

June 2006

Personal Submission

to

Senate Inquiry

“Women in Sport”

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Background

This submission is presented for your consideration to emphasize the importance of ensuring an environment where by all women are offered the opportunity to a better quality of life through sport.

As a senior gymnastics coach for over 17 years, the importance of participation at an early age is the key driver for active involvement into adolescence and adulthood.

My practical experience also includes involvement as a coach of youth based programs after school hours and a community person volunteering to grass roots community based not for profit youth clubs and associations.

Gymnastics is principally a youth sport that attracts a higher percentage of young girls, compared to boys. National statistics in 2003 by ABS has gymnastics as ranked as 5th most popular sport for girls aged 5 to 14 years, behind netball, swimming, tennis, basketball.

Because gymnastics has greater representation by girls, my submission refers to them as "children" between the ages of 3yrs to 19yrs. My references to 'youth sport' or 'junior sport' is from my gymnastics perspective, but should not preclude the synergies and meaningful similarities to all other structured sport and dance activities.

The senate inquiry into "Women in Sport" is an opportunity to communicate the sum of my valued experience which has been enriched by the considerable research I have undertaken since November 2004 on related papers, journals, media releases and interaction with many community clubs about 'youth in sport'.

A radio interview by the brainchild of the original 'Life Be In It' campaign, Brian Dixon, a former Australian Rules Football champion, who became the Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation in Victoria in 1973 was the catalyst that ignited my intense interest in this critical community issue. My undertakings to develop a comprehensive understanding of this issue have been further fuelled by the very rewarding and lower profile coaching at the grass roots community level.

Terms of Reference - 'Women in Sport'

In general, this commentary refers to the key issues relating to, though not in reference order:

- a) Health benefits (community and economic)
- b) Accessibility:
 - (i) participation, and (iii) constraints
 - (v) trends of current grass roots participation.
- d) Women in leadership:
 - (ii) issues associated with women in leadership roles at a grass roots level.
 - (iv) strategies to improve the number of women in coaching, administration and technical roles.

1. Health benefits - 'Women in Sport'

Many articles and comprehensive reports articulate the irrefutable benefits that physical activity through organised sport provides for youth. Physical activity is important to human health as the lack of physical activity has proven to lead to a range of detrimental health issues for our communities. Aside from the individual effects of inactivity the economic implications are significant through the escalating health costs and the drain of limited community resources. Prevention has always been considered better than cure.

The Australian Health Budget in 2004 was approximately \$40 billion (\$2,000 per person). A statement by the US Dept of Health and Sciences in 1997 said "School and *Community* programs that promote regular physical activity among young people could be among *the most effective strategies for reducing the public health burden* of chronic diseases associated with sedentary lifestyles". A recent report from Boston Consulting Group (Improving Mental Health Outcomes in Victoria) estimates mental illness has an economic cost to our nation of \$20 billion a year. Youth suicide is part of this alarming cost in this country, where near to one child per day takes their life. In a recent 4 Corners story on the topic, Professor Graham Martin, Suicide Prevention Expert, has been documented to comment, "I think what it means in preventative terms is that we have to start much earlier looking at connectiveness, resilience, and a whole range of other issues of self-esteem, you know, way back in primary school, and building up young people to the point where the word "suicide" never, ever crosses their minds."

Community sporting clubs provide a particular important focus for the youth. Sport can provide youth with a sense of belonging to a community and enhanced self-esteem and resilience. It can have a profoundly positive impact in terms of health and psycho-social outcomes, including academic and social benefits. Research indicates that youth involved in sport are far less likely to confront serious health issues such as obesity, depression and substance abuse. Life saving skills are not only limited to the water. Community sporting clubs are about making a real and significant difference in the community.

Both State and Federal Education and Health bodies endorse and promote these positive benefits of community junior sport.

My involvement and experiences in community gymnastics endorse those findings which outline how children feel more connected to their community, learn to be resilient and develop leadership skills through organised sports. In reality, physical education and sport is not just limited to the school curriculum but many more community based programs have for a long time been at the forefront of community capacity building through physical activity and interactivity. 'Physical education is an all encompassing term, including fitness, skill development, movement, dance, recreation, health, games and sport, plus the appropriate values and knowledge of each'. (Moneghetti report 1993.)

