



# Western Australian Sports Federation

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15 June 2006-06-15

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

## **Re: Senate inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity of contributing to the Senate inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia.

The WA Sports Federation (The Voice of Sport in WA since 1950) is the peak umbrella body for sport in the State. Our purpose is to advocate for, promote and support the ongoing development of sport for our members. WASF comprises some 117 State sports associations and agencies and is an advocate of the philosophy of 'sport for all'.

This submission is from the Board of WASF. It is understood that many member sports and Womensport West will respond with their own submissions.

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

WASF is of the belief that there is already more than sufficient evidence through research and medical support in favour of the health benefits attributed to the population generally by their participation in active sport and recreation pursuits, either as an active participant and /or a volunteer.

In addition, there is also evidence to indicate that involvement in clubs builds social capital in the community and assists in areas of mental health and overcoming feelings of isolation. The self confidence that comes from involvement in sport in any capacity and at any level cannot be underestimated.

**2) Accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organized sport, fitness and recreation activities, with additional reference to State and Federal programs, including;**

a) participant numbers;

Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Sports commission figures show that participation rates are minimal by comparison with the optimal. Accurate and quality statistical information gathered and recorded over a period of time to establish trends should be a priority of government. More than just the record of one or two days physical activity in a year.

b) characteristics of women not participating;

WASF is not qualified to comment on this as there is limited quantitative data available on which to make an informed comment.

c) constraints, including strategies to overcome these constraints;

WASF is not qualified to comment on this as there is insufficient data on which to make an informed comment. Research needs to be undertaken to determine whether the reasons for non participation are similar to the reasons for limited participation of women in other fields of endeavour such as the work place.

d) effectiveness of current State and federal grant programs;

What programs exist specifically for women at the present time?

WASF is not qualified to comment on this as there is limited quantitative data available on which to make an informed comment.

e) retention and attrition rates of grass roots participation;

WASF is not qualified to comment on this as there is limited quantitative data available on which to make an informed comment. However, from observation and anecdotally we believe that children participate in a variety of sports and recreational activities but the drop out rate in early teen years is high. Reasons for women and girls dropping out include, awareness of body image, sport uniforms being uncool, other social activities taking precedence and parental concern over school work being a priority.

f) remuneration, recruitment, retention and attrition of elite female athletes;

It is our view that sport at this level is either professional entertainment or highly subsidised by government. Successful professional entertainment sport will fill stadia and have high media following levels which turn into high salary levels for the professional athlete. If the sport does not attract an entertainment level, then it will not attract spectator and media income.

Government chooses to subsidise certain sports over other sports based on the potential for international success. This is not something that the sport or the female athlete can control.

It follows that the paying public and the politician will determine which sports they support based on the visual entertainment value and the potential for international recognition.

- g) retention of athletes competing in senior and open age state and national sporting competition, with possible strategies to retain females in elite and sub-elite competition;

It is difficult to comment on this issue as retention at an elite level is dependent on personal success and support systems. The more money in support systems, including coaching and infrastructure, then the more likely there will be personal success and thus retention.

At a more senior age level, then competition is more social, albeit serious for some. Participation in national events is more aligned to event tourism.

Strategies can only be determined once the rationale for retention is determined.

- h) opportunities and barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition;

The issues here are the same as for male athletes. A lack of adequate support systems and finance. Government will determine a budget and sport will work within it.

- i) the financial status, success and viability of women's national league competitions, including strategies to improve these factors.

In just the same as the paying spectator will support an A grade movie or spectacular stage show, they will pay to support what they perceive to be exciting competition. It is the public perception of entertainment value that will determine the financial status, success and viability of any national league competition, men's or women's.

### **3) The portrayal of women's sport in the media, including;**

- a) the role of government to regulate and review the coverage of women's sport in the media;

There should be no regulation of the media regarding what is published or produced re sport coverage. Public support for a sport or event will determine what the media covers. If increased media coverage of women's sport, or any activity for that matter, is a priority for government then government should do more by way of education, promotion and implementation of support systems to increase the public interest.

For example, government could fund a survey to determine the level of public interest and commence an education and promotion campaign based on the results. However, media coverage tends to reflect public interest and public interest can be built through education and promotion.

- b) the influence of pay television on the coverage of women's sport;  
Refer above, pay television responds to viewer demand.

- c) the promotion and publicity of women's national league competitions;  
Education and promotion campaigns may create a demand, based on the public perception of entertainment value. Refer comments under point a.

d) the financial status and success of women's national leagues.

Given the lack of any quality data published and easily accessible for the making of comparisons with men's national leagues, WASF is not in a qualified position to comment on this.

**4) Women in leadership roles in sport, including;**

a) the number and proportion of women in coaching, administrative and officiating roles;

WASF is of the belief that there is insufficient data to comment on this issue. It is recommended that a national survey of sports be undertaken to determine the numbers of women involved in these roles.

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

This is also an area in which government can assist by initiating and funding appropriate research.

c) trends and issues for women in organized leadership roles;

Refer above point b.

d) strategies to improve the numbers of women in coaching, administration and technical roles;

Again, research is required. However, whatever strategies are considered, the foundation of participation is born in the school system. WASF is strongly of the belief that until there is a more positive attitude and culture for skill development in basic school physical education programs delivered by qualified teaching staff and supported by a community attitude supportive of volunteerism and community clubs, there will be little, if any change in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue. WASF looks forward to receiving a copy of the outcome and to the development of strategies that will assist in overcoming the many inequities that exist between the participation of women and men in sport and recreation generally.

Kindest regards,

Bob Welch OAM  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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