

Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee
on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Inquiry into the Contribution of Sport to Indigenous Wellbeing and Mentoring

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1. Introduction - Touch Football Australia

Touch Football Australia (TFA) is the governing body for the sport of Touch Football in Australia and is charged with leading the sport in all areas including administration and technical development.

As a national sporting body TFA has developed a structured model of unified management in which it directly manages the sport at a state level in the majority of states in Australia, while working closely with its partnering organisations, the NSW Touch Association (NSWTA) and Queensland Touch Association (QTA).

TFA also works closely with the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), ensuring that its values and direction are closely aligned with that of the ASC.

Since its inauguration, Touch Football Australia, as an organisation, has strived to develop a culture of national inclusiveness. The effort and output at a national level is provided to participants at the grass roots level, and the growth of the sport is spread throughout the nation, allowing us to move forward together.

2. Sustainable Touch Football Programs for Indigenous Communities

Touch Football Australia has been actively engaged in creating sustainable Touch Football Programs for indigenous communities throughout Australia. Over the course of the past twelve months, TFA has focused on programs specifically in the Arnhem Region in the Northern Territory (NT) and the Northwest region of New South Wales (NSW).

With funding support from the Office for Sport, TFA has developed a program that is focused on engaging with indigenous community members, providing educational opportunities, providing introduction and development within the sport, establishment of localised competition, provision of participant pathways and ongoing support to ensure sustained participation within the community.

TFA believes that a project of this nature will have a significant effect on the increased level of active participation amongst indigenous community members, particularly for those living in remote communities. Touch Football State Associations regularly receive widespread requests for development in regional areas; however the capacity to deliver adequate and sustainable programs is been restricted due to various limitations including distance, lack of human resources and funds. This project will provide TFA and its partnering State Associations with the resources to develop self sustainable programs/competitions in these communities. Local volunteers will be provided with the knowledge and the equipment to organise and manage their own competitions, as well as conduct development in their own communities, no longer waiting on development staff to travel out to their community to provide one off clinics.

TFA's long term goal is to continue to expand this program so that opportunities for participation in Touch Football are provided throughout every state and territory in Australia.

3. Opportunities for Indigenous Touch Football Participants

In March 2012, Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory released a report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory¹. The report found that during the period of 2001 - 2006, the suicide rate for Northern Territory indigenous children 15 years and under, was five times the Australian average. Comparisons have also shown that the rate of suicide deaths, of 10 to 17 year old indigenous children in the Northern Territory, has increased from 18.8 per 100,000 in 2001-05 to 30.1 per 100,000 in 2006-10.²

The report also indicates that suicide rates for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 increases with remoteness. In 2003-05, the age-standardised suicide rate in remote and very remote areas was three times higher than in major cities (31 per 100,000 compared to 9 per 100,000).³

One particular observation that the committee made, was the positive effect that sport had on indigenous communities and their youth, in curbing growing trends of suicide and delinquency.

When the football – or whatever season, basketball season – was on the delinquency rates were almost invisible and, as soon as the sporting season came to an end, it all escalated enormously.⁴

Sport provides social inclusion and connectedness, it boosts self esteem, improves body image and has an impact on substance abuse; all of which are protective factors for suicide.

The report also found that sport has a positive psychological effect as it assists in dispelling a lacking sense of future.

When you think about sport you are thinking about next weekend's match, you are thinking about next month's match, you are thinking about next season's match...We have to find mechanisms to get people to have some kind of future orientation that life has some kind of future.⁵

The committee found that infrastructure to support sporting programs was essential. Through its structures, sport has the capacity to build ongoing relationships with mentors, it promotes teamwork and encourages positive behavioural responses to difficulties such problem solving and resilience building.⁶

¹ Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, March 2012, Gone Too Soon: A report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory, accessed 31 October 2012, <http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/parliamentary-business/committees/ctc/youth-suicides/Final_Report_on_Youth_Suicides.pdf>

² Gone Too Soon: A report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory - Page 9

³ Gone Too Soon: A report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory - Page 12

⁴ Gone Too Soon: A report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory - Page 105

⁵ Gone Too Soon: A report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory - Page 105

⁶ Gone Too Soon: A report into Youth Suicide in the Northern Territory - Page 28

One of the specific opportunities that have been created for a group of participants from Ramingining has been the opportunity to participate in a number of Touch Football tournaments in both Darwin and as far as Perth. The group has attended both the Northern Territory and Western Australia State Championships as well as supported a number of regional tournaments throughout the NT.

