

Participation in sport for Indigenous Australians

- 3.1 Many people in Australia participate in less physical activity than is considered necessary for ongoing health and wellbeing. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicate the incidence of inactivity is considerably greater among Australia's Indigenous population.¹
- 3.2 As stated in chapter 1, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2008 survey found that 'only 30.1 percent of those aged 15 years and over had participated in sport and physical activities during the 12 months prior to interview. The participation rate for males was 37.7 percent and for females 23.3 percent.'²
- 3.3 During the inquiry the Committee examined the differences in Indigenous participation rates across a broad range of sporting codes and organisations. In addition the Committee considered the barriers to participation and what various sporting bodies were doing to promote Indigenous participation.
- 3.4 The Committee focussed on the topic of women in sport as Indigenous female participation rates in sport were even lower than Indigenous male participation rates in sport. The Committee was interested to find out what programs or sports were successfully engaging Indigenous girls and women.

1 DRALGAS, *Submission 51*, p. 4.

2 DRALGAS, *Submission 51*, p. 6.

Participation rates and barriers

- 3.5 Evidence was received from a broad spectrum of sporting codes and organisations across Australia from the well-known Australian Football League (AFL), National Rugby League (NRL), cricket, netball and hockey through to sporting organisations such as tennis, swimming, surfing and mountain bike riding.³ A majority of sporting organisations that lodged submissions to the inquiry operated targeted Indigenous sports programs.
- 3.6 During the inquiry the Committee attempted to determine the participation rates for Indigenous Australians in each of the sporting codes. It became clear that only a handful of the sporting codes could provide this information to the Committee.
- 3.7 The Australian Rugby League Commission (ARLC) had a thorough break down of statistics demonstrating numerous positions for Indigenous participation in rugby league across Australia.
- 3.8 The Rugby League National Census 2011 identified Indigenous Australians in various roles across the game, including:
- 3.39 percent of committee members at registered clubs
 - ⇒ 5.8 percent of all registered Rugby League players in Australia (aged 4-19+)
 - ⇒ 8 830 males 532 females
 - 8 percent of National Toyota Cup players
 - 12 percent of NRL players
 - 21 percent of State of Origin players, and
 - 35 percent of the Australian National Team.⁴
- 3.9 The Northern Cowboys, a community owned club, commented that it worked closely with its high Indigenous population in the community.
- While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up some 11.9 per cent of the total population in our catchment, some 13.5 per cent of our player group identifies as Indigenous Australian. In addition, 11.1 per cent of our full-time administration and coaching staff identify as Indigenous. Four out of five of our Indigenous staff are female.⁵

3 A complete list of submissions authorised by the Committee can be accessed at: <www.aph.gov.au/sport>

4 ARLC, *Submission 16*, p. 6.

5 F Pelling, North Queensland Cowboys, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 3.

- 3.10 The Brisbane Broncos commented that they 'have a long and proud association with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than 15 percent of our organization is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage.'⁶
- 3.11 The AFL in its submission stated that Indigenous Australians represent:
- 6 percent of all participants
 - 10 percent of AFL lists, and
 - 3 percent of employees.⁷
- 3.12 In 2008 the AFL developed an Indigenous Framework to outline its philosophy, practice and programs with respect to development in Indigenous communities. The submission stated that 'the underpinning principle of this framework is partnership. The contribution and guidance of key Indigenous staff in leading our program development has been key to the AFL's success.'⁸
- 3.13 A very significant finding from the AFL demonstrated the importance of employing Indigenous staff to increase Indigenous participation rates:
- The AFL's Indigenous employment strategy has demonstrated the importance of employing Indigenous staff in increasing Indigenous participation. Since 2008 the number of Indigenous people in the industry has grown from less than 10 to over 80, equally our participation has grown from 29,000 in 2007 to 41,000 in 2012. Dedicated Indigenous sporting programs delivered by local Indigenous staff are key to ensuring Indigenous people have equal access to our game.⁹
- 3.14 Hockey Australia discussed the Remote and Indigenous Communities Hockey Program (RIHP HOCKEY) highlighting its Indigenous participation targets for 2012. These targets included:
- delivering across nearly 1 million sq.km , 5 regional programs and 48 communities
 - touching over 3000 participants
 - accreditation and Training of over 150 coaches and umpires
 - supporting 5 regional competitions - 400 participants - talent and mainstream pathways.¹⁰

