

31 May 2013

Stephen Palethorpe
Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
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Dear Mr Palethorpe

The Council of Heads of Exercise, Sport and Movement Sciences (CHESMS) thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the practice of sports science in Australia, conducted through the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee.

What is CHESMS?

CHESMS is an association formed in 2012 with membership available to all Australian Universities within which there is a department/school/discipline/faculty that provides degree programs in exercise, sport and movement sciences. The incorporation followed less formal, annual meetings of heads held since 2006. There are currently 26 members nationally across states/territories and university clusters. The mission of CHESMS is to promote exercise, sport and movement sciences as areas of higher education study and research for the benefit of the Australian community.

CHESMS has collaborative relationships with a number of national organisations, in particular, Exercise & Sport Science Australia (ESSA) who provide accreditation for Exercise and Sports Science and Clinical Exercise Physiology programs for those university programs and practitioners who seek it.

CHESMS would like to comment on the following Terms of Reference:

- (a) the current scope of practice, accreditation and regulation arrangements for the profession
- (c) the duty of care of sports scientists to athletes, and the ethical obligations of sports scientists in relation to protecting and promoting the spirit of sport;
- (d) avenues for reform or enhanced regulation of the profession.

TOR (a) the current scope of practice, accreditation and regulation arrangements for the profession

Scope of practice

CHESMS supports ESSA's scope of practice (www.essa.org.au) for sports scientists:

Sports scientists are 3 or 4 year university trained exercise and sports science / human movement studies graduates. They specialise in helping an individual athlete or team to improve their sporting performance through the uses of scientific knowledge, methods and applications in the area of physiology, biomechanics, psychology, motor control and motor development. They evaluate research, assess and advise on the technical and practical aspects of training, injury prevention, technique analysis, and nutrition, optimisation of performance, and recovery practices in all areas and levels of sport.

The scope of practice of a sports scientist needs to be diverse to allow these individuals to work in many and varied roles. These include but are not limited to: programming and monitoring training (including strength and conditioning); performance/movement analysis; monitoring recovery; rehabilitation; and a conduit between sports doctors, sports dietitians, sports physiotherapists, sports psychologists and coaches. It is important to recognise these other disciplines as their scopes of practice and professional accreditations (e.g., Sports Dietitians Australia; Australian Psychological Society College of Sports and Exercise Psychologists) are separate to that of a sports scientist.

In the context of changing patterns in Australian's physical activity participation, it is pertinent to consider the definition of "sport". The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines sport as follows:

An activity involving physical exertion, skill and/or hand-eye coordination as the primary focus of the activity, with elements of competition where rules and patterns of behaviour governing the activity exist formally through organisations (ABS, 2008, p. 8).

How "sport" differs from "exercise" is pertinent to this discussion as frequently the three or four year university programs are offered as the study of "exercise and sport science".

Exercise is in fact a sub-category of physical activity and has been defined by Corbin and Dowell (1980) as "any planned, structured and repetitive bodily movement performed to improve or maintain one or more components of physical fitness" (ABS, 2008, p. 6).

How the Inquiry makes sense of these definitions is important. The CSIRO review of "*The future of Australian sport*" (Hajkowicz et al., 2013) paints a picture of the decline of traditional sports and the rise and codification of a range of new forms of physical recreation and exercise. Thus, sports scientists' practice and the boundaries between "sport" and "exercise" become relevant when considering the scope of regulatory processes.

CHESMS further suggests the Inquiry seeks to ascertain how many “sports scientists” there are in Australia and their pattern of employment now and into the future. We understand that there is unreliable data on the scope of this field of practice, data that we believe are necessary in order to make recommendations that are commensurate with the scale and nature of practice.