From discussions with members of remote communities that are involved in the program that TFA is providing, it has found that Touch Football is essentially giving some of these young people something to live for. While it can be argued that the events that the participants have been engaging in are not ongoing and not sustainable in themselves; what these events are doing is giving these young people something to look forward to and become enthusiastic about. These opportunities are also having ongoing and lasting effects as they are also resulting in the participants giving back to their community and engaging in non Touch Football related community activities.[†]

Attending these events has created many challenges that the team has had to overcome. While the team has received support from Touch Football NT, they have also had to become very self sufficient in learning how to book their own travel and accommodation, apply for small grants and sponsorship, and organise team uniforms. The team has become very active in raising funds for their travels which has involved setting up a stall at the local market and selling drinks and chips. Aside from all of these challenges, the group has the even greater challenge of traversing the Arnhem Region of the NT. Located in the heart of the East Arnhem region; it takes at least 10 hours to travel from Ramingining to Darwin. This involves organising 4WD vehicles as the roads are largely rugged and inaccessible. During the wet season, travel by road becomes impossible and has resulted in the team having to travel by boat or charter small aircraft in order to reach their tournaments.

Challenges such as these would, in most cases, deter a group from striving to achieve what this group of men have achieved, but in actual fact what it has done is given them purpose and a determination; the outcome has become greater than the challenge.

The team from Ramingining have begun to document their travels through the use of video, and what is clearly evident from these videos is that their involvement in Touch Football has given these men a level of enjoyment and satisfaction that they have possibly not experienced before.^{7 & 8}

[†] Appendix 1

⁷ Ramingining Warriors - Touch Football - WA State Championships, 2011, online video, accessed 26 October 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRCWx7xn84A>>

⁸ Ramingining Warriors - Touch Football - Jabiru, 2011, online video, accessed 26 October 2012, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeG0kGoppKQ>

What is also evident from these videos is that this group of men have been given the opportunity to meet new people, travel to places and have experiences that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to experience.

These experiences and opportunities are not just limited to the team from Ramingining. They have adopted the motto 'Be Active' and are now giving back to their own community by going into the local school and talking to the children about maintaining a healthy life, being physically and mentally active, attaining a good education and the importance of going to school every day. They are also beginning to introduce the sport of Touch Football to female participants within the community and have managed to take a women's team away with them to a recent state championship event in Darwin.

Through ISARP funded program Touch Football Australia has been able to provide educational opportunities through accredited referee and coach courses. These courses give the participants an opportunity to have a greater level of involvement in the sport as well as a greater level of confidence and influence in the activity in which they are involved, be that as referee on the field overseeing a game or as a coach who is guiding and teaching a group of players. Opportunities are provided for these participants to be mentored, guided, continually taught, as course presenters provide ongoing support as a component of the accredited courses.

4. Threats to Achieving Sustainability

Disengagement

One of the greatest challenges in creating sustainable sporting programs for remote indigenous community members is overcoming the level of disengagement that currently exists within these communities.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that from the recent trend of sports receiving government funding and providing 'fly in, fly out' programs that provide little to no opportunity for ongoing involvement, a culture of apathy has evolved in many of these communities. Community members have become accustomed to sporting programs that begin but very rarely continue because the funding has disappeared or because there has not been an emphasis on providing the education and support necessary for the sport to continue within the community, and as a result, community members are now very hesitant in becoming involved in new programs because there is an expectation that it will fail.

Delivering to Remote Service Sites

The programs that TFA are currently delivering are primarily focused in remote communities within the NT and NSW. In developing sustainable Touch Football programs for communities in these regions, TFA has been faced with a number of logistical challenges.