6 Brisbane Broncos, *Submission 3*, p. 4.

7 AFL, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

8 AFL, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

9 AFL, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

10 Hockey Queensland Inc., *Submission 33*, p. 7.

- 3.15 Softball Northern Territory commented in its submission 'it attracts over 1 700 participants to the Territory's Shire Softball competitions.'¹¹ While it does not have specific figures for Indigenous participation, Softball Australia hosts competitions that aim to increase participation levels of Indigenous women and children living in remote communities by way of a structured and regular sporting activity. Softball Northern Territory stated:
- Participating teams play a round-robin home-and-away format over a 10-15 week period. This format promotes wider community involvement and enhances inter-community relationships. Softball Northern Territory, through the delivery of coaching and officiating training courses, has increased the capacity of participating Shires to host a sustainable competition.¹²
- 3.16 Cricket Australia informed the Committee that figures for 2011-12 demonstrate that cricket is Australia's number one participation sport, with more than 880 000 Australians playing cricket.¹³ However, in terms of Indigenous participation in cricket, Cricket Australia commented that more work was required in this area:
- Further investigation of junior participation amongst Indigenous Australians uncovers only 5% of boys and 1% of girls aged 4-14 played cricket which is why we want to invest more in this area.¹⁴
- 3.17 Tennis Australia told the Committee they do not currently collect data on Indigenous participation. However they suggested in a year or so they should be able to collect that data using its new database system called My Tennis.¹⁵
- 3.18 Tennis Australia informed the Committee that in partnership with the Evonne Goolagong Foundation they have been delivering the Learn Earn Legend Program across the states to 1 100 boys and girls at different locations around the country.¹⁶
- 3.19 Netball is ranked as the leading women's participation team sport and the top team based sport in Australia for 15 to 24 year olds. Over 1.2 million participants enjoy the game nationally and Australia has been dominant on the international stage since 1963. Netball Australia has more than 330 000 registered members; 5 000 clubs nationally; 570 Associations; and

11 Softball Australia, *Submission 12*, p. 5.

12 Softball Australia, *Submission 12*, p. 5.

13 Cricket Australia, *Submission 35*, p. 3.

14 Cricket Australia, *Submission 35*, p. 5.

15 B Tierney, Tennis Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 31.

16 T Browne, Tennis Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 26.

eight member organisations.¹⁷ Netball Australia had participation statistics for all women however they did not have data for Indigenous specific participation.

- 3.20 In its submission the Government of South Australia raised the issue of limited capacity within the sports industry:

It is important to note that the capacity of the sport industry is limited. It is largely volunteer run and there are often expectations that because one sport has the funding to assist, other sports will have the same capacity. Most sports at a state level do not have specific funding for Indigenous participation.¹⁸

Documenting the impact of sport participation

- 3.21 The national research and data collection is very limited in relation to the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing. In addition there is a lack of general statistics demonstrating Indigenous participation levels in sport and physical activity across all age groups.

- 3.22 Several witnesses called for improved data collection and research in the area of Indigenous participation in sport. Some witnesses called for improved data collection from sporting codes whilst others suggested research should be undertaken to assess the benefits that sport and sporting events have on the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians.

- 3.23 Some of the limited data from the ABS includes the following statistics for Indigenous Australians aged between four and 14 years old that have participated in organised sport in the past 12 months:

Based on 2008 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in Australia, for Aboriginal children and young people aged four to 14 year, almost half (47%) had played organised sport in the last 12 months. Of these children and young people 51 per cent were boys and 43 per cent were girls. Aboriginal girls and boys four to eight years of age had lower participation rates (30% and 34% respectively) than Aboriginal girls and boys aged nine to 11 years (57% and 63% respectively), and 12 to 14 year olds (51% and 69% respectively).

For Aboriginal boys aged four to 14 years, the three most popular sports were Australian rules football (17%), rugby league (16%) and outdoor soccer (10.5%). For Aboriginal girls aged four to 14

17 Netball Australia, *Submission 28*, p. 3.

18 Government of South Australia, *Submission 41*, p. 3.

years, the most popular sport was netball (13%) followed by swimming (7%) and basketball (7%).¹⁹

- 3.24 Professor Colin Tatz advocated for research to be done on the linkages on delinquency and self-harm rates between Indigenous communities that have organised sport and seasonal sporting events against those communities who do not. At a public hearing he elaborated on this idea emphasising that it would not be a difficult or costly to conduct:

It is not a difficult exercise, and it is not a costly exercise, to set up a monitoring research project alongside Aboriginal communities where there is heavy sporting activity as measured against a few Aboriginal communities where there is no sporting activity. So you can measure three things: a community with sport; a community without sport; and then, in turn, you measure – and as I said it is not a difficult exercise – the suicide rates, the delinquency rates, and the assault and physical harm rates in a community when the competition is on and when the competition is off. I think you will find, as I found with my study of Aboriginal delinquency and the impact of sport on that in the 1990s, that it is not rocket science to work out and find factually that where there is sport, and heavy sport activity, the rates of delinquency and harm et cetera go down, and when the season is off the rates skyrocket.²⁰

- 3.25 Mr Anthony Bowd from vicsport commented that there was not a lot of research publically available that has been completed on the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing. He noted:

There is some research that has been done on the benefits that sport can have on delinquency, but there really is a shortage of research on the benefits of sport.²¹

- 3.26 A majority of submissions agreed that there would be many benefits for increasing Indigenous participation in sport. However, an important aspect of such an aspiration is to be able to analyse current participation levels across a wide variety of sports in order to be accurately able to assess increased participation rates following targeted Indigenous sports programs. The following quote emphasised this point:

Without reliable information about who is playing what sports in Australia – and why those sports are or are not attracting Indigenous or CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse]

19 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

20 C Tatz, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 2.

21 A Bowd, vicsport, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 8.

participants – it is difficult to determine what specific programs need to be developed to increase the participation rates of different groups. Sporting organisations need to make this data collection a priority.²²

- 3.27 Some witnesses referred to the need for better evaluations of programs that link sport with other outcomes. For example, Professor Bill Fogarty saw a need for better evaluations of programs which link youth to sport and education, particularly in remote communities:

It is not enough to say that we think sport is doing great things; we need to know in real terms where best to spend our efforts.²³

- 3.28 Professor Mick Dodson told the Committee he was seeking an Australian Research Council grant to carry out research on why cricket was played in some remote Indigenous communities before the second world war and then disappeared and did not come back:

Our preliminary investigations show that there is a dearth of research, a dearth of material. It is really hard to find stuff. You look back in some of these remote areas to the twenties and thirties when cricket proliferated in these remote communities. Around the war it disappeared and did not come back. Why was that? What happened? I am not singling out cricket particularly but why did it vanish from the scene? We need to know the answer to those sorts of questions and research can deliver, I think, potentially some of the answers.²⁴

- 3.29 The Committee heard that not only is there a lack of information on the participation of Indigenous Australians in sport but more specifically there is a dearth of research on the participation of Indigenous girls and women in sport. Professor Bill Fogarty made this point at a public hearing:

We need to look at the models that are actually working. What is it about Deadly Sisters that is working? What are the things that you think could be working better? How applicable are they to other codes and other areas? The final really big thing is around the grassroots capacity. What are the models that are working really well? Again, what are the parts that are adaptable and what are the parts that are not adaptable? Clontarf is a fantastic thing and it has become the catch-all phrase of a great model, but does it work

22 Dr Adair and Dr Stronach, *Submission 29*, p. 3.

23 B Fogarty, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 3.

24 M Dodson, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 3.

in other codes? We do not know. How well is it really working for girls and women? We do not know.²⁵

- 3.30 In contrast with the discussion on the limited research that has been conducted in Australia, the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) pointed out in its submission that in the international sphere the benefits of sport on education, health and youth development have been recognised and used for many years:

The links between sport, positive education and health outcomes and child and youth development are well documented. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) first recognized sport as a tool for education and incorporated it into its program in 1952 and more recently sport is being used as a tool across all Millennium Development Goals (Right to Play, 2008).²⁶

Committee comment

- 3.31 The Committee believes there is value to be gained from sporting codes and organisations collecting data on Indigenous participation. Whilst a few of the larger sporting organisations had collected statistics on Indigenous participation, many of the witnesses who spoke with the Committee thought it would be beneficial for their organisation to collect data on Indigenous participation.
- 3.32 The Committee suggests that data collection of Indigenous participation should be incorporated into a registration or enrolment form. The Committee acknowledges that many sporting groups are locally based or state run and therefore are dependent upon volunteers to run the club. However the Committee urges all sporting groups to gather this information where possible to assist with national data collection for Indigenous participation in sport.
- 3.33 Recommendation 2 in chapter 2, aims to provide the Commonwealth Government with comprehensive data to evaluate outcomes of Indigenous sport programs. Data would include statistics collected by sporting bodies.
- 3.34 The Committee recommends that a comprehensive project be undertaken to measure the impact of Indigenous participation in sport and cultural activities across age and gender. The Committee understands that some of the outcomes from participation in sport cannot be easily measured, such as improved welling or capacity building within the community.

25 B Fogarty, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 25.

26 NASCA, *Submission 38*, p. 1.

However, given the amount of Commonwealth money being spent in this area, the Committee believes that further research and documentation of outcomes would benefit policy makers, sporting bodies and Indigenous communities. The Committee noted the importance of funding being equitably distributed across Australia.

