

Australian Broadcasting Corporation Submission

Senate Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia

Introduction

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) provides a significant contribution to coverage of women in sport in Australia. The ABC achieves this through its coverage of women's sport on all platforms, particularly local radio, television, and on-line.

In this submission, the ABC addresses the following terms of reference for the inquiry:

- c. the portrayal of women's sport in the media; and
- d. women in leadership roles in sport.

c. The Portrayal of Women's Sport in the Media

The ABC's contribution to the portrayal of women in the media as sportswomen, broadcasters, commentators and reporters has given value and prominence to the role women play in sport, especially and in key national league competition and their role in their communities. The Corporation has a long and distinguished history as a broadcaster of women's sport, broadcasts more women's sport than the commercial networks, and continues to work hard to improve its coverage.

In addition to coverage of women's sport, the ABC contributes to the positive portrayal of women through exploring the issues and difficulties sportswomen face, and through features on prominent sportswomen.

The ABC Charter requires the ABC:

- a. to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting system consisting of national, commercial and community sectors and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, to provide-
 - i. broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community; and
 - ii. broadcasting programs of an educational nature;

The broadcast of women's sport is an important role for the national public broadcaster in meeting its Charter requirements.

The ABC's strategic direction is to present a range of views and perspectives on Australian life – on television, radio and through its popular Internet site. ABC sports broadcasting is distinctive and takes account of the output of other broadcasters through the achievement of the following objectives:

- contributes to a sense of national identity, particularly focusing on regional identification with local sports;
- reflects the experiences and diversity of local communities;
- engages audiences with distinctive content;
- contributes to diversity of output through an enhanced genre spread; and
- maximises the audience for sporting programs.

These objectives acknowledge the integral role of sport as part of the ABC, as well as the importance of building and maintaining audiences. They also take into account the responsibility of the ABC to provide programming of distinctiveness, relevance and diversity and the need to be innovative and entertaining. These objectives provide for the opportunity for the ABC to maximise its presence in communities around Australia, via television, radio and on-line.

ABC Television

ABC Television's coverage and promotion of women's sport has given the ABC a unique position in the Australian television landscape. ABC Television makes a significant contribution to the recognition of women's achievements in sport.

Since 1975, ABC Television has been broadcasting the national netball competition¹ in association with Australia's national netball association. The women's basketball competition has been broadcast since the 1989 finals series in association with the Women's National Basketball League (WNBL).

The Women's World Bowls Championships were first broadcast in 2000. Since 2002, when the men's and women's bowls associations merged, ABC Television has shown regular coverage of women's elite bowls competitions.

In 1982, the Australian women's hockey championships were covered by ABC Television for the first time. In 1990, the ABC was host broadcaster of the World Cup of Women's Hockey. Since that time, the ABC has covered major

¹ Since 1997, titled the Commonwealth Bank Trophy due to sponsorship naming rights.

hockey events in Australia involving the national women's team, including the World Cup in 2002 and Champions Trophy tournaments in 2003 and 2005.

In addition to these national and international competitions, ABC Television has covered other women's sports such as tennis, golf, cricket, soccer, volleyball, beach volleyball, rowing, triathlon, water polo, equestrian, swimming, diving, synchronised swimming, athletics and rugby. Broadcasts may be of full live coverage, edited highlights or magazine-style programming. This is in addition to any reportage or programming from ABC News & Current Affairs.

National women's sporting competitions provide around a third of ABC Television's national sports coverage (see tables below).

