

Introduction

Sport's contribution to wellbeing and mentoring

- 1.1 The contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring arose as an issue during the Committee's inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system. The Committee's June 2011 report *Doing Time - Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system* found that sport and recreational activities were a way to deflect youth away from anti-social behaviour and self-harm. Mentors and role models through sport were found to assist youth at risk to develop self-esteem, self-worth, future aspirations and a commitment to community responsibility.¹
- 1.2 During this inquiry the correlation between sport and suicide rates was noted by Professor Colin Tatz who argued that the anticipatory, future-oriented activity is the beauty of sport:
- 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.²
- 1.3 Other participants in the inquiry maintained that sport can contribute to safer communities, help to reduce crime and can help to be a diversion from anti-social behaviour.³ The Queensland Government referred to anecdotal evidence from the Indigenous community of Aurukun in

1 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Doing Time - Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*, June 2011, pp. 61 & 64-72.

2 C Tatz, *Submission 2*, p. 3.

3 Australian Rugby League Commission, *Submission 16*, p. 34; Vicsport, *Submission 34*, p. 3.

remote Queensland that sport and active recreational activities assist with lowering the regularity of crime and behavioural problems and improve the self-esteem of the youth in the community.⁴

- 1.4 According to the evidence received throughout the inquiry, sport has an indelible impact on Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring and can contribute to achieving Close the Gap targets in health, education and employment. Mr Doug Booth, an academic with 25 years of academic research into sport as a social and cultural institution and practice, made the following comments in his submission:

Research emanating from nearly every academic discipline – economics, education, history, pedagogy, psychology, psychiatry, social and preventative medicine, sociology and sports studies – reports positive relationships between sport and community well-being. Many of these studies draw attention to the role of sport in fostering individual and community identity as a foundation stone for community well-being. In short, the evidence is unequivocal: sport – as an institution, practice, set of lores, culture – nurtures identity at both the individual and collective (e.g., community, town, regional, provincial, national) levels.⁵

- 1.5 Evidence from the inquiry acknowledged the skills learnt in sport and physical activities are transferrable to all areas of life such as teamwork, problem solving, resilience building, communication and social skills and responsibility.⁶ The building of confidence and a sense of accomplishment were described by the Indigenous Marathon Project and the David Wirrpanda Foundation as particular values of participation in sport and physical activity.⁷
- 1.6 Sport participation was viewed as being about more than the person playing the game. Participation can be in a range of ways such as scoring, refereeing, supporting, volunteering and sponsoring. Sport was seen as engendering community pride, bringing people together, and promoting inclusion, equality and fairness.⁸

4 Queensland Government, *Submission 46*, p. 2.

5 D Booth, *Submission 19*, p. 1.

6 David Wirrpanda Foundation, *Submission 4*, pp. 4-5; Touch Football Australia, *Submission 39*, p. 5; NASCA, *Submission 38*, p. 6; Hockey Australia, *Submission 30*, p. 11; Newcrest Mining Limited and Western Desert Sports Council, *Submission 50*, p. 6.

7 Indigenous Marathon Project, *Submission 49*, p. 10; David Wirrpanda Foundation, *Submission 4*, p. 4.

8 Australian Drug Foundation, *Submission 27*, p. 9; Australian Rugby Union, *Submission 37*, p. 4; Australian Rugby League Commission, *Submission 16*, p. 5; Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

- 1.7 Professor Colin Tatz referred to participation in sport as involving entire communities:

There is a confusion in many people's minds that you have to have the right muscles, the right attitude, the right facilities and the right talents to be involved in sport. But sport is about many other things. It is about being a fan, a touch judge, a referee, a newsletter writer, a fundraiser or a badge maker. Sport belongs to the entire community, and 'fandom' is what makes sport what it is. People do not play sports, other than minor leisure sports, in the absence of fans and viewers. ... So I would like you to consider looking at sport in the broadest sense of the term, as a community activity, a communal activity and an activity that means something to more people than just the players in the competition.⁹

- 1.8 Mr Dale Kickett, former AFL player and a Plan 2morrow 4 2day mentor with the David Wirripanda Foundation described the many contributions of sport to Indigenous communities:

The contribution sport has had on the Indigenous community can sometimes be underestimated in terms of breaking down barriers of equality, the impressions that either side of each (the Indigenous cultures and the wider community cultures has of each other), the obvious health benefits through being active physically, and mentally through the social interaction of being a player, coach, administrator or just a supporter. So there has been some Indigenous legends created through the interaction of themselves and sport but more importantly its opened doors to education, about each other's cultures, and created pathways for our young to follow.¹⁰

- 1.9 In its submission the Rumbalara Football Netball Club in Victoria stated that it is 'a place for the community to come out in force to cheer on friends and relatives, connect and be part of a proud, strong, family'.

