

Mills, Rebeka (REPS)

From: Heidi Norman [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 12 November 2012 8:03 AM
To: Committee, ATSIA (REPS)
Subject: Submission - sports Inquiry
Attachments: Norman (2009).pdf

11th November 2012

Dear Committee,

Re: Submission to the Federal Government Sports Inquiry on the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring.

This submission, and attached research articles, bring to the Committee's attention the cultural, social and economic significance of the NSW Annual Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout carnival for the Aboriginal community. Further areas are briefly identified below where Government support could further contribute to the success of the event.

Over the last 10 years I have been documenting the Knockout carnival. This has culminated in a history of the now 42 years of the event; a study of media coverage of the Knockout that shows wider community attitudes and the responses to the Knockout; and an extensive photo archive of the Knockout. The articles area attached for the Committee's further information and photo archive can be found at: <http://www.facebook.com/#1/pages/NSW-Aboriginal-Rugby-League-Knockout-40-year-anniversary/114547481915851> and <http://www.atsida.edu.au/archive/datasets>.

Research on the Knockout highlights the significance of the Knockout carnival as a social event, as a 'modern day corroboree', the economic contribution of the Knockout including public and private sponsorship and stall holdings, and the development of the women's and junior competition.

The Knockout has been an enormously successful and significant event that is passionately embraced by the NSW Aboriginal community. The Knockout emerged in the context of considerable social, economic, cultural and political change. It is a vehicle for the continuation and regeneration of cultural traditions. It has been the means by which new communities are forged, where love is realised and stars made. It has created opportunities to reconnect and celebrate being Aboriginal in a jubilant all-Aboriginal environment.

While the Knockout has been a hugely success event, there are significant challenges ahead that threaten its future viability – these include the decline of rugby league in the bush, lack of guarantee of financial support for the event and the absence of a secretariat or governing body. Before discussing these points I provide here a brief introduction to the Knockout.

The origins and development of the NSW Annual Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout.

The Knockout is an annual Aboriginal Rugby League carnival involving teams from all over NSW.

The Knockout, beginning in Sydney in 1971, is widely described as a 'modern day Corroboree' with teams and supporters from Ballina to Bega along the coast and west to Bourke. The event involves incredible organization and planning and is funded from a mix of private, government and community sponsorship and support. It has been run independently since its inception.

The football carnival can be understood as a modern and adapted medium for cultural performance and expression, for kinship-based modes of organisation merged with state shaped communities, and for courtship and competition. The Knockout is reminiscent of a four-day traditional ceremonial dance and celebration and enables new social and cultural practices to emerge. It is an opportunity for families to gather, reunite as a community and barrack for their

home-town and mob, to relive past glories and to remember those who have passed on. The football is fiercely contested with tough, world class Rugby League on display, and where victory is cited as a lifetime highlight for players and communities.

Over the 2010 October long weekend the NSW Aboriginal community gathered in their thousands at Woy Woy Oval in fierce competition and celebration, with more than 100 teams competing in the men's, women's and junior (U15's & U17's) Rugby League 'Knockout' Carnival. For the NSW Aboriginal community, the Knockout is the biggest event of the year. It is run by and for the Aboriginal community. For the most part this major sporting and cultural event goes unnoticed by the wider community, save for anxiety over possible violence and disorder as indicated in the media coverage.

The instigators of the Knockout set out to provide a stage for the many and very talented Aboriginal footballers playing at the time who had been overlooked by the talent scouts. At the same time they said,

[it] was never simply about football, it was about family, it was about community, it was getting people to come together and enjoy and celebrate things rather than win the competition football.

It is hard to imagine how the Knockout is organized and run today as compared with its humble beginnings. Back in 1971 one founder, Bob Smith, hand-drew A4 cardboard signs that he then posted around Redfern. The nomination fee was \$5.00 and the winner 'took all' of the \$35 prize money. By way of contrast in 2010 the entry fee was \$1500 and the winning men's team collected \$60,000 in prize money! As well as second, third and fourth place cash prizes. Participation in the women's competition has also steadily increased and the quality of play is high. At the 2012 Knockout carnival held at Raymond Terrace 14 women's teams competed and the crowd attendance on the Friday confirmed the women's and junior's competition as central to the weekend events.

While the Knockout is hugely celebrated and attended, it is an enormous event to organise with most communities starting this process from scratch. There is no template or 'how to' guide, although in many cases those who have been involved in organising Knockouts before willingly lend support and expertise. Committees book and prepare the grounds (line-marking, emblem stamping), erect barriers, recruit referees and lines people, clean the grounds, clean the toilets, in some cases the construction of amenities, transport between fields, security, footballs, football pumps, clocks, hooters, tables, chairs, tents for elders, marquees for different communities and player insurance and public liability.

Organising the Knockout is also a very costly activity. The Dubbo Pacemakers and Wellington Wedgetails combined organising committee for the 1999 Knockout estimated that the expenditure for the event amounted to approximately \$300,000. A modest profit of \$30,000 was channeled back into the community for employment, health and sporting venues. The RAB 2004 organising committee also said that 'before a ball had even been kicked', the organising committee required a starting budget of \$200,000 and were meeting weekly at Souths Leagues Club from November 2003. For Committee Secretary Ricky Lyons, 'organising the Knockout basically has taken over my life' and Graham Merritt said it was 'a big headache'.

For the anniversary Knockout in 2010 organizers believe 'at least' 20,000 people came through the gates over the four days to watch a record number of teams compete. Organization of the 40 year Knockout drew on a team of wise heads well versed in the organization of both large events and football administration. They worked on the organization full time from February. Their experience affirms earlier accounts: it costs at least \$250,000 to run a Knockout and while the gate takings seem substantial - about \$100,000, 'there's no profit, you only made money to pay bills...it was all paid out'. The host club has to pay for referees fees, accommodation, ground usage, insurance for the women's competition etc.

In the absence of a governing body, or secretariat for the Knockout, the costs – both in money terms, but also the pressure this puts on key community leaders is enormous. In recent years the NSW Rugby League has provided support including with conducting the draw and templates for entry forms and other secretariat-like assistance, along with covering costly player insurance. Australian / NSW Rugby League Indigenous programs has also attached sports development, community fitness and wellbeing programs to the Knockout. Since 2011, winners of the NSW Knockout have played the winners of the Queensland Knockout thereby further extending the Indigenous All-stars game to a weekend of football. In this we see the Knockout increasingly embedded in the formal institutions of

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rugby league, but at the same time a community owned and run event. Annual Government funding to support a secretariat or similar, would ensure the community character of the Knockout is retained and future viability of this most important social and cultural events for the NSW Aboriginal community.

Thank you for considering my submission. Should you require any further information please don't hesitate to contact me as listed below.

Regards,

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Attachments

Norman, H., 2012, A modern Day Corroborree – the New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout, Vol 15, Issue 7, Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics, Special Issue of Indigenous People, Race Relations and Australian Sport, pp 997-1013.

Norman, H.R., 2009, 'An unwanted Corroboree: the politics of the NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout', Australian Aboriginal Studies, vol. 2009, no. 2, pp. 112-122.

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