

The Secretary,
Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology and the Arts
References Committee
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

**RE: SUBMISSION – INQUIRY WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN
AUSTRALIA**

On behalf of Womensport and Recreation Victoria, it gives me great pleasure to include the attached submission regarding the senate inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia.

As a non government not for profit advocacy body we are dedicated to enhancing the sport and physical recreation environment for women and facilitating opportunities for those wanting access to sport and recreation. WSRV value sport and physical recreation participation as an appropriate way of facilitating improved physical health and mental well being. We have faith in participation in sport and physical recreation as a conduit for a confident and healthy women's population

It is for this reason that we have embraced the opportunity to share with you some insights that we have gained in working within the womensport sector in Victoria. Much of the information contained forthwith is the result of a six month research period conducted in late 2005/early 2006 which has resulted in the formulation and launch of a the '***Starting Blocks and Spring Boards Victorian Strategy for Women in Sport and Physical Recreation***'.

In preparation for the plan a number of in person and on line workshops were conducted with state sporting associations, peak sporting agencies and female sport and physical recreation participants in order to ascertain their thoughts on the issues and barriers that face women's sport and how they could be overcome.

The submission attached is a true reflection of the voice of those involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of women's sport and physical recreation opportunities in Victoria. We hope that you heed their concerns and urge the government to make a financial commitment to supporting the growth and development of women's sport and recreation throughout Australia.

Yours in sport,

Fiona Justin
Chief Executive Officer
Womensport and Recreation Victoria Inc.

A POLICY BACKGROUND

The encouragement of equality for women in sport and recreation has long been supported internationally by a number of conventions and papers including the 'Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women' within the Ottawa Charter (WHO 1986) and the 'Brighton Declaration on Women in Sport'. These international policy documents are supported by a number of domestic instruments including the 'National Women's Health Policy – Advancing Women's Health in Australia' (1989), the 'Forth United Nations World Congress on Women: Platform for Action – Australia's implementation report' (1996) and the 'National Policy on Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity' (1999).

On a state level the Department of Victorian Communities 'A fairer Victoria' and the 'Five Year Strategic Plan for Sport and Recreation Victoria', VicHealth's 'Big Issues' contained in 'The VicHealth Story' and the 'Starting Blocks and Spring Boards strategy for women's sport and physical recreation' provide a policy environment for women's sport and physical recreation in Victoria.

Both the Victorian and Australian Governments have recognised the value of the contribution of women within the community and the essential and varied roles that they play in the development of a gender inclusive society. Acknowledging that 'Australia must foster a culture that encourages and supports the full involvement of all women and girls in every aspect of sport, recreation and physical activity'¹ the Australian Sports Commission, on behalf of the Commonwealth Government has previously been responsible for the development of a National policy.

Disappointingly this strategy, which covered 1999-2002, does not appear to have been re evaluated and restated in support of what was initially a significant push to recognise the issues faced by women in relation to participation. However, the challenges to participation by women in sport and physical recreation are on going and we will continue to see low level of participation and the associated health and social issues if these are not addressed.

The mere fact that women who participate are generally healthier, more confident and feel better than those who don't² is a fundamental reason for pursuing increases in physical activity amongst this sector of the community. Unfortunately there are few female role models to whom women can aspire, with women more likely to nominate a sportsman than a sports woman as a role model³ and fewer than 20% of decision making roles in sport held by women.⁴

¹ National policy on women and girls in sport, recreation, and physical activity. 1999-2002. Australian Sports Commission 1999.

² Female participation in sport, recreation and physical activity n NSW, NSW Department of Sport and Recreation 1 November 2001.

³ Why girls don't play sport. Sport and Recreation Queensland November 2001.

In order to address the issues in women's sport and recreation the unique barriers to participation for women must be identified and adequately address providing accessible and appropriate opportunities that empower this population to make positive lifestyle choices. Recognising that women are 20% less likely than men to get sufficient exercise⁵ an understanding of the reasons why will go some way to determining how to address the issue.

