

From: Colin Tatz
Date: 4 October 2012 9:18:40 AM
To: atsia@reps.gov.au
Subject: Formal submission

Dear Anna Dacre,

Please accept this as a formal submission to your inquiry.

The Contribution of Sport to Aboriginal and Islander Wellbeing

1. Please note that I have made submissions to previous inquiries on this subject, notably to the Senate Community Affairs Committee in November 2009 and to the Select Committee on Suicide in the Northern Territory in September 2011. In the former case, there were some six references to my submission in the final report; in the latter, several pages were devoted to my research on how sport definitely influences levels of juvenile delinquency and in all likelihood is protective against suicide and parasuicide.

2. Attached below is the online reference my article "Aborigines, Sport and Suicide" which appeared in the international journal, *Sport in Society*, published by Taylor and Francis

in Britain in October 2012. This is a special edition of the journal, devoted to sport and racial matters in Australia. The journal appears under a 2012 dateline, and a book containing the identical material will be published by Routledge in 2013.

3. This article should be read in its entirety. The significant points can be summarised briefly here, but they need the fuller context of the essay.

(i) Given the quite false assumption that suicide is solely a "mental health problem" and therefore in the sole domain of the psychiatry, psychology and medicine, these healing professions have totally disregarded sport as having anything to do with suicidal behaviour.

(ii) In my book *Aboriginal Suicide is Different: A Portrait of Life and Self-Destruction*,

revised in 2005, I criticised this popular but erroneous biomedical vision which locates illness (and suicide) as residing solely within the patient/victim and which ignores all socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors (and causes). In the past two or three years some biomedical people have come round to recognising these so-called "external factors".

(iii) The article below cites eight American studies which show quite plainly that sport has an ameliorating effect on potential suicides. It also reports the New Zealand experience and the work of two eminent Australians, Brian McCoy and David Denborough. McCoy has an article in the special *Sport in Society* journal.

(iv) My 1990s research on *Aborigines: Sport, Violence and Survival*, showed quite plainly that activity in sport either stops, and mostly ameliorates,

juvenile delinquency. That research covered some 80 communities across Australia. I contend that sport has the capacity to alleviate and deflect (not stop) suicidal behaviour and I have pleaded, so far in vain, for a systematic study of sport and suicide, especially in the Northern Territory where the Australian Sports Commission has launched some five major sporting projects. It is neither expensive nor labour intensive to measure suicidal behaviour where sports participation is high as opposed to where it is absent. Perhaps if it was a hugely costly exercise it might get off the ground. The formula is simple, as in the delinquency study: in season, delinquency rates drop to a level of acceptance; out of season, the prevalence of delinquent behaviour is off the charts. There are a number of events and places where suicidal behaviour can be measured against sporting activity: the Yuendumu Games, the Barunga Games, Rules football at Nguuiu (Bathurst Island), the NSW Rugby League Knockout finals (which vary from town to town), the football season at Cherbourg and Woorabinda.

(v) One important caveat: sport must **not** to be seen as confined to actual playing. Those who haven't the ability to play can be involved in any number of ways: becoming scorers, umpires, organisers, managers, fund-raisers, rosette makers and the like.

(vi) Sport, uniquely, enables people to belong, to develop a sense of loyalty and community, to have a purpose. Above all, sporting competition is about **anticipation**: the next match, the next season. It is a future-oriented activity — whereas suicide resides in the immediate past and the very immediate present.

I am willing to appear before the Committee to discuss some of these issues. Please let me know that you receive this and that the link to the article allows you full access to it.

Good wishes,

Colin Tatz

Professor Colin Tatz AO,