Gymnastics is very unique amongst all sports principally because it is a youth sport and encompassing all nine components of physical fitness, and considered the foundation for all sports. Uniquely, tuition into adulthood is largely unfamiliar compared to most other sports. Unlike most other sports, we are neither teaching how to throw a projectile or use an implement. In gymnastics we are demanding involvement by the **whole body** – consciously arranging movement with heart, head and vitality.

2. Women in leadership - 'Women in Sport'

Coaches

Children's participation in organised sports creates a very positive and connected community culture. Many club coaches, mostly females in gymnastics, are fostered at a junior level, nurtured and attain professional qualifications as teachers in their field, being professionally registered under their national sporting body. These skills and positive attributes are readily transferable to the benefit of the community in other fields of endeavour, particularly specialist teachers to undertake coaching and organise activities within the school curricula. Many community leaders emanate from their confidence building association with a community club starting at a junior level.

Educational workshops and conferences run throughout the year by state sporting bodies are an integral part to a coach's professional training, updating and technical membership renewal each year. The outcomes on these education workshops add to the employment related skills of people and enable coaching qualifications to be professionally maintained. The courses being so specialised by the nature of the sport are professional and above any University, TAFE course on offer. Our state sporting bodies provide important and educational workshops and an opportunity for professional development for coaches, and like minded; these workshops costs have by recent times a new tax which is another impediment and for the development of our young people and individuals into sport leadership roles.

Educational Courses have to meet three requirements to be GST free:
1)Employment related, 2)Determined to be educational by a Minister,
3)Provided by a recognised body. To eliminate any tax compliance issues, our state sporting bodies' education courses and workshops must be recognised as educational, with state bodies becoming a recognised training body by the Minister.

Administration

The influences of organised sport at junior level flow into adolescence and result in the ongoing participation in sport or through mentoring and development roles become involved at a volunteer committee level. It is this role playing and mentoring found outside the school environment that builds sustainable and long term links that continue into adulthood.

The grass roots youth community clubs are generally characterised by three types of structure being i)committee volunteer based and ii)community organisation based (e.g., YMCA). The third structure, private business, which is often overlooked in the development of children at the grass roots involvement.

The committee type is principally made up of mothers supporting their children outside the school environment. These mothers and also fathers through their volunteer efforts are the glue that helps hold these community sporting clubs together. These volunteer mothers and partners bring a range of skills and experience fostered in many instances by their previous involvement as children nurtured in community clubs.

The community organisation type has in instances been invited by councils to manage local facilities and continue providing community service programs for children. These programs encompass sport lessons and physical education outside of schools. These partnerships outside of school environments, where councils have well established infrastructure, link children to sporting lessons provided by volunteer sporting groups and private tutors.

A large constraint on committee clubs is attracting a volunteer to administer a highly complex GST system. Committee clubs and grass root community clubs do not have access to the same tax concessions as schools, which have paid specialised staff to administer. A committee position filled by a volunteer may only be held for a year or temporarily. Any demands above simple volunteer and managerial tasks for the committee club will in turn burden the connectedness of community. A volunteer treasurer who can execute basic administration and business procedures is an asset, but in recent times are expected to be fully compliant in the massive changes to the business environment and cope with the GST. What we now need more than ever is simplification of the rules to encourage volunteers (women) to administer what should have been a relatively simple tax. This deterrent stifles the development of positive environments that foster leadership development at many levels.

3. Accessibility - 'Women in Sport'

Our country is facing a national obesity crisis amongst our children. Health departments acknowledge part of the solution lies in taking a 'whole of community' approach to promote being physical activity and healthy eating. There are well funded government programs in schools to encourage physical activities to children whom would not normally be active in sport. The anomaly for children, who already take advantage of physical endeavour down at their local community sport club, is federal legislation will tax children (directly or indirectly) for being active, outside of school hours, in paid sport lessons. Our nation's leaders constantly encourage our young people to take advantage of the many outlets for physical endeavour yet wilfully impose a tax for being active on these most vulnerable members of the community. The most disadvantage members of our community being disabled children with physical or mental impediments are being deliberately disadvantaged in a calculated manner for being active and interactive at their local community club. The GST isolates these government funded programs from the 'whole of community' approach.

