

SENATE INQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA

**SUBMISSION JOINTLY PREPARED BY THE AUSTRALIAN
NETBALL PLAYERS' ASSOCIATION AND THE AUSTRALIAN
WORKERS' UNION**



Australian NETBALL PLAYERS Association



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1. INTRODUCTION

This is a joint submission on behalf of the Australian Netball Players' Association ("ANPA") and the Australian Workers' Union ("AWU"). We would like to thank John Kirby and Village Roadshow for their support.

History of the partnership

Former Australian captain Kathryn Harby-Williams founded the current ANPA in 2003. The association was created as a voice for Australia's leading female athletes to communicate with the governing body Netball Australia.

The ANPA won landmark decisions against Netball Australia on areas of restraint of trade and female rights. By 2004, the association was unable to attract sufficient funds to continue such work and thus began discussions with AWU following an approach to ANPA by AWU National Secretary Bill Shorten.

The ANPA entered into a landmark memorandum of understanding in November 2004 allowing the AWU to act as a negotiator on industrial and occupational health and safety interests for netballers.

The ANPA/AWU met all Commonwealth Bank Trophy (CBT) teams early in 2005 to put forward a vision of how to improve the status of netballers in Australia. The response from teams was an overwhelming success and the information they provided substantiated the first claim against the employers.

Significantly, the ANPA has been able to boast a 100% membership since its inception and it is this collective strength that has earned players respect at the negotiating table.

The objectives of the ANPA/AWU partnership

The primary objective of the ANPA/AWU is to increase the profile of netball around the country, by becoming a nationally recognised professional association.

Some of the objectives outlined in the constitution of the ANPA are as follows:

- To provide members with unified and representative organisation.
- To be the peak advisory body on player welfare.
- To protect in advance the professional, industrial and occupational health and safety interests of members who are contracted to play with a team in the CBT or for Netball Australia as an Australian squad member.
- To achieve and maintain an appropriate level of fair minimum terms and conditions for all netball players.
- To improve the terms and conditions to ensure that netball continues to attract and maintain top sports people to and in the competition.
- To ensure a role for player's through the Players Association and the development of policies, procedures and arrangements to be directed at a player safety and welfare issues.
- To mediate in regards to and if possible reconcile and settle disputes affecting individual players or groups of players.
- To assist, participate and work with Netball Australia and the National Netball League teams to enhance the game nationally and increase the gross revenue of the competition.

This ANPA/AWU believes the inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia is well overdue and we are happy to provide a submission and make an oral one if required to further elaborate.

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2. REMUNERATION, RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND ATTRITION OF ELITE FEMALE ATHLETES, INCLUDING COMPARISONS WITH ELITE MALE ATHLETES

Members of ANPA do not receive sufficient amounts of remuneration to play their sport on a full-time basis with most having to rely on supplementary income.

In 2005, ANPA and the AWU surveyed its membership to discover how players were treated. A copy of the findings of this report is attached as *Appendix A*. The following were key findings in the report:

- 83.2% of respondents who played in the CBT in 2005 earned less than \$4000 with the average being approximately \$2000, some earned nothing.
- All players (except those at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS)) were responsible for paying any costs associated with an injury.
- 63.4% of respondents had played three seasons or less and 22.8% of people were completing their first season.

- 84.2% of respondents committed more than 25 hours per week to either their other job or education and 58.4% committed more than 38 hours per week.
- An amazing 67.3% of respondents had or were completing a tertiary qualification, 12.9% were or had completed a TAFE qualification and 18.8% were completing secondary schooling.
- Respondents engaged in full-time work accounted for 41.6% of those surveyed, 14.9% were employed part-time and 37.6% were casual employees.

During 2005, ANPA along with the AWU entered into negotiations with Netball Australia and its affiliate Member Organisations to establish common minimum terms and conditions for players in the CBT.

The following was established on behalf of players:

- A banding structure to pay players in accordance with their skill and experience.
- A minimum base allowance of \$1000 per season, up from \$0 in 2005.
- The average pay will increase from approximately \$2000 per season to \$3900, representing a 95% increase in one year.
- A pool of funds has been established by the employers where players can draw upon them to cover the costs associated with injury.
- The new agreement provides for family assistance on individual basis to be given for each player needing it.
- Players now own the right to the use of their image and permission must be sought to use it.
- Players from all teams will now become employees and receive superannuation, last year players from two teams were engaged as hobbyists.
- Players will receive annual leave for the first time, in addition to a day each week of the season; their employer can't engage them.