National Competitions

Year	Women's Sport: National Competitions (hours)	% of National Sport***
2001-02	82	31
2002-03	80	38
2003-04	98	33
2004-05	107	38
2005-06*	131**	44

* projected figures to end Financial Year

** includes 34 hours broadcast on ABC2

*** Women's sport as a percentage of total National sport broadcast.

Women playing in mixed Sport

Year	Women's Sport in Mixed Events: National Competitions (hours)	% of National Mixed Sport**
2001-02	35	63
2002-03	26	50
2003-04	29	41
2004-05	32	26
2005-06*	43	56

* projected figures to end Financial Year

** Women's Sport as a percentage of total National Mixed Sport broadcast.

ABC Television is committed to the broadcast of sporting codes, events and activities that have a particular local or regional significance or characteristic, in particular state and territory-based competitions of major codes and / or have substantial levels of community participation but are not broadcast by other media organisations. The latter include national and international lawn bowls, national and international netball and women's basketball and hockey.

In addition, ABC TV maintains a commitment to the development of women's sport, in particular netball, hockey and basketball.

As part of this commitment, ABC Television continues to develop longer term relationships with sports organisations in order to provide increased certainty and understanding of the ABC's role and commitment to building audiences and extend the recognition and strength of both the ABC and women's sport.

In 2005-06, ABC Television recognised the need for television broadcasts of women's sport to continue to meet existing audience needs but to attract new audiences. Despite devoting significant resources over a number of years, television netball audiences remained disappointingly small. ABC TV Sport undertook extensive research to find out what netball fans wanted from their coverage.

As a response to the research results, ABC Television revised the 2006 netball coverage in a number of key areas. The new approach features live match coverage on ABC2, a comprehensive highlights program on ABC TV which includes aspects of every match of the round, the latest netball news and profiles and interviews with players.

ABC2 started broadcasting women's netball matches live on Friday nights, which has led to very positive press coverage and an enthusiastic response from the audience. There have also been requests from viewers about how to access ABC2 specifically so they can see the live netball coverage, demonstrating that this will be a real incentive for audiences to move to digital television. In addition, the regional netball clubs around Australia are all promoting coverage of the games on ABC2 to their members and the Netball Association of Australia is very supportive.

ABC2 also broadcasts women's basketball on Friday nights in the summer. Australian women's basketball does not receive coverage on any other television service apart from the ABC and ABC2.

The utilisation of ABC2, a digital free-to-air channel, is a key to the ABC's change in approach. It is the ABC's first attempt in the sporting area to utilise the flexibility that the digital channel offers, whilst meeting the need of the loyal ABC TV netball audience.

The size of the audience for women's netball and basketball on ABC2 cannot yet be calculated. OzTam, the official source of television audience measurement, does not yet provide comprehensive data about audiences for digital-only free-to-air channels such as ABC2. It is anticipated that this data will be available in the next six months, as audience numbers continue to grow for the channel.

If the multichannel genre restrictions are lifted later this year, as planned, ABC2 will be able to broadcast international women's sporting events, including games between Australia and New Zealand and potentially the World Cup qualifier.

There is some potential to explore in terms of increasing the ABC's broadcast coverage in both national and international women's competitions, such as women's soccer, golf, hockey, rowing, cricket and softball. ABC Television would work in association with the relevant peak women's sporting associations to provide the best and most appropriate coverage of the sport, as well as to assist in the promotion of the broadcasts to a national audience. However, any extension to existing levels or range of sport broadcasts will be subject to identification of increased resources.

In recent years, ABC Television has also broadcast features on prominent women in sport, which have canvassed the issue of portrayal of women in sport. For example, during 2003 and 2004, the popular *Enough Rope with Andrew Denton* profiled Layne Beachley, Dawn Fraser, Shane Gould and Nova Peris. Similarly, *Message Stick*, which is aimed at Indigenous audiences, told the story of Cathy Freeman in March this year. *Behind the News* focused on young champion swimmer, Stephanie Williams, in an episode last year.

Other programs such as the *Dynasties* documentary series on the Roycroft family included part of the life story of Vicki Roycroft, daughter-in-law of Olympic equestrian champion Bill Roycroft. Her continued competition in equestrian at the international level is part of her journey in overcoming her personal tragedy, the loss of her only son.

While each profile addresses the story of an individual woman and their achievements, many include comments on the particular hurdles faced by women in pursuing their sport.