Balancing competing needs, lack of affordable and accessible childcare, poor body image, lack of self efficacy, few role models and the 'stigma' of elite level participation by women all contribute somewhat to hindering participation. Further, child protection and legislative issues, injury, age related drop off and complex insurance issues are all contributing to the rising cost and resultant inaccessibility of participation opportunities for women.

With the sport and recreation industry contributing around 2.3 billion dollars a year to the Victorian economy⁶ alone there is an excellent opportunity for policy makers and government leaders to demonstrate to industry the value of investing in women's participation pathways.

As policy makers, sports business professionals, volunteers, athletes, parents, participants and women we must create a framework that facilitates participation for all women. Rather than 'recruiting women' to an established framework we must determine the needs of this group and realign current thinking. In short we must look to evolving the industry in a way that it becomes attractive for women from all backgrounds, abilities and participation levels. To this end, greater consideration must be given to developing unstructured opportunities as women are more likely to be active in non organised activities than men but 9% less likely to be involved in competitive sport⁷ and more likely to want to participate in order to be sociable and meet people than be competitive.⁸

Working in partnership we have the opportunity to create a sport and recreation environment where women are afforded every opportunity and choice for full participation as participants, athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and career professionals.

⁴ Women in leadership roles in sport, recreation and physical activity. NSW Sport and Recreation November 2001.

⁵ Mercury News 2004 'Women's Activity Shock Findings'.

⁶ *The business of Sport: An examination of the dimension of the Sport and Recreation Industry in Victoria.* Sport and Recreation Victoria

⁷ Why girls don't play sport. Sport and Recreation Queensland November 2001.

⁸ Ibid.

A. Health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities

There are a number of well documented physical benefits of participation in sport and physical recreation including a lower incidence of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and chronic illness. Less often highlighted however are the social benefits of participation in sport and physical activity such as the fact that young adults are 92% less likely to take drugs if they are participating in physical activity and 80% less likely to be the subject of unwanted pregnancy. Further physical activity has been linked to lowered depression and anxiety, improvement of mood and increased ability to perform daily tasks.

Further, though only anecdotal, participation in sport and physical recreation is said by its participants to be responsible for instilling virtues such commitment, courage, determination, flexibility, integrity, respect and self discipline.

We would like to direct you to the submissions of partner organisations Sports Medicine Australia and VicHealth who have utilised there expertise in addressing this area more thoroughly.



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;

Physical activity and sporting participation figures show that although general participation rates are similar for men as for women only 44% females reach the minimum physical activity threshold of 150 minutes per week⁹ and almost 12% would be considered sedentary.¹⁰

Although it is recommended that adults accumulate 30 mins of moderate exercise most days of the week only 4% of them choose to do it by activity commuting to work.¹¹

Participation rates indicate that up until the age of 35 that rates of participation for men is high than for women. However this appears to equal out where upon the participation rate for women outstrips men.¹²

- 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);

Information gathered in the development of the 'Starting Blocks and Spring Boards Victorian Strategy on Women in Sport and Recreation, driven by WSRV, indicated that the top ten reasons barriers to participation for women were;

1. Financial infrastructure

Within this category participants cited the cost of participating. Providers recognised that costs increased due to the lack of sponsorship and funding of women's activities. It is interesting to note that membership of a sporting club decreases with decreasing income.¹³



⁹ Heart Foundation Seesaw study Deakin university 2005

¹⁰ Medical journal

¹¹ Seesaw

¹² ASC annual report

¹³ Seesaw

2. Media

It was thought increased coverage of women's sport would lead to an increased acceptance of participation amongst the population. It was also considered that not just the quantity but the quality of women's sport coverage need to be considered. Reporting on the size of a female player's backside or a 'scrap' she may have had with a team mate does nothing to encourage women to become active.

