

Senate Committee – Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

Submission from The Australian Womensport & Recreation Association Inc (AWRA)

1. Introduction

AWRA is a volunteer not-for-profit organisation that was incorporated in 2005. As a national non-government organisation, its vision statement is:

“to provide leadership and advocacy for Australian women and girls in sport and active recreation”.

A membership brochure is included which explains more about the organisation.

As a relatively new national organization AWRA:

- Has completed its Strategic Plan 2006-2008
- Is working across three projects with service providers to develop its website, to develop two initial modules on leadership for women in sport (Responsibilities of Directors and Board Readiness) to go onto the website and has commenced a national survey on the needs and issues of girls and women in sport and recreation, to be completed 31 October 2006.

AWRA would be pleased to make the results of the national research survey available to the Senate Inquiry.

Before addressing the terms of reference, AWRA wishes to congratulate and thank the Senate Committee for this inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia. It comes at an opportune time, after the very successful Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games where our women outperformed the men, although they made up less than half the team, and after the World Conference on Women in Sport (May, Japan). While much has improved in Australia for girls and women in sport and recreation, there is still much more than needs to change before there is gender equity in the Australian sports industry.

AWRA further congratulates the Senate Committee for the wide scope of the terms of reference. However, because of the short lead time of this Inquiry and our limited human resources it is not possible for us to address all of the terms of reference.

To start with, AWRA wishes to highlight the international documents that Australia has signed in support of gender equality. These are:

- 1979, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

- 1994, the Brighton Declaration (UK)
- 1998, Windhoek Call for Action, (Namibia)
- 1995, Beijing Platform for Action
- 2002, Manchester Communiqué from the Manchester Commonwealth Games

Looking at the global context Australia still needs to follow-up it's signing of international documents and further progress its implementation of change and action within the sports industry. There needs to be systematic and effective implementation of these charters, which requires strong political will, resources and mechanisms for action and securing accountability.

Further, gender equality and the empowerment of women is a development goal in its own right and is essential for the achievement of other goals in all socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental areas. The positive links between gender equality and empowerment of women and effective and sustainable development are very clear. Women represent half the resources and half the potential of families, communities and nations. Progress for women is progress for all. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Anna, has said that "there was no development tool more effective than the empowerment of women".

Terms of Reference

1. Health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation:

- Reduction in cardiovascular disease – and recent research indicates that physical activity benefits women more than men in this regard
- Reduced risk of breast cancer
- Reduced risk of reproductive cancers
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Reduced risk of osteoporosis
- Reduced risk of diabetes
- Reduced risk of falls and fractures
- Lower body weight and adiposity
- Improved quality of breast milk
- Improved mental health, with improved learning efficiency and less risk of depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease

From a health perspective it is extremely important that Australian girls and women are encouraged and motivated to be physically active, whether this activity is in the context of organised sport or recreational activities, such as walking with for pleasure.

2. The accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organized sport, fitness and recreation activities, with additional reference to state and federal programs

It is expected that National Sporting Organisations (NSOs), the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), state bodies (government and non-government) will address many of these points.

AWRA will address the following:

2 (a) The number of women participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities would increase if there was parity with males in regard to state and federal money for sports facilities. All around Australia far more money is poured into major outdoor stadia to support the traditional sports of football (various codes) and cricket. As these stadia are used almost solely by men, where is the comparable funding of sports facilities used solely by women, or parity of access to the major stadia for female participation?

For example, in Melbourne the Docklands Stadium (for males only for Australian Rules football, rugby union, cricket) has been funded by the Victorian government, which has recently funded the redevelopment of the MCG (somewhere between \$300-400 million) supported by the Federal Government (\$90 million). Yet apart from the 1956 Olympics and 2006 Commonwealth Games and a few games of cricket and recently one women's soccer international, it is very unlikely that women will be seen participating on the MCG (a private club which admits to public responsibilities). Further, after the Commonwealth Games the Victorian Government announced a \$191 million project to develop another football stadium for Melbourne's professional soccer and rugby league teams – which are also private clubs.

Yet Melbourne's leading female netball, basketball, softball, hockey, soccer, volleyball, water polo, etc teams share lower standard facilities with other sports or male teams. For example the Victorian Netball Centre, a second rate facility, is the home venue of the Melbourne Tigers NBL team, an arrangement that is problematic at times,.

The above situation is repeated at the local government level with the same in-balance demonstrated in the sports and recreation capital expenditure and maintenance budgets of local councils. Historically, local government funding has gone into football and cricket ovals, with newer sports and women's sports down the ladder of need.

If a fraction of government sports facility money was dedicated to a variety of dispersed single sex female sport and recreation facilities it would be money well spent in encouraging and increasing female participation in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities. The equation between the provision of sports facilities and participation has always held true.

Moreover, AWRA would like to see the creation of a national resource centre for "Women in Sport and Recreation" to collect, organise and analyse data, to promote innovative practices in sport and provide training for coaches, officials and managers.

More needs to be done for indigenous, disabled, migrant and ethnic minority women, for them to find a place in sport. AWRA does not have the time or resources to document this further but research has indicated that these groups are the least represented in participation statistics.