The results achieved in the first collective agreement put in place a framework for players to build upon in the future.

The ANPA/AWU have compared wages of other professional sports in Australia to those received by netballers. Table 1 illustrates the wage distribution of elite male sports compared to netball in Australia.

Table1.

Wage distribution at elite level sport in Australia

	Competition (\$)	Per Team (\$)	Per Player (\$)
Netball	416,600	59,514	3,967
Basketball	8,096,000	736,000	73,600
Australian Football	97,840,000	6,115,000	156,794
Soccer	12,000,000	1,500,000	75, 000#
Cricket (State)	N/A	N/A	42,500*

This does not allow for the one player per team that does not have to count in the salary cap.

*The minimum a player can be contracted for is \$22,500 while the maximum is \$65,000. However, players then get remunerated on the amount of games the play at a rate of \$3,100 for a four-day game and \$1,100 for a one-day game.

Representatives of the ANPA and AWU recently went to investigate the viability of the New Zealand netball league and the results surprised. During this brief tour, we were able to meet with television executives, sponsorship managers, team owners and many players.

The players and team owners told us the minimum the majority of players on lists received was \$12, 000, some 40 players earned above \$20, 000, and seven of them more than \$45, 000.

One player we spoke to told us how she lived in the north island and was flown to training on the south once a week. During the time away from home

the team would pay for a nanny for her children and would also fly her husband if he so wished. She earned more than \$45, 000 per season.

The New Zealand competition only has seven round plus finals compared to fourteen and finals in Australia. So, it is fair to suggest that for the half the amount of work as Australian athletes, New Zealanders can expect to earn ten-times as much money as our members.

In addition to being paid by their club, New Zealand national players receive a further salary from Netball New Zealand, along with a Prime Minister's scholarship, which is also available after they retire. This government-funded scholarship allows players to attend university free, pays for books and other associated costs with professional development. We believe this is worthy of further investigation.

3. OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS FOR NATIONAL TEAM MEMBERS AND COMPETITORS IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

Opportunities to compete in open international netball competition are limited. The major competitions are the Commonwealth Games and World Championships, both are held every four years.

Each year, Australia plays friendly international matches in preparation for the two major competitions. There are regular friendly matches against New Zealand, and a once-yearly tour to one of Jamaica, South Africa or England, but these tours are usually brief due to the shoestring budget provided.

The organisation for the recent Commonwealth Games was applauded by the Australian Netball Team, but highlighted how poorly the World Championships are organised by International Federation of Netball Associations (IFNA).

IFNA is the international governing body of netball with approximately three full time staff members. This group is responsible for the organisation of the World Championships and awarded the upcoming tournament to Fiji. It is our opinion this was the wrong decision because it was detrimental to the

promotion of netball on the world stage. In fact, for a short time Netball Australia was put on stand-by to host the tournament because sponsors stayed away for fear of lack of exposure.

It would seem playing a World Championship in Fiji would encourage competitors to stay in the sport, as it is close enough for at least families to come and watch. However, stadium capacity has meant only Fiji residents are able to purchase tickets and only an estimated three thousand travel packages will be made available to Australian residents, which will be expensive and price most family members out of attending.

Members of ANPA have told us one of the major barriers for them representing Australia are the high performance training requirements placed upon them as national squad members at the same time as inadequate remuneration arrangement.

In preparation for the Commonwealth Games, players were required to be at the AIS every second week over a twelve-week period for training. In general this placed great demand on their family and professional lives, with many players retiring at the end of the preparation citing this as one of their reasons.

As players don't earn enough money from netball to support themselves, they are required to work away from the sport. Attending these camps placed great pressure on their employers to give them extended leave and often affected the performance of the business where they worked. Players felt they were putting unfair pressure on their employer to treat them differently to other employees in the workplace and players were not happy with the current regime imposed upon them.

Although, there are many negatives associated with playing international competition players are proud to be representing Australia. They put the rest of their lives on hold to represent Australia in competition and enjoy the competitiveness the best in the world has to offer. However, there seems to

be no standards of best practice across the world and participation comes at an unfair and unsustainable price.

4. THE FINANCIAL STATUS, SUCCESS AND VIABILITY OF WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPETITIONS, INCLUDING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THESE FACTORS.

Assessing the status, success and viability of the CBT in Australia is in real terms an assessment of Netball Australia, as they have governed the competition since its inception.

The 2006, Australian Bureau of Statistics yearbook reports organised participation in netball remained steady since 2000. However, there seems to be no measure of growth in the elite level.

