it is up to SSO's, clubs, coaches and parents to ensure this information is obtained and disseminated. This can be a difficult matter, given for example, that not all GP's are up to date on such things as "banned substances". Whilst most modern doctors promote the benefits of sport and exercise for females, not all practitioners are conversant with sports medicine studies on the impact of high level training regimes on developing and menstruating females. There is clearly a need for the appropriate authorities to ensure that the health provider system is regularly updated with the latest information on all relevant and contemporary issues.

Strategy—Health providers need to be aware of the range of sport and physical activity options available to their clients. This identifies that the medical profession must continue towards preventative strategies, particularly as the population ages, to promote healthy activities. GP access to local activity and facility data bases for sports and recreation is considered to be essential. Aids, such as wall posters in the surgery, could assist in identifying appropriate activities to individual patients.

Strategy—Encouragement of cooperation between health and sporting organisations. Health insurance providers need greater government incentive to recognise the utility of supporting sport and exercise programs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some health insurance providers have removed gym membership, sporting equipment and the like from their suite of benefits. These need to be restored as part of the preventative strategy. Health insurance providers should be encouraged to also actively pursue the benefits of sponsorship of sporting groups and in particular, women sporting groups, as being beneficial to their own business health.

Participation Environment:

Strategy---Encouragement of women and girls of a culturally diverse background into greater participation. As an immigrant nation, Australia should be in the forefront of devising effective ways to implement this strategy. One way is to encourage participation rather than competition. Women who practise the Muslim faith, for example, are constrained by many of the norms of a mixed Australian society. Stringent sporting dress codes, where they are not governed by safety issues, could be relaxed in certain circumstances, to assist in the introduction of these women and girls into a physically active environment. Discrete facility usage periods could also be introduced at a local government level, where this is possible. For example, the Bankstown City Council has been trialling discrete female use periods in at least one of its swimming pools. This has not gone without some adverse comment in the local media—but this special allocation is being continued. As part of their overall facilities usage plan Councils should be encouraged to experiment with innovative programs to encourage females from this group to experience the benefits of physical exercise.

Strategy—experimenting with different sports and lengths of season. This could also be extended to reducing the duration of competition to accommodate the lack of time availability that many females face in an era of longer work time and family responsibilities. Such a strategy also touches the problem of retaining people within a sport which will be covered later.

Strategy—focussing on the fun and social aspects of sports participation. “Come and try days” are being trialled in some sports. This has proven a problem in recent years where insurance companies have tightened the wording of many of the sporting accident policies. Government needs to influence insurance providers to write policies which allow “come and try days” by providing coverage for potential members.

Strategy—developing programs which cater for the differing needs and abilities of females. There is clearly a need, particularly in individual sports, to tailor training programs to individual requirements. This is particularly essential for female athletes. There will always be coaching debates between the “quality of program” school and those who follow the “quantity program”. Many former female athletes who have moved into elite coaching circles subscribe to the need to properly tailor programs for their individual female athletes. Sporting guidelines need to heed these views and be regularly updated to reflect contemporary research and developments.

Strategy—“winning back drop outs”. This might be better dealt with as a strategy to increase retention rates. Most highly competitive sports have their membership curves peaking at the sub-teenage and young teenage levels. Figures for Swimming and Athletics support this contention. Some sports seem to putting strategies in place to wind back the drop out rate. ASC initiatives such as suggested modified rules, more concentration on fun and participation for younger ages and the raising of minimum age levels for state championships are gaining currency. The participation rate for females is variable. Looking at three sports where males and females have, on the face of it, equal

opportunity, we find differing results. In NSW, the female to male membership ratios are as follows:

Sport	04-05 ratios		05-06 ratios	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Swimming	48	: 52	45	: 55
Athletics	59	: 41	57	: 43
Softball (national for 2000)	35	: 65		

In swimming, males drop out earlier than females, but the reverse is apparent in athletics. It would seem that insofar as sports with the potential for equal opportunity, different factors influence participation and retention rates. As a consequence, no single strategy is a solution. The common denominator amongst these sports is that in the provision of facilities, opportunities and rewards, the sport is treated as an entity regardless of the gender of the participants.