It needs to be said again that to build stronger health and physical activity foundations in schools the place of physical education in the curriculum needs to be strengthened.

Australia could do with another Life Be In It campaign, to address our increasing sedentary lifestyle with its associated health issues – something similar to the highly successful Brazilian *Agita* program which has spread through the Americas (www.rafanapana.org and www.agitasp.com.br). This program is community based, targeting population segments such as workers, elderly, children, etc and has been highly successful in increasing the physical activity level of women of all ages. It is based on bringing about cultural and attitudinal change through increasing knowledge (health benefits)–leading to intervention – changes in behavior (more physical activity).

2 (d) The Office for Women and the ASC grant programs are most necessary and should be widened, increasing the total pool of money. In 2005 AWRA was a successful applicant of both these agencies, receiving \$5,500 from the ASC to develop web-based learning modules on women's sport leadership and \$25,000 from the OFW to develop a Strategic Plan, produce publications (which includes the membership brochure), develop its web site and conduct the national research survey.

It is recommended:

1. That the ASC should continue with its Sports Leadership Grants for Women with increased funding to \$1 million (now it averages \$2500 per person or organisation, totalling \$400,000).
2. ASC should increase its research into issues relating to women's sport (e.g. female athlete triad, pregnancy in sport, etc).
3. The Federal Government should give financial support to the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association, similar to the Canadian Governments \$350,000 annual support for CAAWS, the Canadian Association for the Advancement for Women in Sport. Similar comparisons occur in the UK (the Womensport Foundation), in France, Japan, Singapore, etc.
4. **The portrayal of women's sport in the media, including the role of the government to regulate and review the coverage of women's sport in the media (print, radio and electronic).**

This is an area of great anguish for the women in sport movement in Australia. At the recent World Conference on Women's Sport in Kumamoto, Japan, the delegates there were amazed to learn of the poor coverage of women's sport in Australia. This is a paradox for such a sport

loving country – that our women athletes do so well and “fight above their weight” compared to the little recognition and media coverage they receive.

If it is was not for the ABC with its coverage of the Women’s National Basketball League, the Commonwealth Bank Trophy (national netball league) and women’s bowls, plus some other special events at times, there would be virtually little to no free-to air television coverage of women’s sport.

Of equal concern is the takeover of television by professional male sports – all of the footballs, cricket and motor racing. With the virtual integration of media and professional male sports it is now in the interest of certain media groups to show the code they sponsor and so on. Not only is women’s sport not getting covered but there is very little diversity of sport on television and almost no amateur sport, male or female. This situation is reflected in radio and print media.

AWRA would like to replicate the national research that was conducted in 1992 (Stoddart), 1996 (Phillips) and 1997 (WSA – Janine Mitkosza), so that methodology and results are comparable, on the media coverage (print, radio and electronic) of women’s sport. There has not been any recent research but anecdotal evidence is that print media (maybe 4-10% depending on the capital city) may be about the same but that radio and electronic is only about 1%. In other words 99% of what Australian audiences see and hear is male sport. And in the print media there is still more coverage given to motor racing, horses and greyhounds.

The recent sacking of Anne Sargeant by the ABC, in order to introduce a more contemporary look to its netball coverage smacks of ageism. One can imagine the uproar if Channel 9 had dumped Richie Benaud at any time over the past 30 years, based on him getting older. Nicole Livingstone (Channel 9) who is excellent in her sport of swimming, Michele Timms (basketball) and Anne Sargeant who is outstanding in her sport, are a few of the better known female sports presenters. But why so few?

AWRA recommends that:

- 1 Further to the above, for the ASC or the Office for Women to support current data collection relevant to media coverage of women’s sport.
2. ASC or other federal agency to support the development and production of a quality half hour national television program on women’s sport and recreation.

(Postscript to point 2: It was noted that while in Germany for the World Cup it was pleasing to see on German television, at popular viewing times, various 5-10 minute exercise sessions for mature and older people. This type of segment could be part of a national television program).

3. The Australian Communications and Media Authority should have regulatory power to direct the broadcasting media to have a mandatory amount of coverage of women’s sport, similar to the 20% stipulation that drama content on television is Australian. Such a standard should

be capable of clear understanding, implementation and monitoring by ACMA.

4. Women in leadership roles in sport

The under representation of women in leadership positions in sport is a perennial issue, along with the poor media coverage of women's sport.

Please refer to the attached AWRA media release which examines the results and team management for the Australian 2006 Commonwealth Games team. This demonstrates the under-representation of women in senior executive positions, in management, particularly coaching, as officials and in sports medicine.

Whilst special measure programs are a legitimate means of empowering and providing skills to women it does not address the systemic impediments that women continue to face. These special measure programs also result in heightened expectations by women that they will have increased access to leadership positions as a result of participating in the programs.

These programs also have an underlying assumption that somehow women are deficit in their skills and attributes and they require 'training' before they can assume leadership positions. This assumption needs to be reconsidered as it reinforces a 'victim' mentality where the onus is on women to solve the issues facing women. It also assumes that men have the requisite skills that women do not.

