



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

Leverrier Crescent Bruce ACT 2617
PO Box 176 Belconnen ACT 2616
ABN 67 374 695 240

Tel 61 2 6214 1111
Fax 61 2 6251 2680
www.ausport.gov.au

Dr Ian Holland
Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology
and the Arts Reference Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Dr Holland

Re: Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

Please find attached a submission to the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Reference Committee's inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia.

The Australian Sports Commission would be only too happy to provide any further assistance required to support the Committee's inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Mark A Peters
Chief Executive Officer

1 September 2006



AUSTRALIAN
INSTITUTE OF SPORT



National sources of physical activity data

Background

National data on physical activity is available from two main sources:

- **The Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport (SCORS)** – which is comprised of representatives from the Australian Sports Commission, the state and territory government agencies responsible for Sport and Recreation and the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
- **The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)**

Each year, SCORS releases an annual report of its Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS). ERASS has been conducted quarterly since February 2001, providing detailed findings of the frequency, nature and type of activities that are participated in by persons aged 15 years and over for exercise, recreation and sport during the 12 months prior to interview.

Prior to 2001, the ABS produced annual estimates of participation in sport and physical activity through the Population Survey Monitor (PSM). Since the cessation of the PSM, the main reports produced by the ABS that have focused on participation in sport and physical activity have been:

- *Participation in Sports and Physical Activities*. This publication presents results from the General Social Survey (GSS), 2002 relating to participation in sport and physical activities by persons aged 18 years and over.
- *Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity*. This publication presents results from the Survey of Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity conducted in April 2004. It presents information on the number of persons aged 15 years and over who were involved in organised sport and physical activity over a 12 month period.

Issue

There has been some concern as to how different national surveys of participation in exercise, recreation and sport can produce different participation statistics. Specifically, there is a perception that ERASS is overstating participation in exercise, recreation and sport because the 2002 ERASS results reported an overall participation rate of 15.4% higher than the GSS of the same year (77.8% compared to 62.4%).

However, it is important to recognise that there are many reasons why results produced by the two surveys may differ. These possible differences include different question wording, the context in which questions are asked in interviews and the population that is being studied.

ACNielsen Research was commissioned to investigate the possible reasons for these differences and found that SCORS could reliably use ERASS statistics because ERASS and the GSS were, broadly speaking, measuring different concepts.

That is, the GSS is measuring a narrower concept of physical activity than ERASS. Specifically, because the GSS questioning approach uses the terms “participant”, “coach”, “official”, “umpire” and “administrator” in its preamble to its key question, respondents are less likely than ERASS respondents to include recreational physical activities like walking, aerobics and yoga in their survey responses. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that ERASS is measuring participation in a wider range of physical activities for exercise, recreation and sport than the GSS.

Moreover, given that women are more likely to participate in recreational physical activities such as walking, aerobics and yoga, it is likely that the GSS is underestimating their participation in these kinds of activities in comparison to ERASS.

ACNielsen also found that even though the GSS had a higher response rate than ERASS (91% compared to 46% in 2002), this was not biasing ERASS results. ACNielsen proved this by using a split sample design, where they interviewed 1,400 respondents using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing. They randomly selected half the sample (700 respondents) and asked them the ERASS question, while the other half (700 respondents) were asked the GSS question. Even though this ACNielsen study achieved a response rate of just 32%, the participation rates obtained from the GSS and ERASS questions in this study were comparable to the results of the original surveys. ACNielsen, therefore, concluded that there is no evidence of bias in the ERASS data caused by response rates.



Conclusions

In summary, the GSS is asking a very different question than ERASS in the mind (comprehension) of respondents. ERASS is measuring a much broader concept of physical activity than the GSS, where respondents are more likely to include recreational physical activities (be they organised or non-organised).

ERASS can therefore be considered a reliable source of annual estimates of participation in both organised and non-organised sport and physical activity.