3. Lack of female role models (participation, coaching, administration, management)

Sadly young women are more likely to choose nominate a sportsman than a sportswoman as a role model in sport¹⁴

4. Societal expectations

Stereotypical ideas about femininity and masculinity appeared to shape young women's attitudes to physical activity and the meaning it has for them.

Further it would appear that motherhood greatly influences participation as Women with children are less likely to be active, whilst inactivity increases with the number of children.¹⁵

5. Body image/confidence

For many years body image has remained as barrier for women in regards to participation. It is only more recently that the issue of body confidence has arisen.

A cyclic issue participation in women's sport and activity can lead to a healthier body and better body confidence though it often requires a level of confidence to commence.

Encouraging women to believe in their own abilities will go some way to addressing this issue.

6. Lack of opportunities at school

Respondents felt that the lack of participation opportunities at school influenced participation later on in life.

Education also has an affect on participation with participation rates of only 73.1% for non tertiary qualified adults compared to 91.3% participation amongst those with a university degree.¹⁶ Further it was considered that participation was lowest amongst those who never went to school (56.9%).¹⁷ Leading one to conclude that education has a significant impact on participation.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ MJA

¹⁶ ASC annual report 2004

¹⁷ ASC annual report

7. Male sport

Those working in the women's sport industry often cite men's sport as a barrier to increased women's participation. In actual fact Womensport and Recreation Victoria Inc believe that there is ample opportunity to engage both sexes and that rather than simply diverting resources away from men's sport a greater investment in sport needs to be made by both government and industry. We do however believe that there could be a greater sharing of available resources. For example all government sponsorship (such as TAC funded sponsorship) is allocated to men's sports.

8. Lack of availability of resources (coaches, rural areas, information time)

Surprisingly lack of information regarding available activities falls at number eight indicating that perhaps government investment in providing information is no longer required and could be better invested in the media or delivering affordable participation options.

9. Access issues (practical opportunities, transport, language, lack suitable opportunities, lack of facilities)

A lack of local availabilities, accessible facilities via public transport and language barriers all equate to an issue of access which is yet to be substantially addressed by either government or industry.

10. Profile of womensport (status of women, media focus, negative profile)

The profile of women's sport in general was thought to be a significant contributing factor to our inability to fully engage the female community. Women's sport seems to hold a low profile not just within the general community but also within the sports sector itself. This is quite difficult to understand when women are more successful at both the Commonwealth and Olympic games than men.

- iii. constraints, including strategies to overcome the constraints that may prevent these women from participating;

Action

Women's Sport and Recreation Conference

- One day conference addressing the issues and sharing best practice SOLUTIONS



- iv. the effectiveness of current state and federal grant programs that encourage women to participate;

WSRV believe that the current government investment has not been utilised to its most effective and fears that without a clear strategy for women's sport the Government will continue to 'patch holes' rather than make a difference. It is for this reason we researched, designed and are currently implementing the 'Starting Blocks and Spring Boards strategy' and we strongly encourage the state government to support its implementation through directing funding in the identified areas.

With specialist skills knowledge and understanding WSRV are in an excellent position to deliver a great deal more to the sports community if only for lack of funding.

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);

Womensport and Recreation Victoria strongly advocate for legislative change which requires media outlets to dedicate a minimum percentage of their sports coverage to women's achievements.

We are also committed to the development of a 'Charter for women's sports coverage' facilitated by the federal minister which brings together heads of sports media around Australia to 'sign up to' a charter dedicated to the appropriate coverage of women's sport.

- ii. strategies to improve the amount and quality of media coverage for women's sport;



Action

Acknowledging the great impact that women's media coverage has on the industry Womensport and Recreation Victoria (WSRV) have identified this area as a focus area for 2006/2007. Launching the 'Campaign for Coverage' project we will take a four pronged approach to encouraging better media coverage for women.