Accreditation

There is a robust and reliable accreditation scheme for sports scientists administered by ESSA and this has been in place since the mid-1990s. Application details can be found at:

<http://www.essa.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013-Sports-Science-Accreditation-Application-Form-2.pdf>

ESSA has established an accreditation assessment committee to oversee this process and they provide the following guidance note regarding the process:

Accredited sports scientists are qualified specialists who are associated with:

- *the provision of sports science services to athletes;*
- *the training of potential sports scientists; and/or*
- *the conduct of research relating to sport.*

Within the domain of sports science lie the sub fields of biomechanics, physiology, skill acquisition, and strength science.

CHESMS supports the role of ESSA in accrediting these areas to ensure that appropriate standards of technical and ethical conduct are met and maintained by all those in practice. We note and support “strength science” being an area of study and practice within ESSA’s sports scientists’ scope of practice and accreditation but that the Inquiry seek clarification in terms of ESSA’s expectations and another organisation with interests in this area, the Australian Strength and Conditioning Association. ESSA advises that:

The applicant must hold exercise science/full membership of ESSA, and then satisfy the specific requirements detailed for sports scientist accreditation.

We understand, however, that there is scant uptake of this accreditation among sports scientists in Australia, since there is no legislative or other requirement for professionals in this area to do so.

Regulation arrangements for sports scientists

CHESMS acknowledges and supports the regulation arrangements by ESSA that are currently in place for Accredited Sports Scientists. These arrangements include:

- ESSA Code of Professional Conduct and Ethical Practice
- ESSA Return to Practice Policy
- Social Media Policy
- ESSA Complaints Procedure

Details of these provisions may be found at:

<http://www.essa.org.au/about-us/professional-standards/>

CHESMS suggests that the Inquiry consider the protection of the title “Sports scientist” and/or “Exercise and sports scientist” through legislation to prevent misuse in Australia and facilitate legal recourse in cases where people use the title without the right or adequate training/experience.

TOR (c) the duty of care of sports scientists to athletes, and the ethical obligations of sports scientists in relation to protecting and promoting the spirit of sport

As indicated above, CHESMS supports the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethical Practice (August, 2011) outlined by ESSA intended to:

Unify the practices of Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA) members, to provide guidelines for ESSA members, and to formalise a set of guidelines, which inform the Australian public of the professional standards of ESSA members.

This Code is appropriately embedded in the criteria that need to be satisfied by applicants for accreditation as a sports scientist through ESSA.

TOR (d) avenues for reform or enhanced regulation of the profession

An accredited system such that which is currently available through ESSA must be valued by sports science practitioners, and those who employ staff. CHESMS encourages the Inquiry to recognise the ESSA Accredited Sports Science process and seek ways that it can be promoted as a requirement for professional practice and more widely recognised by employers. ESSA’s independent, national status provides a framework for shaping standardised professional practice and is more appropriately placed to provide this than self-regulation by individual sporting codes. In seeking to establish the “buy in” of stakeholders (e.g., universities, sporting organisations, sports scientists), ESSA should be encouraged to work cooperatively with them to ensure an efficient and robust process that meet the needs of industries, practitioners and athletes.

With a more regulated and defined scope of practice for the sports scientist by an independent body, it would then be prudent to expect the Boards and management teams within sporting organisations to have a better understanding of the role description and the essential qualifications of a sports scientist prior to employing such staff. The current undefined ‘space’ in which a sports scientist operates is difficult for any organisation to manage given that the individual is usually working independently of any code of practice, ethical guidelines or requirements for continuing professional development.

A representative from CHESMS would be available to attend the Inquiry to speak to issues relating to the university sector if required.

Yours sincerely

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References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008). Defining sport and physical activity, a conceptual model. Retrieved from [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/5527537D36688787CA257508000F39D1/\\$File/4149055001_2008.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/5527537D36688787CA257508000F39D1/$File/4149055001_2008.pdf)
- Hajkowicz, S., Wilhelmseder, L., Boughen, N., Littleboy, A., Hemana, C. & Fairweather, P. (2013). *The future of Australian Sport*. CSIRO: Australia.