Recommendation 6 - Research the impact of sport

- 3.35 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government conduct a comprehensive project to measure and compare the range of outcomes across gender and age from Indigenous participation in sport and cultural activities.**

Barriers to participation

- 3.36 The Committee examined the barriers that may prevent Indigenous Australians from participating in sport. The Committee received evidence that discussed economic and structural barriers, as well as gender and race-based barriers.
- 3.37 In its submission vicsport highlighted some structural barriers that can decrease participation in sport such as 'limited access to facilities and high costs of transport, membership and uniforms. Factors such as race-based discrimination can also exclude participation.'²⁷
- 3.38 Professor Colin Tatz discussed economic and structural barriers, especially for remote Indigenous communities:
- The almost total absence of sports facilities in many remote communities like Lombardina, Doomagee, Mornington Island, Santa Teresa. Salt pans and sticks in the ground are what pass for football arena, no gyms or indoor courts. No lights, no showers, no coaches, no equipment are the order of the day.
- The presence of some playing fields but no equipment, no local organised competition, no travel money to get to competition, no sponsors, no financial resources apart from beer canteen profits.²⁸
- 3.39 Netball Australia raised concerns about the lack of economic and structural facilities in remote communities:
- As expected in all sports, there was a barrier with finance, infrastructure and services, but particularly in remote areas. There

27 vicsport, *Submission 34*, p. 4.

28 C Tatz, *Submission 2.1*, p. 3.

was a lack of capital and life-cycle funding for facilities, so that facilities were built but there were no long-term plans around maintaining and enhancing those facilities.²⁹

- 3.40 At a public hearing, Mr Anthony Bowd from vicsport suggested that consideration of possible barriers for participation needs to be given to a variety of sports and recreation, not just mainstream sports:

There need to be, as much as mainstream sports, successful sports. I think we need to understand that there are many second- and third-tier sports which are less mainstream and which are also very popular in communities. I point to the example of the VicHealth funded Surfing Victoria program, a terrific program which has been delivered in coastal Victoria. So mainstream sport is important, but I think that a wide breadth of sport may also help to increase the appeal to young women and girls, which is what part of this inquiry is looking at.³⁰

- 3.41 Community support, including having appropriately trained coaches was another barrier that was brought to the Committee's attention:

A further barrier was in the workforce, in terms of volunteers and the lack of appropriately trained people – which you alluded to before about physios, doctors and coaches – but also the managers, administrators and the volunteers who run the clubs, and knowledge of the government structures and understanding what it takes to actually put a team on the court.³¹

- 3.42 In its submission to the inquiry, the Government of South Australia, highlighted the following barriers that may exist for Indigenous Australians in urban, regional and remote settings:

Barriers specific to Urban Communities:

- Cost of playing structured sport in general is higher than in regional areas.
- Insufficient financial support to allow individuals to access clubs. Many funded programs aim to introduce Indigenous people to sport but fail to consider the individual's capacity to pay club fees or the costs associated with elite sport pathways.
- Short term programs are offered through some sports and government funded projects but little attention is paid to linking or creating capacity for long term participation.
- Lack of awareness of sport opportunities that are available in any given location.

29 N Cohen, Netball Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 19.

30 A Bowd, vicsport, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 8.

31 N Cohen, Netball Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 19.

Barriers specific to Regional Communities:

- Lack of community consultation and engagement.
- Lack of multi-purpose facilities or access to existing facilities.
- Lack of leadership within the community.
- Lack of confidence and/or support networks to join local clubs rather than setting up specific Indigenous clubs.
- Insufficient financial support to allow individuals to access clubs. Many funded programs aim to introduce Indigenous people to sport but fail to consider the individual's capacity to pay club fees or the costs associated with elite sport pathways.
- Community priorities - other things are more important, e.g. family and culture.

Barriers specific to Remote SA (South Australian) Communities:

- Lack of trust and engagement between community and service providers
- Limited access to sporting clubs as well as little understanding of how structured sport works.
- Community priorities - other things are more important, e.g. family and culture.
- Fly in-fly out, random, unplanned and uncoordinated (across agencies) visits.
- People in communities are not willing to take the lead (because culturally it may not be the norm).
- Lack of a functional base to deliver sport from, lack of facilities and equipment.
- Expectations of travel to metropolitan areas for state or national Indigenous programs/events. This heightens existing levels of disadvantage.
- Lack of resources to deliver programs in remote locations.³²

Cultural and gender barriers

- 3.43 Cultural stereotyping was discussed as a potential barrier to participation in sport that existed for some Indigenous women. Traditional roles in various cultures that stereotype women in the helping capacity rather than the participator in sport draws some parallels with Indigenous cultures.
- 3.44 The Committee received evidence that related to the way sport can rally a community, however this often results in women setting up the BBQ or canteen or participating in more administrative jobs rather than in physical activity.
- 3.45 Professor Colin Tatz provided an example of cultural and gender barriers that can be present for Indigenous communities. He commented that:

32 Government of South Australia, *Submission 41*, pp. 3-4.

Because the normal view in traditional communities of women is they are childbearing, they ought to bear children, they bring an economic benefit to the community in the form of the social service become to women.

