

Senate Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia



Submission from Australian Olympic Committee (AOC)

19th June 2006

b) The accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organised sport

i. the number of women actively participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities.

Whilst the AOC does not retain participation figures for each of the member sports, the steady increase in female members in the Australian Olympic Teams is encouraging.

Summer Games

Olympic Year	Team Composition	Women as a % of the total Team	Women Medalists as a % of total Team Medalists	Ratio Women Medalists / # Women in Team	Ratio Men Medalists / # Men in Team
Barcelona 1992	96 women 194 men	33.1%	19.2%	10 / 96	42 / 194
Atlanta 1996	170 women 254 men	40% (more than double that of Seoul in 1988).	55.3%	68 / 170	55 / 254
Sydney 2000	283 women 349 men	44.8%	51%	78 / 283	75 / 349
Athens 2004	208 women 274 men	43.2%	37.6%	50 / 208	83 / 274

Note: - 'Medalists' include all members of team sports (eg, all members of a hockey sixteen team members are counted as medalists).
- Multi medalists are only counted once per Games.

NB: There were more women medalists than men in Sydney 2000.

Winter Games

Olympic Year	Team Composition	Women as a % of the total Team	Women Medalists as a % of total Team Medalists	Ratio Women Medalists / # Women in Team	Ratio Men Medalists / # Men in Team
Lillehammer 1994	7 women 20 men	25.9%	0	0	4 / 20
Nagano 1998	8 women 16 men	33.3%	100%	1 / 8	0
Salt Lake 2002	13 women 14 men	48.1%	50%	1 / 13	1 / 14
Torino 2006	18 women 22 men	45%	50%	1 / 18	1 / 22

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In looking at these figures it must be remembered that the Australian Olympic Teams are selected on merit regardless of gender, with athletes qualifying through their International Federations Olympic Qualifications System, approved by the IOC. For some Winter sports and a few Summer disciplines, the AOC or National Federation, imposes additional performance standards in order to be selected.

Given the merit based selection process, it is interesting to note the percentage of medals won by Australian women at Olympic Games.

Interestingly, the percentage of women comprising the Australian Olympic Teams is higher than the overall percentage of representation of women in the Olympic Games.

Over the past ten years, there has been an increase in the overall women's representation at The Olympic Games. The IOC has been proactive in promoting women's sport and women sport leaders (see attachment "The Promotion of Women in The Olympic Movement"). The AOC supported this evolution in the lead up to the Sydney Games culminating, for the first time, in women being represented in the same number of team sports as men. In Atlanta (1996) women represented 34.2%; in Sydney (2000) 38.2% and in Athens (2004) some 40.7% of all athletes at the Games.

vi. the remuneration, recruitment, retention and attrition of elite female athletes, including comparisons with male athletes;

The AOC offers a program for male and female athletes called the ASPIRE Career Assistance for Olympians program. One of the goals of this program is to assist athletes to find employment which provides flexible work practices so that athletes can embark on a career without jeopardising their athletic goals and competitive program.

All athletes regardless of gender have access to the Olympic Solidarity Grants which makes scholarships available to assist with training programs.

The AOC also conducts the Australian Youth Olympic Festival bi-annually which offers young athletes an introduction to the world of international sport at an age when many young women are evaluating the options of remaining a competitive athlete.

viii. opportunities and barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition;

The AOC Funding Program provides National Federations with funding to contribute to the cost of the company in international competition in each of the four years in preparation for an Olympic Games.

In addition, athletes and their coaches who won medals at the 2004 Olympic Games or who win medals in 2005, 2006 and 2007 at World Championship (or equivalent) events are considered for AOC direct funding to help them achieve selection and success at the 2008 Olympic Games. The same system operates for the Olympic Winter Games athletes.

Neither Funding Program differentiates between male and female.

c) The portrayal of women's sport in the Media.

i. the role of the government to regulate and review the coverage of women's sport in the media (print, radio and electronic);

While a quick search for women's sport generally reveals little to no media coverage, during the Olympic Games the achievements of our women athletes rate very highly indeed. Where a sport is successful and has a following, it attracts the media.

When world records are broken in women's swimming, for example, this will ensure front page coverage. Outstanding athletic achievements also rate good coverage as in aerial skiing and women's cycling.

ii. the influence of pay television on the coverage of women in sport;

Pay television is certainly a vehicle to increase the amount of coverage of women's sport. Women's golf, in particular, features in Fox Sports but again this is only shown because the best players in the world are competing on the world circuit.

v. strategies to improve the amount and quality of media coverage for women's sport;

Strategies to improve the amount and quality of media coverage for women's sport should continue with the current professional approach. The best chance for more coverage of minor sports will come via on-line or internet development and these sports should be positioning themselves now to take advantage of this new technology.

d) Women in leadership roles in sport, including

i. the number and proportion of women in coaching, administrative and officiating roles;

The AOC Executive Board comprises three women – Lynne Bates, Helen Brownlee and Victoria Roberts (in the capacity of Deputy Chair of the AOC Athletes' Commission) making up 21% of the total membership. In addition, Helen Brownlee currently serves on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Commission for Culture and Olympic Education and Lynne Bates is on the FINA Bureau – the first woman to be elected to this position.

A number of other women represent their National Federation at the International Federation level either as a full Board Member, or Technical Committee Member (rules, development, coaching, umpiring, legislative, masters, ranking, legal, medical, women). Women make up 25% of National Federation representation to their respective International Federations. All State Olympic Council Executive Boards have at least one woman member out of a possible 4/5 total in addition to one President (Helen Brownlee, NSW) one Vice-President (Kerrie Tepper, VIC) and 4 Executive Directors (SA, TAS, VIC, WA).

