



5 July 2023

Senator Janet Rice
Chair
References Committee
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
via email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Inquiry into concussions and repeated head trauma in contact sports

Thank you for your letter of 28 June 2023 in which you seek further information on the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) decision in 2004 to rescind its 1994 *Head and Neck Injuries in Football: Guidelines for Prevention and Management* (the football guidelines) and reasons why they were not updated.

From the records available, we have ascertained that, as part of a large-scale review of its publications, NHMRC identified a number of guidelines and other documents with the intent of establishing whether or not they were still current, based on their age. This project was overseen by NHMRC's Health Advisory Committee (HAC).

The process was also informed by public consultation, which invited members of the public to comment on:

- the strengths and weakness of the existing publications
- issues that had emerged since the publication of the documents
- any other issues thought relevant to the review.

The public consultation, which included the football guidelines in a tranche of 20 documents, opened in March 2003 and closed on 23 May 2003. The 2003 NHMRC Annual Report records that a total of 44 submissions were received.

At the conclusion of this review, the HAC made the following recommendations:

1. "The research base for, and recommendations and guidelines in, Football injuries of the head and neck are no longer current.
2. "While football injuries of the head and neck are not strictly a HAC priority issue, they do constitute a significant percentage of injuries that result in hospital admission and emergency department presentations (as well as death and permanent and severe disability). Further, should awareness of such injuries demotivate people (especially young people) to play football, this could directly impact on all national health priority areas and on other areas such as obesity."



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HAC also noted that implementation of the recommendations had been variable and that the research indicated new directions for preventing injury.

However, HAC did not recommend that the football guidelines should be updated and in its advice to NHMRC Council it identified the Australian Sports Commission as the appropriate agency to which documents should be referred.

At its 154th session held on 16 and 17 September 2004, NHMRC Council considered the tranche of 20 documents for rescission.

Advice was provided to Council to rescind the football guidelines and the companion 1994 *Head and Neck Injuries: Guidelines for Prevention and Management (included concussion notes for referees, umpires and coaches)*.

NHMRC Council accepted HAC's recommendation to rescind. Following this decision, a 'rescinded' watermark was applied to the football guidelines which remained on the NHMRC website for reference purposes.

As you would appreciate, there is an enormous number of areas for which guidelines could be developed and NHMRC must prioritise its limited resources carefully. I am unaware of any calls to update NHMRC's football guidelines since they were rescinded in 2004, until very recently. Further, the Australian Institute of Sport has since developed guidance for medical practitioners, athletes, coaches, parents and others on the assessment and management of concussion in sport.¹

Yours sincerely,

Professor Anne Kelso AO
Chief Executive Officer

¹ <https://www.concussioninsport.gov.au/>