In a similar sense in other parts of the world, there is huge discrimination against Muslim women because they also are prescribed traditional roles which do not include putting on running shorts and running around the Olympic track. So yes, there is a very serious problem of how a young Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander girl gets out from under the expectations of the clan, of the community, to break away and join an Institute of Sport in Canberra, leave home at 12 and not stay with a cottage mother and run and jump and play tennis and swim.³³

Racism

- 3.46 Racism in sport was discussed as a possible barrier for Indigenous Australians. Racism is conceptualised as comprising avoidable and unfair phenomena that lead to inequalities in power, resources and opportunities across racial or ethnic groups. It can be expressed through beliefs and stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, and occurs at many social levels, including interpersonally and systemically, and as internalised racism.³⁴ Netball Australia emphasised in its submission 'Sport must combat racism in order to make a sustainable and valid contribution to Indigenous wellbeing.'³⁵
- 3.47 At a public hearing in Sydney, Mr Tom Evans, Executive Officer, Lloyd McDermott Rugby Development Team, informed the Committee that all major sporting codes had just signed up to an anti-discrimination campaign called 'RACISM. IT STOPS WITH ME.' Mr Evans explained the program was high-profile, and would roll out over the next 12 months.³⁶
- 3.48 Netball Australia advised the Committee that the purpose of the campaign is to:
- Ensure more Australians recognise that racism is unacceptable in our community.

33 C Tatz, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 8.

34 Netball Australia, *Submission 28*, p. 8.

35 Netball Australia, *Submission 28*, p. 8.

36 T Evans, Lloyd McDermott Rugby Development Team, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 45.

- Give more Australians, at an individual and organisational level, the tools and resources to take practical action against racism.
- Empower individuals and organisations to prevent and respond effectively to racism where it may happen.³⁷

Committee comment

- 3.49 The Committee acknowledges there are significant barriers that Indigenous Australians may need to overcome in order to participate in sport and recreation. During the inquiry the Committee heard from several impressive Indigenous Australians who had overcome some of these barriers to participate in sport at local, state, national and international events.
- 3.50 The Committee noted that some of the economic and structural barriers would require some innovative thinking and cooperation from all levels of the community, individuals and government. The Committee does not believe it is solely up to the Commonwealth Government to resolve the structural barriers that exist in many Indigenous communities.
- 3.51 The gender imbalance for participation in sports within the Indigenous communities is of great concern to the Committee. The Committee encourages all sporting groups and organisations to assess what can be done within each sporting organisation to improve the participation of Indigenous women in sport.
- 3.52 The Committee suggests that sporting organisations consider employing more Indigenous women and where possible encouraging more Indigenous females to step up to become coaches, and mentors within their sport of choice.
- 3.53 The Committee strongly endorses the anti-discrimination campaign being run by the Australian Human Rights Commission 'RACISM. IT STOPS WITH ME.' The Committee was encouraged to hear that a majority of sporting organisations had signed up to it.
- 3.54 The Committee strongly encourages all sporting organisations and recreational activity centres to sign up to this campaign in order to develop policies and strategies to combat racism head on in all sport and recreational programs throughout Australia.

37 Netball Australia, *Submission 28*, p. 8.

Recommendation 7- Sport participation roles

- 3.55 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government acknowledge and develop Indigenous participation in the supporting roles around sport, such as coaches, umpires, health workers and administrators.**

Women in sport

- 3.56 The participation rates of Indigenous females are lower than the participation rates for males in a majority of the sporting codes. The issue of gender equity was raised to highlight potential barriers and to discuss what is currently being done by sporting organisations to address the low Indigenous female participation statistic.

- 3.57 The Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport (DRALGAS) recognised the need to improve gender equity in Indigenous sports participation. DRALGAS informed the Committee that one third of the participants in the Indigenous Sports and Recreation Program (ISARP) projects in 2012-13 were expected to be female. In its submission it DRALGAS stated:

It is also likely that the next funding round of the ISARP will prioritise applications promoting sport and active recreation for Indigenous women and girls. Available statistics indicate that the level of involvement in sport and physical activity is lower among Indigenous females than males and yet, notwithstanding the efforts of various organisations, at present the majority of Indigenous people assisted by sport participation programs are male.³⁸

- 3.58 Professor Colin Tatz emphasised his concern with the disparity of funds being spent on Indigenous men and women in sport. He commented:

... let me say to you that, for every \$100 that is spent on Aboriginal male sport, you are lucky if \$1 is spent on women's sport. There is a gross disparity not only in the minds of sporting bodies but in the minds of Aboriginal communities that sport is for men and it is the footy that is the big deal, not the netball, not the basketball, not the field hockey and the various other games that women can participate in. Now, of course, in the general community, women's