TFA has received funding that assists development staff in travelling to remote communities to deliver educational courses, provide coaching clinics and to create localised competitions; however TFA is very restricted in being able to utilise this funding to assist teams in travelling throughout the territory to participate in tournaments. Through both the tyranny of distance and the wet-season, travel becomes an extremely significant cost. As indicated, the ability to participate in events is the primary element in initiating sustaining and growing people's interest in physical activity.

The wet-season also creates a significant challenge in maintaining momentum within the program in the NT. With many of the communities being extremely difficult to access during this period, it can be difficult to regularly engage with community members and assist in their participation and development.

Ceremony

During the past twelve months TFA has had to adapt its program to work within the parameters of community laws and ceremony.

In October 2011, an indigenous Touch Football festival was organised in the community of Jabiru. Two days prior to the commencement this event, ceremony was undertaken in one of the remote communities in the West Arnhem region. This meant that access to that community and to a number of roads surrounding that

community was forbidden. This had a significant effect on the outcome of the festival as it meant that a number of communities who had committed to attending were unable to participate. ^{††}

Taking a 'One Size Fits All' Approach

In developing a model of sustainability and in an effort to create a level of efficiency in delivery, it can be easy to get caught in the trap of creating a 'one size fits all' environment.

During the course of past twelve months, TFA has found that each and every community is different and that what works in one community may not work in the next. This has resulted in a level of inconsistency in the outcomes that have been achieved as each community has become involved in Touch Football activities at differing rates; with some communities still to become involved, if at all.

In these instances, TFA has had to re-evaluate the way in which it has delivered programs and activities and has demonstrated the necessity to take on a greater level of consultation with each individual community.

^{††} Appendix 2

5. Recommendations

The previous twelve months have provided a significant opportunity for TFA to make a contribution towards the improvement of wellbeing for Indigenous Australians through sport. This period has also provided TFA with a number of key learning's that will assist them in continuing to develop and expand their indigenous sporting programs.

Sport's Involvement

It is essential that sporting organisations take all of the steps necessary to ensure that they create the environment for a lasting legacy for sporting participation within indigenous communities. These steps include, but are not limited to:

- Find a core group of key community members who take an interest in the sport and who will ensure that it continues without the dependence of development officer or external deliverer; people need to be able to take ownership
- Consult with key community members to find out exactly what it is that the community would like to achieve and how they would like to achieve it
- Provide educational opportunities and training to community members
- Provide a pathway that creates opportunity, aspiration and purpose
- Network with other sporting bodies, educational and health organisation and indigenous support organisations that are working within the community to combine resources and ensure that duplication is avoided
- Ensure that ongoing communication, consultation and support is provided

Touch Football Australia understands that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach to the development and delivery of sustainable sporting programs to indigenous communities; however TFA believes that what they are creating is an effective model that provides the core elements of a sustainable program, and one that can be replicated and adapted to work in any community.

Organisational Involvement

While there is a responsibility from national and state sporting organisations to ensure that the programs they are providing are sustainable, there must equally be a level of responsibility shown by the organisations, particularly government departments, that provide funding for these programs; it is not enough to simply provide funding.

In providing financial support to sporting organisations, volunteer organisations and community groups, government and private organisations must take a certain level of ownership over the plan, direction, use and effectiveness of the finance that they are providing. While these organisations should avoid taking control of where and how these funds are spent, they should:

- Have a level of involvement in the initial planning of the project to ensure that the project is sustainable and achievable. This level of consultation should be conducted once funding organisations have agreed upon their list of funded projects.
- Have an understanding of what the project is about, why it is being conducted, specifically who it is designed to assist and how it is going to be achieved.
- Withhold a certain percentage of a projects funding, that may be used to bring all relevant stakeholders together to effectively plan and organise projects, as well as to take the opportunity to conduct educational courses and training
- Identify, create and build relationships between the organisation they are funding and key stakeholders.
- Provide ongoing support and direction throughout the funding period to assist in achieving outcomes, but to also understand when and why certain aspects of a project are not achieved.
- Create a tiered reporting system that reflects the level of funding provided; that is, a more comprehensive report for those organisations who have received the highest level of funding, and a less comprehensive reporting template for those organisations who have received mid to minor levels of funding.
- There needs to be a greater level of consideration given to supporting the costs of travel for participants as well as to creating initiatives and solutions to the issues to alleviate these significant costs. This is something that must come from funding bodies, but through consultation with community and the sporting organisations they are working with and supporting.