In effect tax reform in 2000 has burdened 'sport in clubs' and is discriminating physical activity for the first time in our history as a nation. Our children are encumbered by a tax based on **where** an activity is done (or the **time** of day). Sport is GST free in schools (before 3pm); and taxed down at your local community club (after 3pm). The GST should not be based on the time of day, let alone location.

The community and the various Education Departments recognise that sport in schools is an important part of a child's education and as such is GST-free. A school being registered for GST is able to claim back input credits for GST on related expenses. Yet, children's sport in a structured learning environment outside of schools at a community youth club registered for GST has to **charge** GST on the child's activities. The community club's program is more likely to be more skill empowering than the school's curriculum.

Unfortunately, as it stands now with regards to GST registration, the lesser evil is for the smaller community club to remain 'not registered'. And clubs will purposely not increase enrolments so as to remain in the status quo. Clubs in this situation have found the GST in commercial rents to be the single biggest cost to be passed on with increased tuition fees to the children. The GST as applied to community clubs has become a major impediment in developing community based organised sports, when these clubs exist only to provide a positive environment for youth.

Many parents continue to reiterate the considerable burden that gymnastic (and other youth sport) tuition fees have on family budgets. In gymnastics these high fees relate to the high capital costs of specialised indoor equipment

which require a minimum building size to provide a well structured tuition environment. The parent's financial sacrifices, though par for the course of parenting, are becoming disproportionate and many families will now place the added burden of after school physical activity squarely back in the school domain. This will eventually transfer the cost burden back to education and community health providers.

Consistent with government endorsed principles to a healthier nation, youth sport must become GST free.

The GST has taxed children who are not yet income tax earners for being active in sport lessons. I estimate Australia's children are being disadvantaged in very broad terms at around *\$170 million dollars annually for being active (2,000,000 children x \$14 tax/term x 4 terms x 1.5 sports = \$170,000,000).

* This calculation has been extrapolated from an operating community club in Melbourne of around 750 children collectively being charged GST of \$42,000 year in their paid sport lessons. This estimate can be expanded in a more detailed survey and if warranted to amend this total to reflect a more succinct summary. Notwithstanding the precise detail, the magnitude of the final financial analysis and the burden to our youth is substantive.

Changes in our lifestyles and standards of living are placing greater pressure and stress on people's health. The demands on mental health have grown along with these changes. When the estimated \$170 million in GST revenue generated through the taxing of youth for being active in community clubs as outlined above, is compared against the estimated \$20 billion economic cost of just mental illnesses in our community, the relative offset offered by the application of the GST appears to be disproportional. Exact segmentation of costs would provide a more detailed analysis for comparison, but the multiplier effect on the related cost to the community is very significant compared to providing a more inclusive environment for children's organised sport.

National surveys show that childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes, and inactivity are growing as a community concern. This alone if allowed to continue will place greater financial demands on the National Health Budget and the nation as a whole. With increased participation in youth activities at the community level the flow on savings in just in Mental Health and General Health will exceed the \$170million the ATO will forgo annually. Here is a step towards reducing future Health and economic costs by simply reducing, by a relatively small amount in terms of total budget allocation, the cost for a child to participate in activities that develop leadership, regular exercise, healthy minds and a sense of community.

Summary - 'Women in Sport'

More than ever before, our society is calling for strong minds and bodies in our youth. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. The community is seeking a consistent playing field for our kid's education and health. Sport for kids in a structured learning environment **wherever performed** must given the same taxation treatment and privileges as the kids receive in school hours.

We have gone from not taxing grass roots community capacity building infrastructure being our community based clubs which are considered a fundamental necessity, to now taxing them through the application of the GST on these groups.

As a nation, we owe it to our children to have a sub category in tax legislation and not be placed in the same sport category as horse racing, dog racing, trophy fishing, motor sports, and shooting sports.

Junior sport lessons must be treated at least as a community capacity building activity by the ATO and must be GST free, no matter where performed.

Community participation should be fostered, especially as more and more activities are competing for the limited time available to us all. Australian youth will continue their slide into the sedentary life style of playing video games unless we provide an environment for a more favourable alternative.

Peter Cullen of Reclink, "There is a lot of funding to stop people from drowning, but not a lot to help them swim".

United Nations International Charter of Physical Education and Sport (1978), Article 2(2.1), "Physical education and sport, as an essential dimension of education and culture, must develop the abilities, will power and self-discipline of every human being as a fully integrated member of society....".