ABC Radio

ABC Radio also contributes significantly to promoting women's sport through its coverage on local radio, and through its analysis of the challenges faced by sportswomen.

In the last 12 months, the ABC Radio program *Grandstand* has provided coverage of a wide range of women's sports including the women's cricket test series between Australia and India, Netball Test matches involving Australia as well as coverage of various women's events at the Australian Masters Games in Alice Springs. ABC Local Radio also covers major women's golf and tennis tournaments.

ABC Local Radio provided full commentary of major female team events at the Commonwealth Games including hockey, basketball and netball as well as individual sports such as track and field and swimming. During this coverage we used female expert commentators in swimming (Susie O'Neill), basketball (Rachel Sporn) and hockey (Jenny Morris).

In its Australian Open Tennis coverage, ABC Local Radio broadcasts a wide selection of women's singles matches as well as the final. ABC Radio also broadcast commentary of a selection of games from the Adelaide International Tennis and coverage of the Adelaide Lightning women's basketball games in South Australia.

ABC Local Radio also covers stories about women's contributions to sport in local regions and throughout Australia. Over the past few months, this has included features on Stephanie Gilmore, Gold Coast surfer, as well as Jenny Williams, AFL coach.

The ABC plays a significant role across Australia and there is a close affiliation between ABC radio stations and their local communities. Local radio keeps its communities in touch with women's sport at the local and regional level, particularly via the sporting segments of the local morning breakfast shows.

In addition to broadcasting women's sport, the ABC is also strongly committed to exploring the portrayal of women's sport in the media. For instance, *triple J*, the ABC's national youth network recently explored how changes to the world women's surfing tour have impacted on women involved in the sport, through its current affairs program Hack.

Radio National, the ABC's specialist national talk network, provides information and analysis of national and international issues through a range of program styles including features and documentaries.

Radio National broadcasts the weekly program *The Sports Factor* which debates and celebrates the cultural significance of sport in Australia. It covers issues of gender in the politics and performance of sport as well as broadcasting features on women in sport. In 2006, the program broadcast a discussion with Liz Ellis about the preparation of the Australian women's netball team in the lead up to the 2006 Commonwealth Games as well as an in depth look at marathon runners and why some people argue that women are better than men at this event. In 2005, the program explored Liz Ellis' thoughts on the differences between media interest in women's sport compared to men's as well.

The Sports Factor also looks at issues such as the effect of masculinity in sport on the portrayal of women. For instance, following the publicised scandals

and allegations of sexual impropriety by male footballers at the beginning of 2005, *The Sports Factor* explored the culture of football and how women are treated by this culture. The program has also looked at the campaign by women softballers to maintain their Olympic status, after a decision by the IOC to drop softball after Beijing 2008.

In the lead up to the World Cup, Radio National's Indigenous arts and culture program *Away!* broadcast a program looking at Aboriginal people's involvement in the world game (soccer) including the contribution of Belinda Dawney (former member of the Australian women's soccer team).

ABC Online

The ABC's Internet platform also makes a large contribution to the coverage of women's sport. ABC Sport Online has made a significant commitment to covering women's sporting events to the extent that resources permit. The ABC's online sports site includes specialist netball and women's basketball sub-sites.

The netball site includes the results and stories of the weekend's matches in the national league, a guestbook, draw, statistics and specialist commentary from ABC TV's special netball commentator Steve Robilliard. More recently, the site has been expanded to include a weekly slideshow of match photos from the weekend competition. Recently, additional funding was secured to provide an additional one shift per week to improve the netball coverage.

The women's basketball site includes a similar content offering to the netball site, and a significant commitment is also made to the coverage of international matches involving the Australian women's cricket team.

ABC Sport Online also provides particular stories involving women's sport as circumstances and new values dictate. This means, for example, that major events on the women's golf circuit are covered regularly.