6. Appendices**Appendix 1 - Letter from the Ramingining Warriors Touch Football Association**

*Ramingining Warriors
Touch Football Association*

To whom it may concern,

The Ramingining Warriors are a very committed Elite Open Men's touch football side that have already shown some huge promise in their first two years as a representative touch football team. They first travelled to Darwin in May of 2010 for the NT State Championships. They have since returned to Darwin for this same tournament in 2011. They have travelled once to Jabiru and twice to Western Australia to represent their community at the elite level. Their biggest sporting achievements include taking on Australia's best at the WA State Championships, getting four players into the NT state squad for two consecutive years, and the most prestigious achievement is defeating Alice Springs in the NT State Title Country Final to become the best country side in the Northern Territory. The Warriors have not only had success at the elite level but the young committed men have also been able to establish a very spirited mixed gender social competition. Thanks to the Northern Territory Touch Football Association the Warriors have also become qualified referees and coaches of this local competition.

The Ramingining Warriors were born in 2009 when I moved here to be a Primary School Teacher. I saw a need for the local men and women to be involved in some sort of physical activity that involved everybody and didn't cause family feuds like other sports such as AFL. During my time here especially in the early days there hasn't really been a drive for sport and recreation. Since I came here we have only had a Sport and Recreation Officer for approximately six weeks in the middle of 2009. More recently we have been allocated two Youth Workers who take on some sporting commitments. But prior to this and for the majority of the time it comes down to people here on ground level volunteering their time to provide sporting opportunities for the youth of Ramingining. Unfortunately the local members of the community don't yet have the training, skills or motivation to run successful programs consistently by themselves without some on-going support. However, touch in collaboration with the youth work unit is slowly providing this platform and is empowering the young men to successfully run sports and recreation programs. This is mainly due to the fact that they can see the opportunities available to them and others in the community.

The Ramingining Warriors are far more than a touch football side. Since the very start of the program the team have given many talks to the students of Ramingining School, they have engaged in meetings including safe sex, alcohol and drug use, food and lifestyle, and the importance of living

active lives. In actual fact the team adopted the phrase 'Be active' and they promote the benefits of the phrase to others.

Ultimately the greatest benefits of having an elite side continue to travel and host tournaments are the ongoing opportunities to close the gap. The relationships that are formed through this program are extremely positive. It provides opportunities for Indigenous people to come together with people from many other cultural backgrounds and share memorable experiences with them.

The success of touch football in this community has brought a lot of hope to all that live here. For the first time in a long time the youth and adults have exposure to many of the same opportunities that are only usually available to people from an urban setting. This program is allowing the people of Ramingining to lead healthy and active lifestyles. However as we all know such programs aren't sustainable without funds and contributions from people who believe in what we are trying to achieve. We are ultimately using this team to stimulate motivation for the community as a whole, as well as provide opportunities for all to take sport to a higher level. This year is no different for the Warriors and we are looking at assisting the surrounding communities in development of touch football, so they to reap the same benefits as those here in Ramingining. We aim to raise the level of touch in these communities so that more players, referees and coaches can emerge and gain opportunities to move on to a representative level. We aim to build a strong competition between the Arnhem communities.

Last year was the first time that we ran the Arnhem Cup, which is a touch tournament for all Arnhem communities. Last year we had 4 communities attend and this year we are aiming for 8. For this to be possible we need ongoing assistance from organisations such as yours. Please contact Adam from Touch Football Australia if you think that you may be able to assist our cause.

