

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 29 March 2006, the Senate asked the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee to conduct an inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia, for report by the first sitting day of September 2006. On 15 August 2006 the Senate granted the Committee an extension of time to report to 6 September 2006.

1.2 The terms of reference were to inquire into women in sport and recreation in Australia, with particular reference to:

(a) the health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities;

(b) the accessibility for women of all ages to participate in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities, with additional reference to state and federal programs, including:

(i) the number of women actively participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities,

(ii) characteristics of women not participating in organised sport, fitness and recreation activities (including, for example, socio-economic strata, age, women with a disability, Indigenous or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women),

(iii) constraints, including strategies to overcome the constraints that may prevent these women from participating,

(iv) the effectiveness of current state and federal grant programs that encourage women to participate,

(v) the retention and attrition trends of grassroots participation, including comparisons with male athletes at a similar level,

(vi) the remuneration, recruitment, retention and attrition of elite female athletes, including comparisons with elite male athletes,

(vii) retention of athletes competing in senior and open age state and national sporting competitions, with possible strategies to retain female competitors in elite and sub-elite competition,

(viii) opportunities and barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition, and

(ix) the financial status, success and viability of women's national league competitions, including strategies to improve these factors;

(c) the portrayal of women's sport in the media, including:

(i) the role of the government to regulate and review the coverage of women's sport in the media (print, radio and electronic),

(ii) the influence of pay television on the coverage of women in sport,

- (iii) the promotion and publicity of women's national league competitions,
 - (iv) the financial status and success of women's national leagues, and
 - (v) strategies to improve the amount and quality of media coverage for women's sport; and
- (d) women in leadership roles in sport, including:
- (i) the number and proportion of women in coaching, administrative and officiating roles,
 - (ii) the issues associated with women in leadership roles in both elite and grassroots activities,
 - (iii) trends and issues for women in organisational leadership roles, and
 - (iv) strategies to improve the numbers of women in coaching, administration and technical roles.

Note on references in this report

1.3 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the Committee rather than a bound volume of submissions. References to Committee Hansard are to the proof Hansard transcript of hearings. Page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.4 In accordance with its usual practice, the Committee advertised details of the inquiry in *The Australian*. The Committee also wrote contacted a range of organisations and individuals, inviting submissions. It received 88 written submissions, as listed at Appendix 2. Public hearings, and the documents tabled at them, are listed in Appendix 3. The context of this inquiry is outlined in Appendix 1.

1.5 Public hearings of the committee were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, which included teleconferences with witnesses from South Australia and the Northern Territory. Details of the hearings are at Appendix 3. The committee thanks everyone who made themselves available for hearings, particularly those who travelled to make it to the capital city locations.

1.6 Physical activity amongst school-age children emerged as an issue in submissions and hearings, and this led the committee to write, on 3 August 2006, to all state and territory departments of education, asking them a number of questions about the status and extent of physical activity within school programs. By the time of reporting, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia had responded to this query. Their replies are included in Appendix 4. It is the committee's intention to pursue responses to its query and it will publish them on its website as they become available.

1.7 Late in the inquiry process, the committee sought information from the outdoor recreation and fitness sectors, and is very grateful to the individual businesses and organisations who responded promptly to the committee's queries.

1.8 This inquiry was an inquiry into women's participation in sport and recreation. However, the evidence quickly revealed three important points that the committee believes are useful to express in the opening chapter of this report.

1.9 First, the challenges faced by women are not challenges they face alone. There are great health benefits for all Australians that come with being physically active, and there is a need for everyone – women and men, boys and girls – to be more active, and for governments and sporting organisations to play roles in facilitating that activity. There are hurdles that elite sportsmen and women both face in their efforts to compete at an elite level. Outside the sports that have the lion's share of media coverage, and which are financially strongest, most elite sports people are working hard with relatively few direct financial rewards.

1.10 Second, the solutions to the challenges faced by women's sport are not for women alone to implement. It has to be a partnership of women and men working together to create change. The committee received evidence from men and women alike about how sporting endeavours and recreational activities can be enhanced through equal opportunities for women to participate in playing, coaching, administrating, officiating and governing sport and recreation. Sporting and recreational bodies and all participants will be the beneficiaries of policies and attitudes that remove barriers to women's involvement at all levels.

1.11 Third, all sportspeople have a part to play in ensuring everyone can enjoy their game or activity and all parents have a part to play in ensuring their boys and girls stay active and healthy. Everyone in the media, male or female, needs to take every opportunity to give the diversity of sports the coverage they deserve. It is about time that women have enhanced opportunities, access, media coverage and roles in all sports and activities.

