



SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN SENATE ENQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA

This submission into the Senate Enquiry into Women Sport and Recreation in Australia is made on behalf of Bowls Australia Inc.

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1. About Bowls Australia Inc.

- Bowls Australia is an incorporated national not for profit organisation with a vision to deliver an exceptional sport and community development experience that is appealing, entertaining and accessible to all Australians.
- Bowls Australia comprises a national staff of 13 with its national office located in Melbourne. There are state associations in each of the 8 State and Territory's and 2060 clubs Australia wide.
- In September 2005 Bowls Australia released the strategic plan for 2005 – 2008 entitled "The Next Step – Together". The strategic priorities are:
 - **Leadership and Management**
To deliver strong and effective advocacy and direction, through progressive leadership that fosters the national interest of bowls and the development of our people.
 - **Promote and Grow Bowls**
Refresh the image, brand and offerings of bowls to increase the contemporary appeal of the sport to mainstream Australia including new participants, supporters and the media.
 - **High Performance**
To foster and develop a high performance culture in bowls, which delivers the world's number one elite bowling nation by 2008.
 - **Commercial Development**
Generate new revenues to provide the platform to reinvest in the development, promotion and growth of bowls in Australia.

2. Membership Statistics

STA	2005/06		
	Male	Female	Total
ACT	1,569	826	2,395
QLD	34,344	18,087	52,431
SA	11,981	5,970	17,951
TAS	4,239	2,272	6,511
WA	13,224	7,195	20,419
NSW	65,683	29,757	95,440
NT	296	196	492
VIC	39,086	21,406	60,492
Totals	170,422	85,709	256,131

- Women make up 33% of the current 256,131 affiliated bowlers in Australia.
- 80% of current bowlers are aged 65 years plus.

3. Terms of Reference

a) The health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities

While there is no specific study undertaken, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that participation in the sport of lawn bowls promotes good health and prolongs life expectancy. The physiological health benefits include walking, lunging and moderate gentle exercise. For the older demographic bowler the social and mental health benefits gained from bowls are invaluable. Bowls Clubs provide a sense of community; a safe welcoming environment where the older population in particular can gain a sense of belonging. Often they help integrate people back into the community, such as those recovering from an illness or those who have lost a partner.

b) The accessibility of women not participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities.

Bowls is one of the few sports that females can play at all ages for an entire lifetime. The sport can be played at varying levels of competition, from social bowls to the elite level. One of the advantages of the sport is the accessibility it provides to the older generation with the vast majority of Bowls Clubs running social club competitions daily. The flip side of this is that while this caters for the older female demographic who are time rich, it is a barrier to younger (Under 65) women as the options for regular competition are limited to weekdays. Traditional female pennant competition is played during the week and on weekends by Men. Some states are initiating weekend competitions which will enable working Women to enjoy the game.

To date there are 85,709 affiliated female bowlers, comprising only 33% of the total bowls membership. There is no reason that this percentage should not and can not be equal to that of Men. In comparison to membership trends which are on a 20 year decline, participation levels are high with interest in bowls increasing from 8% to 15%ⁱ, however retention of these grassroots or triallist bowlers to Club Members is low.

Research conducted by Bowls Australia and Sweeney Sportsⁱⁱ found that some of the barriers to female participation are:

- Lack of promotion of the sport
- Strict rules and regulations
- Strict dress standards
- Restriction of playing times and options
- Changing role of leisure time, e.g. bowls is now competing with more activities such as bushwalking, tennis, yoga etc.

At the elite level, Bowls Australia's High Performance program is aimed at delivering gender equity with equal representation, recruitment and remuneration of male and female athletes. The opportunity for national and international competition is equal to both males and females and the financial viability of the High Performance program is heavily reliant on funding from the Australian Sports Commission. The Australian Bowls team recently recorded it's best ever result at the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games with a tally of 5 out of 6 medals. Our female athletes contributed a silver triples medal and a gold pairs medal. At the sub elite level there are concerns about pathways for younger female athletes. Ensuring viable junior programs exist is crucial to retaining youth in the sport.

c) The portrayal of women's sport in the media.

As a unified body Bowls Australia equally promotes the achievements of both men and women in the sport of bowls. Gender equity applies to prize money, tournament schedules, draw sizes and editorial content of all marketing material.

As a requirement by Bowls Australia, ABC televised Lawn bowls events feature both men and women athletes equally. However crowd attendance at these events will tend to lean towards viewing the men's games. This is due to lack of education by the general bowling public about the elite women's game which is at an equal viewing standard to that of the men's.

The media department of Bowls Australia will always provide story leads and angles on each member of the Australian Bowls Team, however there is still a bias towards male stories in the print media, such is the climate of Australian sporting culture.

d) Women in leadership roles in sport

Governance at the National and State levels of the sport is aimed at gender equity with equal representation of males and females on the Board and Council. This is not the case at the club level and the lack of female representation in governance at this level is of great concern to the sport. Administrators, Umpires, Coaches and leaders in general are dominated by males at the club level and this can be related to the low female membership. Females have an important role to play in decision making at the club level and it is crucial that the number of females in governance roles increases. Ensuring that clubs adopt best practices principles and promote gender equity will have a direct impact on the number of women participating in lawn bowls competitions.

4. Initiatives of Bowls Australia and the Australian Sports Commission.

"Building a Better Sport: Better Management Practices"

The Women and Sport Unit of the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) in conjunction with consultants, The Miller Group have developed an analysis framework to assist sports to develop more effective management practices.

Bowls Australia has agreed to partner with the ASC to pilot the implementation of the framework. The program will run over approximately 3 years with the main objectives to:

- Strengthen leadership and management capacity
- Better understand the needs of all stakeholders and develop products and deliver high quality services that meet those needs.
- Promote learning and information sharing across the whole of the sport.
- Sustain the improvements gained with regular monitoring and reviewing of performance
- Increase the involvement of women across all areas of the sport.

To date a Steering committee comprising bowlers, administrators, elite athletes, from club, state and national level has been formed. The committee has taken part in two workshops where the priority issues facing women in bowls have been identified and prioritised.

- Uniforms / Dress standards
- Membership packages i.e. flexible playing times
- Club Management
- Marketing

Practical solutions to these issues have been brainstormed and the change agenda is currently being drawn up.

5. Recommendations

In a society where male and female population is 50/50 there is a substantial amount of work to do to ensure that bowls membership is a true reflection of the current population. Given the nature of the lawn bowls there is no reason that females should not be represented equally in participation and governance. In order to address this issue the government needs to be active in promoting women in sport.

Recommendation 1:

That the Senate enquiry acknowledges the physical, social and mental health benefits gained by women playing bowls, in particular the older demographic. And consider bowls as a viable partner for health promotional programs.

Recommendation 2:

That the Australian Government place a funding emphasis on high participation sports, such as bowls. Ongoing funding is required to implement programs aimed at increasing female participation and female governance representation.

Recommendation 3:

That the senate enquiry acknowledges the lack of media exposure for women's bowls and women's sport in Australia and the importance of effective working relationships between media organisations and sports in providing a balance.

ⁱ National Sports Information Centre / Australian Sports Commission, Sweeney Sports 2005/06

ⁱⁱ Sweeney Sports "Building Participation in Lawn Bowls" Study No. 15025 January 2006