The crux of the issue for women's representation is that the sport system itself needs to be influenced to increase the participation of women. To do this, the traditional male structures of sport need to be the focus of change for women. A new paradigm of attacking the issues facing women is required.

Generally change can be brought about in two ways, policy/legislation or influence. Both methods have their pros and cons and need to be carefully considered.

In respect to policy, one example is that of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which mandated that International Federations affiliated to the IOC must have at least 10% of Board members are women by 2000 and 20% by 2004. There is no penalty to those countries that fail to meet these targets but overall this policy has had some success as the majority of member countries have reacted positively to the targets. However, it should be noted that the IOC has failed to meet its own targets with only 13 women out of a current 113 members.

Maybe if the IOC had a better gender balance the decision last year to drop softball from the Olympic sports program would not have happened? Globally 6.5 million females compete in softball.

Some State Government's have now mandated that Government Boards must be 50% male/female. One National Sporting Organisation as a result of an amalgamation, have constituted that of the 8 Board members at least 3 must be of one gender and that the position of President and Vice President must be of separate genders. This is a good example of equity in leadership and it is hoped that these constitutions are permeating to state level organisations and are being adopted.

If policy or legislation is not the chosen method for behavioural change then the change is likely to be a lot slower. Change will require the good will of the organisation and that decision currently rests with predominately male dominated organisations and their members.

One defence for the slowness of change is that there are not sufficient women to undertake the board, committee and coaching positions even when they are on offer. This argument often places the responsibility back on women rather than the system and can often generate another batch of 'leadership programs for women' thus starting the vicious 'victim' cycle again. Organisations should be actively encouraged to succession plan for all its members, male and female, and embark on programs and initiatives that would promote succession planning. Organisations considering change should also acknowledge that having one woman sit on a predominately male board is quite intimidating as would most men feel somewhat out of place on an all female board.

The Montreal Tool Kit (which came out of the 2002 World Conference for Women in Sport in Montreal, Canada) has excellent materials for adoption by sporting organisations, such as a document on 'Strategies for Making your Sports Organisation More Equitable'. The wheel does not need to be reinvented and this and other very suitable documentation is available through the Montreal Tool Kit at www.iwg-gti.org

There are a number of possible options that the sport and recreation sector can embrace to improve the role and involvement of women in sport leadership. Some of the options for consideration could include:

1. Government departments consider making it a requirement that sporting organisations that receive government funding must have 10 or 20% of board members as women by 2007 and that this percentage gradually increase over the next 10 years.
2. Sporting organisations that meet a self-imposed system of increasing the representation of women on boards receive incentive or bonus funding from government departments.
3. Follow the example of France, where an agreement was reached between the Ministry of Sport and sports federations to incorporate more women into leadership roles with proportionality between the number of registered female athletes and the number of women holding leadership positions.
4. Constitutions of sporting organisations be amended to enshrine the rights and representations of their members, male and female, to

ensure the ongoing systemic change to the expectation and culture of organisations.

5. Provide succession training for potential or new board members on the provision that organisations must nominate both men and women in order to participate.
6. Organisations to structure and conduct meetings to be more “women friendly” in terms of when they are held and how long they run.
7. Provide assistant coaching positions to women for all the male institute/academy programs coached by men so that more women will become eligible for paid positions in the future.
8. Undertake a media campaign that aims to change the stereotype of women coaches as soft or more “touchy feely” particularly aimed at athletes that still believe men coaches to be tougher, stronger and more results orientated.
9. Moreover, introduce a national female coaching scheme, like the Coaching Association of Canada, where a trial campaign in hockey, softball and soccer in eight communities across the country is recruiting, training and working to retain women coaches.
10. Sporting organisations to target or talent ID potential women coaches/officials and negotiate a development program that is realistic and achievable.
11. Adapt France’s award schemes to promote the image and role of women in sports and physical activities, as well as female access to leadership responsibilities: in 2005 there were four prize categories for the National Award for Women and Sport, awarding 5-10,000 euros to the winners and there were 24 regional awards with 275,000 euros distributed to 188 winners. It should be noted that the Prime Minister Women in Sport Awards in the early 1990’s were very successful but were cancelled by the Howard Government.

Increasing the participation of women in all facets of sport and recreation benefits the organisation, the community and the individual. This responsibility rests with the industry as a whole and is not just the responsibility of women or women’s units. Systemic change and action is required.

Further Recommendations:

1. Australian Sports Commission (ASC) to link gender equity outcomes to its funding of National Sporting Associations. Nothing much will change until this occurs as impetus needs to be from the top down as well as from the grass–roots.
2. ASC to continue with its Sports Leadership Grants for Women with increased funding to \$1 million (now it averages \$2500 per person or organisation, totalling \$400,000 which is too low for real outcomes at the organizational level).
3. Similar to France’s national resource centre “Sports Practices for Women and Families”, the development of a national resource centre

for Women and Sports to collect, organize and analyze data, to promote innovative practices in sports and to provide training for coaches, officials and management.

It is strongly recommended that at the conclusion of this Senate Inquiry that a national task force is established with terms of reference and resources to implement solutions and bring about change to increase female participation in the sports industry.