Future plans include encouraging users to submit their own stories, photos and videos on local women's sporting events, as well as potentially a national results service which would allow users to upload their local match results.

d. Women in Leadership Roles in Sport

ABC Television

Historically, the ABC has played a key role in the development and promotion of women as sports broadcasters. Broadcasters such as Karen

Tighe, Simone Thurtell, Tracey Holmes and Debbie Spillane are evidence of the ABC's commitment to place women in key sports broadcasting positions.

The ABC has also developed women as expert commentators. Commentators such as Michelle Timms and Jen Morris are well known and appreciated by the ABC audience. With their debut into netball commentary in the 2006 season, netballers Eloise Southby-Halbish and Liz Boniello continue the tradition of elite players making the transition to broadcast commentators.

Behind the camera, the ABC has also played an important role through the training and development of women's sports television directors and producers. This development role could also benefit from additional funding in order provide further support in this creative and production area.

ABC Radio

ABC Local Radio has a distinctive Radio Sport Division. Two of the most senior positions in the Division, Executive Producers in Sydney and Melbourne, are both held by females.

There are also a number of female sports broadcasters within the ABC who have strong editorial input into program material and coverage. Two of the most prominent female presenters of major sports coverage are Karen Tighe and Simone Thurtell. Former Commonwealth Games and Olympic sprinter Melinda Gainsford Taylor is a regular co-host of Northern *Grandstand* during the winter months. In addition, the first ABC sports broadcaster to be appointed to a Regional area (Townsville) is a woman, Anthea Kissel. Anthea is also the major contributor to the ABC Online Sports Website from the Department.

In the recent 2006 Local Radio Awards, ABC Broadcasters Simone Thurtell and Caroline Davison won the award for **Outstanding Contribution To Local Radio By A Sports Broadcaster** for a series of *Grandstand* outside broadcast programs.

In March 2006, ABC Radio broadcaster Peter Walsh received the **Best Radio Coverage Award** from the Women's National Basketball League for 'Reports and Commentary on Women's National Basketball League in 2005/06 season'. This was Peter's fifth award in six years.

Conclusion

The ABC provides a high quality of coverage and has established a leadership role in broadcasting – and thereby promoting – women’s sport. The ABC remains committed to broadcasting a high level and range of women’s sport across platforms, covering local and regional, as well as national and international events.

The ABC believes that continuing developments in broadcasting, particularly in the digital arena, will open up further opportunities for the national broadcaster to cover women’s sport. For instance, there may be some capacity within the digital radio roll-out in capital cities to provide for further coverage of women’s sport.

It is in its television operations in particular that the ABC would be looking to canvass a number of options in the future, subject to identifying increased resources.

- Provide additional coverage of women’s sport through the broadcast of other elite women’s national and international competitions.
- Re-establish ABC Television’s development role in sourcing and training women’s sports broadcasters through the establishment of a number of broadcasting cadetships.
- Improve the ABC’s training role through further development of women sport directors, producers and production personnel.

Appendix

The following is a list of programs broadcast on *The Sports Factor* relating to women in sport and recreation in Australia:

24 March 06 - Women and marathon running

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2006/1597869.htm>

14 Oct 2005 - The campaign by women softballers to maintain their Olympic status, after a decision by the IOC to drop softball after Beijing 2008

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2005/1480238.htm>

17 June 2005 - The comments of Liz Ellis, Australian netball captain on the differences between media interest in women's sport compared to men's.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2005/1392404.htm>

10 June 2005 - Penny Toft and Linda Darian - endurance horse riding in Tasmania, specifically the Tom Quilty Endurance event, a ride staged over a number of days that attracts world class competitors.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2005/1387251.htm#>

1 April 2005 - After school activity programs

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2005/1334060.htm>

25 February 2005 - Women and the culture of rugby league - Elaine Canty, Wendy McCarthy, Kath Albury; Catherine Lumby

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2005/1309109.htm>

8 October 2004 - Shake those Pom Poms - cheerleading

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2004/1215237.htm>

5 March 2004 - I Am Woman - transsexual golfer

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/sportsfactor/stories/2004/1059427.htm>