38 DRALGAS, *Submission 51*, pp. 20 & 23.

soccer and women's hockey teams have all become national iconic sports.³⁹

- 3.59 Ms Kathryn Palmer, Chief Executive Officer of Netball Australia discussed what is achievable at grassroots level with the big budgets of men's sports, such as AFL and NRL, and the comparably much smaller budgets of women's sports, such as netball:

My sister has worked at Rumbalara with the ASHE program, and she has seen generational change. It is amazing what can happen if you put the resources in the right spot. I am not saying that the government is going to solve this problem and should give us a bucketload of money. We can continue doing what we are now, and we love what we do and it is very effective. But if you really want to change the world for Indigenous women and girls in sport, there needs to be more action.⁴⁰

- 3.60 Ms Palmer highlighted the multitude of barriers that exist for Indigenous women participating in sport:

I see it really as a double-whammy for Indigenous women and girls, because as an all-female sport we suffer from all of things that women suffer from: a lack of respect, inequality, low levels of influence and economic power, and few women in decision making positions. So we suffer from that, and then the Indigenous women and girls have, on top of that, a lack of opportunity, racism and many other barriers to having an active and healthy lifestyle that every Australian should have an opportunity to participate in.⁴¹

- 3.61 In its submission Netball Australia informed the Committee that in 2005 it commissioned research to analyse and recommend programs and events that are essential for the development of Indigenous Australians in netball, including looking at barriers to participation. The research concluded that the main barriers to participation clustered around:

- In-effective, poor or non-existent communication, collaboration and strategic partnerships.
- Finance, infrastructure and services (lack of capital and life-cycle funding).
- Transport and logistics especially given the remoteness of some geographic areas.
- Culture, including attitudes to physical activity, Anglo-Saxon planning and delivery.

39 C Tatz, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 4.

40 K Palmer, Netball Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 15.

41 K Palmer, Netball Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 10.

- Work force, including volunteers and lack of appropriately trained people.
- Program awareness and delivery, including male domination of sport in communities, and “one size fits all” approach.⁴²

3.62 NASCA discussed the importance of providing services directly targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls:

Through our programs and conversations with school staff and community members, we have identified a need to provide additional support to females in a ‘female only’ environment.⁴³

3.63 Whilst mainstream sports are popular for women such as netball, basketball, hockey and softball, Mr Anthony Bowd from vicsport encouraged the Committee to focus on a wide breadth of sport to help increase the appeal to young women and girls.⁴⁴

3.64 vicsport raised another interesting point with the Committee in terms of women having a preference for non-competitive sport:

Traditionally programs are offered to males in structured and competitive formats however we know from research into non-indigenous female participation in sport that female interest drops off in the teenage years due to females not necessarily seeking a competitive sporting experience, demonstrating a preference for more social non-competitive sport. This barrier should be considered when tailoring programs for Indigenous female participants.⁴⁵

3.65 The Indigenous Marathon Project (IMP) co-ordinates ‘Deadly Fun Runs’ in the communities where they have had a past or present IMP squad member. The fun runs attract a fifty-fifty ratio of male and female participants. Ms Nadine Hunt told the Committee how successful the Deadly Fun Run series had been in expanding and attracting female as well as male participation:

The Deadly Fun Run is definitely expanding. It has been 12 months and we have had 35 official community fun runs held throughout Australia in four different states, with 1 300 different participants. Eighty-five per cent of those participants are Indigenous and 52 per cent are women. The biggest thing I noticed with the fun runs is that it is something women can be involved in. When you go to a lot of the communities the girls are sitting on the

42 Netball Australia, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

43 NASCA, *Submission 38*, p. 3.

44 A Bowd, vicsport, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 8.

45 vicsport, *Submission 34*, p. 5.

side, just watching the boys play footy. It is like, 'What do the girls have?'⁴⁶

3.66 The Rumbalara Football Netball Club values the input of women into its club and netball teams. Its submission commented:

Many people say that a great strength of Rumbalara's is that it does not have the kind of 'blokey' culture found in most sporting clubs - women have always played an equal role in the club.⁴⁷

3.67 The Committee examined what programs the various sporting codes had developed for females and how they were encouraging the participation of women in sport.

3.68 Australian Rugby League Commission highlighted some positive statistics showing women's involvement in rugby league. The increases in participation seemingly correlated with increases in female employment, in particular within the managerial and executive positions:

- 70% increase in the number of women in Board or executive management positions.
- Including 37% of administrative positions across all levels of the NRL management structure and the ARLC.
- 10% increase in the number of women in other management positions.
- 20% rise in female participation from 5 490 in 2011 to 6 559 in 2012.
- Female club membership increasing by 20 000 in 2011 to 82 250 to account for 41% of all members.⁴⁸

3.69 As indicated in the above statistics, Ms Trish Crews, General Manager of Community, Culture and Diversity, NRL told the Committee about the increasing participation of women over the past three years:

As part of the strategic plan that we have just launched, the participation of women and of girls in particular is our fastest growing area of participation.⁴⁹

3.70 As part of the social inclusion agenda outlined in the NRL's Strategic Plan, it states that 'rugby leagues commitment to gender diversity will be supported by skills development programs and reflected by a greater representation of women at all levels.'⁵⁰

46 N Hunt, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 29 November 2012, p. 4.

47 Rumbalara Football Netball Club and The Kaiela Institute, *Submission 23*, p. 7.

48 ARLC, *Submission 16*, p. 10.

49 T Crews, National Rugby League, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 16.

50 NRL website, NRL's Strategic Plan <<http://www.nrl.com/>> accessed 24 April 2013.

3.71 Ms Crews continued:

We have at the All Stars game the prematch, the curtain raiser, which is the Indigenous women's All Stars versus the women's All Stars, which is made up of the rest of the Jillaroos, which is the national women's team. We work really closely with the two knock-out organisers in New South Wales and Queensland to ensure we select the best girls from both of those competitions to come forward.⁵¹

3.72 Mr Joseph McDermott, Queensland Rugby League Game Development Manager, commented more generally about the focus on developing women in rugby league. He stated:

Increasing the participation and representation of women and girls in all areas of Rugby League will assist in building a more balanced and diverse sport, promote a positive sporting culture, provide strong leadership and ultimately contribute to a strong, sustainable sport from grassroots to elite and from remote to metropolitan locations. The game is also making a concerted effort to ensure females with leadership capacities are aware of the opportunities from a career perspective, and we intend to continue this.⁵²

3.73 The Committee was informed that most of the rugby league based Closing the Gap programs had an even breakdown of male/female participation. One of the reasons given for this was that the branding of rugby league clubs is so powerful and attracts both males and females to participate in the programs that use rugby league as the 'hook' to engage participants.

3.74 DEEWR stated that sporting partners are chosen for the Learn Earn Legend initiatives based on their appeal to young people, both male and female, and their links to the corporate sector who are able to provide work experience and employment opportunities. The majority of Learn Earn Legend projects are based around male dominated sports, however because the projects are not based on participation in sport, female participation is high.⁵³

3.75 Titans 4 Tomorrow General Manager Mr Matthew Francis commented that 'in all our Indigenous-specific programs over 50 percent are female.'⁵⁴

51 T Crews, National Rugby League, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 16.

52 J McDermott, Queensland Rugby League, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 2.

53 DEEWR, *Submission 48*, p. 19.

54 M Francis, Titans 4 Tomorrow, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 7.

- 3.76 Brisbane Broncos Government Projects General Manager, Mr Scott Czislowski told the Committee:

This year around 56 percent of our students are female. Last year it was 55. That changes from area to area. In the Ipswich area this year we have a huge number of females compared with males, whereas in the northside of Brisbane there are more males and females. But we have 56 percent of females in our program.⁵⁵

- 3.77 The Northern Cowboys Community Manager, Mrs Fiona Pelling commented 'In our programs it is probably about 50 percent for both, depending on populations of the schools. It is equally as appealing to our female participants as it is to our male participants.'⁵⁶
- 3.78 Former Origin Greats Program Manager, Mr Matthew Martin commented that 'The ARTIE academy has 1 630 participants, of which 803 are female and 827 are male. In our academy operations females engage in our program more than males do.'⁵⁷
- 3.79 Social Softball games conducted by the Mornington Island Sports League in 2010 attracted more than 290 community participants, with the majority being women and girls. With the support of a local working group and regular visits by specialist program providers supported by Softball Queensland, participants now have the skills required to organise, play and officiate games. A day-long community Softball event in 2010 saw 60 participants in four teams compete against each other in a round-robin competition.
- 3.80 Australian Rugby Union (ARU) representatives spoke with the Committee and admitted that 'opportunities available to young Indigenous females are far more limited.' Mr David Sykes told the Committee that the ARU would focus in the future to increase participation of women in the 7s rugby strategy.⁵⁸
- 3.81 The Committee received a submission from Mr Ross Tanimu, coach of a South Australian local rugby union women's team. The local team has a high representation of Indigenous players. The team not only encourages participation in the game but offers empowerment and personal growth as demonstrated in the following statement:

The 2012 women's rugby season for the Onkaparinga women's rugby team has become a wonderful journey of empowerment,

55 S Czislowski, Brisbane Broncos Rugby League Club, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 7.

56 F Pelling, North Queensland Cowboys, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 7.

57 M Martin, Former Origin Greats, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 December 2012, p. 8.

58 D Sykes, Australian Rugby Union, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 39.

achievements, self determination and personal growth, for the team as a whole. We have seen a growth in new and young women players being inducted into the code of rugby as well, we have seen a growth in family support.⁵⁹

Indigenous women's perspectives on participation in sport

3.82 In a survey put out to all Onkaparinga players Mr Ross Tanimu asked the women for suggestions of how to increase Indigenous participation in sport. One of the women suggested the following:

Maybe a family fun day, where the mums could come out and try the sport and have rides, games for the kids. A real community feel about it.⁶⁰

3.83 The survey asked what the women liked about having so many Aboriginal women playing rugby at the Onkaparinga rugby club. The following statements summed up the many benefits that accompany the health benefits of participating in sport.