A high percentage of medical support staff for Australian Olympic Teams is female. Coaching and Officials numbers are best left to National Federations.

ii. the issues associated with women in leadership roles in both elite and grass-roots activities;

Specific challenges for women in leadership roles appear to be attitudes, perceptions and balancing family demands. This is particularly so in the sport industry where time away from the family to travel with Teams for International Competitions is an important part of the job. Sports leaders are facing increased demands through an expectation of higher levels of professionalism and increased demands on their time. This factor particularly impacts on women during the child rearing years.

The expectations of a traditionally masculine culture/sports environment impacts on the acceptance of women in leadership roles at all levels. Women leaders are often described as 'lightweight' and seen in a less favourable light, with an expectation to meet higher standards of performance than their male counterparts.

iii. trends and issues for women in organizational leadership roles;

There is a growing awareness of the need to include women in the equation when considering the composition of sporting Boards. Diversity creates a wider range of skills and contributes to the effectiveness of the Boards.

The existence of good corporate governance within an organisation provides the framework to be a better leader. Whilst this necessitates a wider range of obligations and increased expectations by stakeholders, it also provides a level of independence and protection.

The involvement of men and women in the process of addressing change is critical for success. Men are needed to "champion" the cause and can provide mentor support to women in leadership roles.

vi. strategies to improve the numbers of women in coaching, administration and technical roles;

The AOC has implemented a number of strategies with particular focus on increasing the number of women in leadership roles.

1. WORKSHOPS

In 1998 a workshop; "The Changing Face of Leadership" provided the opportunity for women sport leaders to increase their knowledge and skills specifically in the areas of leadership, interpersonal skills, communication skills and successful team building. The target groups were identified by their sports as demonstrating the ability to be a potential leader, and one nomination was accepted from each organisation (total 40). In addition, each sport made a commitment to support their nominated woman in the pursuit of leadership opportunities.

As part of the AOC strategy, the 1998 participants were invited back to Workshop 2 in 1999 where they had the opportunity to share their achievements since attending Workshop 1. These ranged from personal skills and workplace achievements to sporting achievements, as well as many National Federations developing their own strategies to promote the participation of women.

This second Workshop covered the areas of negotiation skills, time management, planning/meeting skills and techniques for successful networking. From this second Workshop a selection of those women considered to demonstrate a high level of leadership potential were invited to a working lunch. This luncheon provided the opportunity for a presentation by a leading businesswoman, further networking and positive, supportive interaction.

In 2005, the AOC conducted a seminar "Leadership Dynamics" with a strong, yet different, emphasis on increasing the representation of women on Boards of our member sports.

Given the knowledge that in the world of sport (traditionally a masculine culture) men are required to "champion" change initiatives along with the women, we looked closely at the Board membership of our National Federations and invited those men and women who could effect change within their organisations or be potential Board members. Also invited were several sports who had demonstrated excellent management/governance principles and these people were used as leaders for the group workshop sessions. This resulted in an equitable gender balance, among the 60 participants, of whom 12 were athletes, and the representation of 30 Olympic Sports (Summer and Winter).

The one day program presented current best practice in business with particular reference to governance, Board diversity and cultural change.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to network and share ideas. They viewed the seminar as a positive indication of the AOC working more closely together with the sports and empowering them to make changes at all levels, particularly with respect to increasing the number of women on Board positions. Recent anecdotal comments would indicate that the effect of this seminar continues to influence in a positive manner, the composition of Board members in our Olympic sports.

2. WORLD LEADERSHIP FORUMS

In addition, the AOC continues to select women in leadership positions and/or women athletes to attend various national, regional and international conferences.

Those women who have enjoyed this patronage speak of the experience as one which is personally rewarding, confidence building, increased skill level and promotes an awareness of global issues in the world of sport. Given the many privileges we enjoy as a nation of sport loving people, such experience has proved to be a strong motivator for ongoing commitment to contribute to a range of programs.

3. ROLE MODELS

The AOC both centrally, and through the State Olympic Councils encourages athletes to be role models for young people through their involvement in Olympic Academics, the AOC Pierre de Coubertin Awards and presentations at school assemblies. The impact of athletes sharing their experiences with youth is inspirational and has often resulted in young people changing 'direction' and striving to achieve their personal best.

4. COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES

Rather than duplicate resources already available, the AOC encourages its member sports to:

- Develop skills through state-based seminars, workshops and scholarship programs.
- Actively recruit for positions of leadership using the "Women on Boards" network.
- Become involved in state-based Women in Sport networks e.g. NSW Breakfast Club, VIC Sportswomen Working Together.
- Support ASC and state-based award programs for Women in Sport.

5. RECOGNITION

The AOC submits a nomination each year for the "IOC Women in Sport Trophy" to promote the advancement of women in sport. The award recognises outstanding achievement and landmarks made to develop, encourage and strengthen the participation of women and girls at all levels in the sporting world by individuals or an organisation.

In 2001, the AOC received the World Trophy for its work in increasing women's events at the 2000 Olympic Games and the celebration of women's participation during the Games Opening Ceremony. Since then, the Continental Trophy (for Oceania) has been awarded to:

2002 - Helen Brownlee, AOC Executive, Olympic Education, Canoeing

2003 - Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Tennis/Youth Programs

2004 - Lorraine Landon, Basketball

2005 - Lynne Bates, AOC Executive, Swimming

6. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Where appropriate, affirmative action has been taken to increase the number of women and achieve an equitable balance of gender. For example, on the AOC Athletes' Commission the Constitution states that of the 8 members elected at each Olympic Games by the athletes, no less than three males and no less than three females shall be elected. With the Olympic Winter Games, two members are elected, comprising one of each gender.