The ANPA membership is sceptical any change had occurred in the CBT until the AWU arrived. There had been no attempt by Netball Australia to create a level playing field to ensure a fair and equitable competition was presented to Australians. This has led to a competition that has eight teams but only three with a realistic chance of winning, three that are competitive against each other but will never beat the top teams and two teams that continue to struggle.

It is this uneven and predictable competition we believe has contributed in parts to the lack of commercial and public interest in the competition and why the viability of this format is questionable.

However, ANPA/AWU believe that a core reason why teams have not been able to prosper and become viable is because they are managed by Member Organisations as part of a bigger business.

Member Organisations rightly spend the majority of their income on the parts of the business that generate it; this is not the elite competition. Therefore, they have not been able to contribute the level of finance needed to improve the sport.

In New Zealand, they encourage Membership Organisations to partner a franchise to run their elite team. The franchise is responsible for the day-to-day obligations of the team but use the Membership Organisation as a database to promote their team.

This has led to a more prosperous environment where players can earn a sufficient amount of income so as they don't have to work full-time to support themselves. The benefit of this is players in New Zealand can balance their lives around netball more efficiently than those playing in Australia.

One of the major complaints Australian players have is they are always fatigued and don't have enough time to recover from a game of netball before doing something else, i.e. family commitments or work, players in New Zealand do not experience this problem to the same extent, because they are run by people with professional skills whom have been able to present a product to the marketplace that is sought after.

We would suggest that most people in Australia don't follow the CBT indicating a low level status amongst the population. Australia would do well to investigate why New Zealand are able to run a more successful competition with a population that is one fifth of ours.

One option that needs further investigation is the viability of a competition involving teams from Australia, New Zealand and possibly a Pacific island. The ANPA /AWU have spoken about this idea with our members and key stakeholders in New Zealand and have found some common ground in how this would happen.

The governance of this competition should not be placed in the hands of either Netball Australia or Netball New Zealand, as we are led to understand there maybe some governance issues in that country as well. We would suggest an independent body be created to oversee the introduction and

management of this league, which we believe would create wider public and commercial opportunities.

5. THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT TO REGULATE AND REVIEW THE COVERAGE OF WOMEN'S SPORT IN THE MEDIA.

Media have played perhaps the most crucial role in the professionalism of sport in Australia as cricket and AFL football have proven. However, there has been a perception in the community that viewers are not interested in women's sport and therefore there has been little need to report on it.

The current levels of netball coverage in the media are declining due in part to the deal struck between the ABC and Netball Australia. The deal sees netball broadcast live on ABC's digital channel on Friday night against the major football codes, and a one-hour package show on Saturday, compared to two matches being shown on a Saturday in 2005.

The percentage of people who have access to digital television in Australia is low. Therefore, the decision to show a live match against the gate, against the major football codes and on a channel few people realise they actually have seems unusual.

In addition, the highlights package shown by ABC on a Saturday is scheduled at the same time most aspiring netballers are playing their own competition. It is fair to assume that whilst the ABC is providing an outlet for the sport to be broadcast it is not broadcasting it at times attractive to the target audience.

Recently, bidding closed to be the host broadcaster of the 2007 World Netball Championships. ANPA and the AWU believe the ABC and Fox Sports were the only Australian networks to express interest in the broadcasting rights. However, we don't believe the bids put forward will promote the game.

We understand ABC offered \$50 000 to have the exclusive rights of the tournament but could not guarantee any footage would be shown, with no live

matches except for possibly the final. Fox Sports offered to televise the grand and semi-finals live but offered no money.

The Federal Government should use existing legislation and add the World Netball Championships to the Anti-Syphoning laws and ensure elite women's sport is available for Australians to watch.

The Australian newspaper does not publish articles relating to the CBT, and only minimal coverage of any international fixtures. Reporting in state based papers is restricted to a preview article the day of a match and sometimes a report the next day.

If the Federal Government does not ensure netball is shown on television, interest in the elite competition will continue to lag. We would hypothesise that if the Federal Government legislates to protect the coverage of netball on television it would have the potential to re-invigorate the sport. We would suggest that if netball could guarantee sponsors greater coverage they will be more likely to invest and promote the sport, therefore increasing the capital worth of the sport.

During our time in New Zealand we met with executives from a major network who asked not be mentioned. They informed us they bid seven figures to secure the rights to the New Zealand national league but lost to another channel, which indicates the prestige of the sport.