Regards,
Cameron Adams
Coach of the Ramingining Warriors

Appendix 2 - West Arnhem Road Closure



Northern Land Council

URGENT NOTICE

SACRED CEREMONIES IN PROGRESS IN WEST ARNHAM LAND

Road closure between * Maningrida to Ramingining and
* Muralidbar Creek Crossing on Top Track (Western Liverpool River Crossing) and Maningrida.

Please see Map Attached for details.

These areas are closed from 8.00 am TOMORROW – Wednesday 12 October 2011 until further notice.
We expect these roads to open either Saturday or Monday morning.

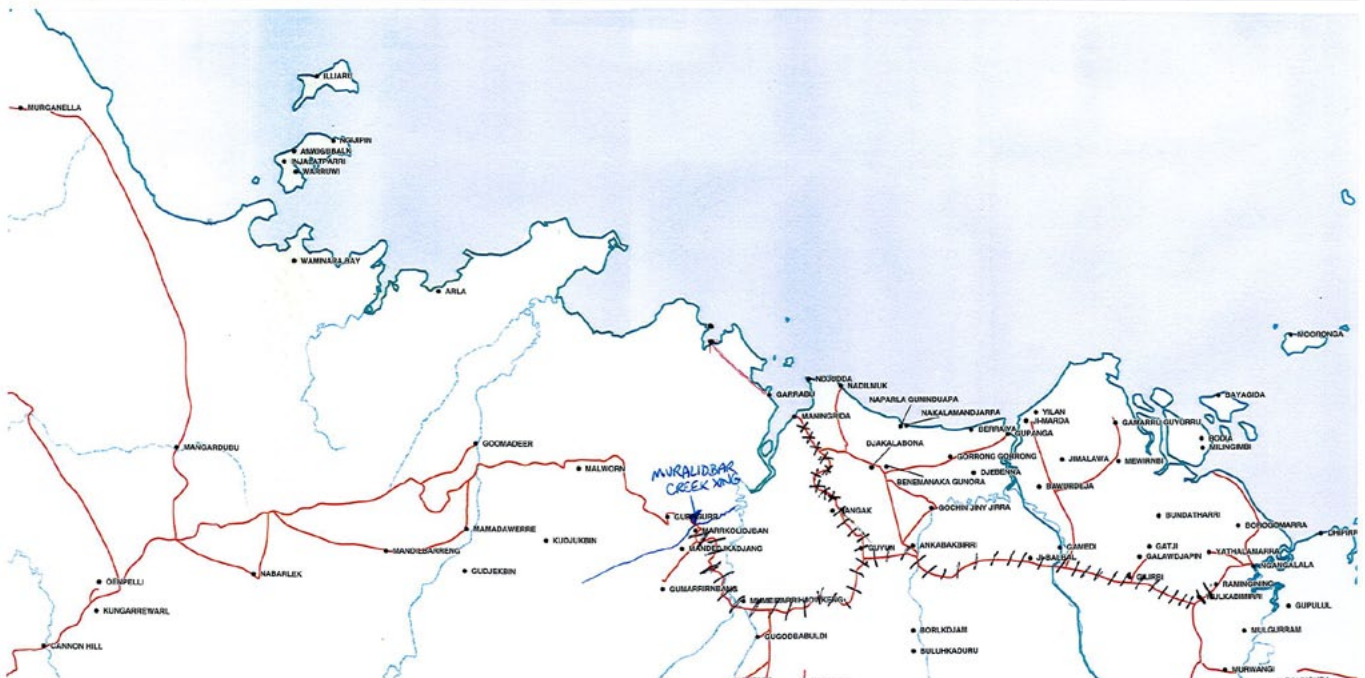
The Road between Maningrida and Djinkarr will be closed from 8.00am on 12/10/11 until 8.00am 13/10/11 only.

There is to be no traffic along these roads. No exceptions!

Any person issued with permits please note that they have now been revoked.

We apologise for the late notice and any inconvenience caused.

Please direct enquiries to the Jabiru Regional Office of the Northern Land Council on (08) 8938 3000.



/// ROADS CLOSED 8am 12/10/11 until further notice
XX ROADS CLOSED 8am 12/10/11 until 8am 13/10/11
(MANINGRIDA TO DJINKARR ONLY)