Over the last fifteen years, the club has been a vibrant hub for the Goulburn Valley's Aboriginal community, a place to gather and connect through a shared passion for sport. There are currently around 440 people engaged at the club either as players or in the club's various programs, 80 per cent of whom are under the age of 25; approximately 50 people involved as coaches, team leaders, volunteers or trainers, and; over 130 paid-up social members.¹¹

9 C Tatz, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 21 November 2012, p. 1.

10 David Wirripanda Foundation, *Submission 4*, p. 4.

11 Rumbalara Football Netball Club, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

- 1.10 The Brisbane Broncos' submission noted that for many Indigenous people rugby league provides a platform for family togetherness:

Rugby League, for many families - particularly indigenous families - is more than just a sport they play, with televised rugby league games described as a site of family togetherness. As one participant of the study explained, 'we watch it [the Broncos match] every week. We have a little Sunday dinner for it.'¹²

- 1.11 Many participants described sport as the carrot or hook that leads to other aspirations and achievements. Dr Bruce Hearn Mackinnon discussed the passion for sport and its ability to grip whole communities:

Sport in general but I think football in particular in Central Australia, the area that I am most familiar with, the main sport that people are passionate about is Australian rules football. It is an activity which seems to have the ability to grip the whole community. They get passionate about it and interested in it. It is something which can activate people.¹³

- 1.12 Sport is highly visible to all Australians. Positive messages of cultural celebration and pride at big sporting events can help in the path to Close the Gap and reconciliation. Reconciliation Australia (RA) considered sport to be 'a key avenue for both building relationships and providing greater opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. RA referred to sport as a powerful force for reconciliation:

Sport breaks down barriers, bringing people together for a shared passion and common cause. Everyone is seen as an equal when they're cheering for the same team and wearing the same team colours. As a result, sporting matches and events present an opportunity to access sports fans and supporters to promote better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians outside of the sporting arena.¹⁴

Indigenous participation in sport

- 1.13 The collection of data on Indigenous Australians participating in sport and recreation is limited however there are statistics available from the

12 Brisbane Broncos, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

13 B Hearn Mackinnon, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 22 November 2012, p. 4.

14 Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 14*, pp. 1 & 5.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2008.

- 1.14 The ABS NATSISS survey was conducted throughout Australia, including remote areas, from August 2008 to April 2009. It collected information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' (aged 15 years and over) participation in sport or physical activities during the 12 months prior to interview.
- 1.15 The ABS NATSISS in 2008 found that:
- one in three Indigenous people aged 15 years or over had participated in sport or physical activities in the last year
 - the participation rate in sport and physical activities was 38 percent for Indigenous men and 23 percent for Indigenous women, and
 - the participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults taking part in sport and physical recreation decreased with age for both men and women. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men aged between 15 to 24 years had a participation rate of 53%, which decreased to 18 percent for men aged 45 years and over. Of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women aged 15 to 24 years, 36% took part in sport and physical activities, while this participation rate decreased to 11% for women aged 45 years and over.¹⁵
- 1.16 The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) submitted that new data on the level of physical activity will be available in approximately October 2013 and more detailed information on the types of physical activity will be released in June 2014.¹⁶
- 1.17 Further detail on participation rates in different sporting codes is discussed in chapter 3, along with evidence of some of the barriers to Indigenous people participating in sporting activities, including economic, structural and race-based barriers.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.18 On 20 September 2012 the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister for Sport asked the Committee to inquire into and report on the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring with a focus on:

15 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008, Australia (cat. no. 4714.0)', 2009.

16 DoHA, *Submission 43*, p. 4.

- how sporting bodies can increase opportunities for Indigenous participation, including opportunities for Indigenous women,
 - how non-government bodies can utilise sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes for Indigenous people, and
 - the contribution of Indigenous sporting programs to Closing the Gap targets as supported by
 - ⇒ sporting codes,
 - ⇒ the private and NGO sectors, and
 - ⇒ federal government assistance.
- 1.19 The Committee received 58 submissions from a variety of sources, including Commonwealth, state and territory government departments, local councils, sporting bodies and clubs, Indigenous groups and organisations, academics, and many individuals. A list of submissions received by the Committee is at Appendix A.
- 1.20 The Committee conducted six public hearings in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. A list of public hearings is at Appendix B.
- 1.21 Submissions received and transcripts of evidence can be found on the Committee's website: www.aph.gov.au/atsia.

Structure of the report

- 1.22 Sport as a vehicle for Closing the Gap is discussed in chapter 2. Commonwealth Government programs which support Indigenous participation in sport and recreation are examined, including a focus on outcomes, evaluations, and Indigenous female participation. Partnerships between the Commonwealth Government and state and local governments, service providers, and communities to achieve sport and non-sport outcomes are discussed.
- 1.23 Chapter 3 looks at Indigenous participation rates in a broad range of sporting codes. The Committee discusses the barriers to participation and what sporting bodies are doing to promote increased Indigenous participation, including encouraging greater participation by Indigenous females.
- 1.24 The important role of corporate sponsorships and Indigenous communities are discussed in chapter 4. Good partnerships are discussed as a significant issue for the successful delivery of sporting programs for Indigenous Australians. Indigenous mentoring and role models as important features of successful Indigenous sports programs are examined. Finally, the influence of culture on sport and sport on culture is

discussed and the significant role Indigenous culture in sport plays in reconciliation. Reconciliation through sport and the creation of Reconciliation Action Plans by sporting bodies and the corporate sector are discussed.