6. THE PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY OF WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPETITIONS.

For the first game of the 2006 season between the Melbourne Kestrels and Sydney Swifts, less than 400 people attended the match. Members of the AWU attended the match and spoke to Australian Team Manager to ask her opinion of the poor crowd, to which she replied she also didn't know the season was starting until the Kestrels coach phoned and invited her that day.

Netball Australia held a media conference the Monday before the season began where they invited outlets to come. It is our understanding this was poorly attended and wasn't covered by any television networks and weakly reported if it made daily newspapers.

It is our contention this shows a lack of skills within netball organisations to generate interest from media outlets, and how to get free publicity.

The promotion of netball on game day is poor and de-legitimises the integrity of the sport. The entertainment before and during each match when netball is not being played consists of young girls dressed and dancing provocatively. In the past, they have had competitions whereby if you throw a netball into a washing machine you were able to keep it. This sort of publicity and promotion on game day does not encourage young people in the crowd to become a sports person but a stay at home mother who should look after their husband, it is demeaning.

Organisers of matches in New Zealand use the breaks to generate crowd participation by using beach balls and competitions. At half time in the AFL young children, take the field for the purpose of encouraging participation. There is no reason why the CBT could not have a game of netta at half time or encourage crowd participation, they just haven't.

7. THE FINANCIAL STATUS AND SUCCESS OF WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEAGUES.

In 2005, Netball Australia paid \$1, 452, 412 in salaries to staff, which is an increase of \$368, 940 (25%) since 2003. In the same time, Netball Australia has posted one small profit and two large losses totalling a loss of \$671, 470 for the three years.

Netball does not have a professional plan to increase revenue and largely live on hope that a major company or person will appear as a white knight. The AWU has tried to work with Netball Australia to increase revenue but has found it increasingly difficult with the demands they impose.

The Australian Sports Commission gives more money to the sport of netball than any other not involved in the Olympics. This funding represents Netball Australia's greater source of revenue and as such, they have become reliant upon it.

Teams in the CBT operate on budgets of between \$70 000 and \$120 000, which includes all administrative costs and things such as travel, food and medical equipment. This is an appalling amount of money to be distributed amongst sixteen (16) players and support staff when Netball Australia officials pay themselves so comfortably.

Member Organisations find it hard to justify the amount of money spent on elite teams to their membership. This is because the majority of finance generated comes from grassroots participation that believes the money should be spent on them.

In New Zealand, franchise teams work with Member Organisations to spend up to \$600 000 (NZD) per season per team. The presentation quality of the match is much higher making it a more pleasurable experience for fans. The amounts of money spent do not affect grassroots participation but encourages young women to continue because they can see a viable career path.

8. CONCLUSION

The Board of Netball Australia is elected not by the membership but by a National Council. To become a member of the Council you must be endorsed by an executive officer of a Member Organisation. ANPA and the AWU don't believe this is satisfactory or representative of the stakeholders in the game and should be changed.

Earlier this year the National Council voted to remove the President of Netball Australia for the first time in the history of the sport, a few weeks later the Executive Officer of the national body also resigned.

In Queensland and New South Wales, their Member Organisations have also faced factional fighting at the boardroom table. As a result, a new Executive Officer has been appointed in New South Wales and the board in Queensland interfere with the day-to-day operation of the sport.

In Western Australia, a stand off has temporarily been averted with the Perth Netball Association over management issues and affiliation fees that had the ability to cripple the sport in that state, whilst the Northern Territory administration continues to suffer from an inability to attract quality staff.

The ANPA and AWU have concluded the reason we believe the sport is not growing at an elite level is because it is dysfunctional. The national body does not have the power to bind Member Organisations to decisions nor force the creation of a national strategy.

Netball is the biggest female participation sport in the country but has continued to be run by people without professional experience. We would recommend the Federal Government convene a forum of stakeholders to discuss the possibility of a complete inquiry and overhaul into the management of the sport.

The big sports in Australia are, AFL, rugby union, rugby league, cricket, soccer and to a lesser extent basketball and netball. Apart from AFL New

Zealand enjoys the same pastimes as us but for some reason netball has been able to market itself as the number two sport.

ANPA and the AWU would contend there will be many organisations calling for the Federal Government to increase funding into netball and hope that this will solve problems. We believe the focus should be on a complete restructure of the governance and the operation in netball so as a sustainable model can be built to go forward in the future.

This restructure would give investors the opportunity to put money into the sport and make a return, leading to capital growth.