The position regarding single sex sports, or separately administered sports, differs widely. This is particularly apparent in the high profile male team sports of football (all codes) and cricket where large amounts of public money are regularly provided by all levels of government to build or upgrade facilities. As these sports are highly professional with significant financial backing, including sponsorships, it is felt that a strong argument exists for government to distribute its funding more equitably across the wider spectrum of sport and recreation. Such an approach would assist in the ability to attract and retain females in these activities.

Leadership and Decision Making:

Strategy—encouraging and supporting women whenever possible to apply for senior positions. There is a social problem in the volunteer side of sport where women seem to gravitate to the more hands on positions e.g. secretary, registrar, race secretary etc. On the other hand, men seem more likely to assume leadership or figurehead roles. For example, in the sport of swimming which has a majority of female members across all age groups, the Swimming NSW Annual Report for 2005-2006 shows that in the sports 23 administrative districts, men occupy 17 positions of president and 6 of secretary. Conversely, women hold 7 and 16 of these positions respectively. There is clearly a need to continue and enhance the encouragement/development of women to leadership roles. It is difficult to prescribe a specific target for female board members and officials in voluntary organisations. These have been tried elsewhere with some success principally because the government has the ability to withhold funding where targets are not met. It is preferred that sporting organisations be encouraged to set target figures for female board, committee members and officials. However, there must be a mandatory

requirement that all barriers to advancement be broken down principally through fully democratic constitutions and non discriminatory job descriptions.

In paid administrative jobs, the continued tertiary training of women in sports management qualifications may have reached saturation point. Apart from the few highly professional sports, most sporting organisations operate lean and flat administrative structures. The CEO may be a fairly well paid officer, but most other staff make average salaries and have little room for internal promotion. Hence, much lateral movement occurs with people trained to have high expectations in their careers. This often leads to staff instability amongst SSO's with obvious efficiency implications. More universities may need to rethink their academic program structure regarding sports management training.

On the other hand, the ASC Sports Leadership Grants program for women is excellent. However, the program would benefit from an increase in funding to allow more participants to benefit and so enhance their leadership skills.

Most Women sport and Recreation associations are quite variably funded by their respective state governments. The Council of Australian Government (COAG) should have an agenda item of sport and recreation where the benefits of supporting their state women sport associations could be cemented with an agreement to provide greater financial assistance.

Media Portrayal:

There are many strategies identified which are designed to assist in achieving the governments objectives in the recognition and media portrayal of women sport. However the any published figures on media coverage of female sporting events make for sorry reading. Where female competition is in parallel with male sport, e.g. major tennis, swimming, Olympics/Commonwealth Games etc---media recognition is not an issue. Even the high profile female sport of Netball, whilst televised by the ABC, is shown at 2PM on a Saturday---a time when many prospective viewers are themselves involved in sport. Major events such as the Women's cricket team winning the World Cup or the Women's Soccer World Cup were not televised. Print media coverage is hardly any better. A solution includes a requirement for major sporting NSO's to adopt media policies which mandate equal opportunity clauses—particularly where the NSO has bargaining power with the media. The government could influence these NSO's to adopt such a specific percentage target figure of, say 35% women sport content, mandated for achievement over the next three years.

Conclusion:

This submission has endeavoured to concentrate on some of the key issues confronting the Senate Inquiry. WRNSW would be pleased to be able to support these comments at any open hearings if required.

References:

1. ASC National Policy on Women & Girls in Sport, Recreation & Phys. Activity
2. Strategies for Implementation of ASC Policy----ASC Website
3. NSW Sport and Recreation Website
4. Swimming NSW Annual Report, 2005---2006
5. Athletics NSW Website
6. Liz Ellis Article-----SMH 14 Jun 06