I think it's great to have a team of so many Aboriginal women as it's so empowering for all of us. As soon as one sistagirl joined we all did as a support.

I think it's great, because it's like Aboriginal women are taking back control of their lives and their future. Stereotypes don't matter. It's great because just talking with them in our language is fantastic after not living with my own community for a while. Saying something and having someone understand is awesome.⁶¹
... good to see them out all out and doing something instead of sitting at home and doing nothing.⁶²

I think if we continue to raise awareness because with most Aboriginal things, it does rely on word of mouth. If we can continue to promote it with adequate support than we would see more interest by aboriginal women.⁶³

My view is that our people like to do things in groups I guess, and the woman that contacted us to play are well known and well supported in the community, it offered a togetherness, family environment, a place where our kids were safe and be together. It felt like a gathering place, a place we had goals and a place we

59 R Tanimu, *Submission 1 attachment F*, p. 1.

60 R Tanimu, *Submission 1.1*, p. 11.

61 R Tanimu, *Submission 1.1*, p. 14.

62 R Tanimu, *Submission 1.1*, p. 16.

63 R Tanimu, *Submission 1.1*, p. 14.

could support each other. A place to gain fitness and laugh and enjoy new friendships.⁶⁴

Committee comment

- 3.84 The Committee was particularly impressed with the work that the NRL is doing in terms of attracting near equal male and female participants for its Indigenous programs.
- 3.85 The statistics that demonstrate an increase in female participation at board level right through to the participation levels are reflective of the positive change for women that is taking place in rugby league. Some of the most compelling evidence from the ARLC was the fact that in the last three years, participation of women and of girls was one of the fastest growing areas of participation.
- 3.86 While Netball Australia recognised that there were several barriers that women in netball had to overcome to increase Indigenous netball participation, there was a real sense of commitment to wanting to break through these barriers to achieve greater participation rates for Indigenous Australians.
- 3.87 The Committee suggests that large successful sporting bodies such as the NRL and the AFL partner up with female sporting bodies to mentor and support them to expand their Indigenous sporting programs.
- 3.88 The Committee was impressed with the work being carried out by Mr Tanimu, who had engaged Indigenous women at the local level to participate in a women's rugby season in South Australia. It was evident that having one dedicated mentor who engaged the local community was able to build up not only a team of predominantly Indigenous women but a successful team who went on to win a grand final after four years of training, playing and mentoring.
- 3.89 The testimonials written by the female rugby players on the benefits of playing sport with other Indigenous women were very powerful statements demonstrating how women at a local level can go from not playing any sport to playing several seasons in a row. The Committee was impressed to hear that a number of Indigenous women were participating in sport and benefiting from the health and wellbeing payoffs due to the dedication of just a few people within the community.
- 3.90 Such a successful outcome as the Onkaparinga Rugby Club demonstrates that individuals at a local level can have long term success in terms of increasing Indigenous participation in sport. However it is important to

64 R Tanimu, *Submission 1.1*, p. 26.

recognise that individuals need support through local clubs and communities as well as the opportunity to access support from larger sporting organisations, and state and Commonwealth governments.

- 3.91 The Committee believes the comment made by vicsport regarding females preferring non-competitive sport to be very telling and suggests that sporting organisations consider a range of social sporting days to be run annually to encourage greater female participation. Family sporting days and community carnivals could be one way of engaging more females to participate in sport. Social and recreational types of sport should be considered when tailoring programs to encourage Indigenous female participants.
- 3.92 The Committee believes Commonwealth Government departments should continue to work on tailoring their sports programs to encourage greater participation by females. The Committee urges Commonwealth Government departments to continue to work with traditional girls' sports bodies, to develop appropriate opportunities for females under the Commonwealth Government programs.

Recommendation 8 - Indigenous female participation

- 3.93 **The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government prioritise strategies within its sports programs to increase opportunities for Indigenous female participation in physical activity.**

Recommendation 9 – Prioritise funding for Indigenous women and girls

- 3.94 **The Committee recommends the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport ensure that funding for sport and active recreation for Indigenous women and girls is prioritised.**
- 3.95 The Committee believes that in the longer term a focus on younger Indigenous people participating in sport will have a trickle on effect and assist older generations in the future to lead longer healthier lives. Sport is an important vehicle for achieving the health, education and employment targets set by the Close the Gap agreement.