A four pronged 'Campaign for Coverage'

- Campaign for legislative change
- Pilot project appointing PR agent to work with 3 sports in securing coverage
- The development of a Charter of media Coverage for women in sport
- A call to action mobilising the public to feedback to media outlets

WSRV would be happy to provide further information in this are at your request.

Action

Women's Sport Awards

- Recognition of the achievement of women through a sports awards evening held in conjunction with the women's sport and recreation conference



D. Women in leadership roles in sport, including;

- i. trends and issues for women in organisational leadership roles;

A 1998 research by the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation showed that only 13% of State Sporting Organisation presidents were women and only 25% of executive Director Roles were held by women. They also acknowledge that where women held positions it was usually in a women's only or small low profile organisations.¹⁸

Major government roles fared no better with 100% of executive decision making roles at NSWIS being held by men and only 32% of decision making roles with the Department of sport and Recreation being held by women.¹⁹

It is made up relatively equally of men and women (48.4%) with 63.4% holding a Bachelors degree or higher, with an average of 5-9 years of experience.²⁰

Despite the relatively equal representation in the sector salaries in excess of \$50,000 were earned more by men than women, with the mean salary for men being \$45,000 - \$50,000 compared to \$40,000 – 45,000 for women. Further there are indications that the highest earning woman (\$180,000) was still \$170,000 behind the highest earning male.

Issues of job accessibility and appropriate remuneration are not the only issues faced by women. Informal canvassing of women suggests that women are often subject to harassment in the work place. Coupled with a lack of adequate child care to support working mothers in the industry the sector is becoming less appealing for female professionals.



¹⁸ http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/assets/pubs/industry/info_decision.pdf

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰

<http://www.sportspeople.com.au/site/misc/sportspeople/downloads/2003%20Sportspeople%20Workplace%20Survey.pdf>

Strategies to improve the numbers of women in leadership;

Action

'Spring Board to Leadership' Project

- Identifying sports with less than 10% female board representation
- Working with the sports to match them with skilled women for board positions
- Supporting women's appointments by providing them access to the SB &SB network

Action

Starting Blocks and Spring Boards network

- Provide networking opportunities for women working or volunteering in sport and physical recreation
- Provide role models for women aspiring to working in the industry
- Provide practical professional development opportunities which better equip women to discharge their duties



IN SUMMARY

The development of the WSRV 'Starting Blocks and Spring Boards Strategy for Women's sport and physical recreation' (attached) provides a sound well researched base from which we have develop a plan of action to address the major issues affecting women's involvement in the Sport and Recreation industry in Victoria.

In order to see significant and sustainable change in the women's sport sector we must;

Build Partnerships

Acknowledge that working together creates greater opportunities for everyone.

- Develop strategic partnerships to address the issues faced by women participating in sport and physical recreation
- Work with the sport and recreation sector in capacity building so that they are aware of issues facing women's access to sport and recreation.
- Work in partnership with the industry to assist and encourage them to actively target women in their programs and activities.
- Support the work of others in providing opportunities for women.

Engage People

Recognise that there are a number of misconceptions about sports women and those who choose to be physically active and work towards a more informed understanding of the women's sport and recreation industry.

- Attempt to influence cultural change in society by challenging stereotypes that negatively impact on women's participation in sport and recreation.
- Provide representation of the women's sector in a way that is transparent, inclusive and reflective of the community

Support programs

Consideration needs to be given to the expanding opportunities for of education and training, along with networking and professional development, in order to encourage more women to take up positions of responsibilities either as career professionals or volunteers in the sport and physical recreation industry.

Develop Inclusive Policy

As an essential component to systemic change the role of policy development must be closely considered.

- Policy change at all levels which makes the industry more female inclusive.
- Special consideration needs to be given to legislative and policy issues that affect women's participation in physical activity including the cost of participation, the standard of physical activity in school, a lack of government funding for women's programs and the lack of concessions for women who lead active and healthy lives.

Profile women

We must acknowledge the substantial contribution of women in sport and physical recreation and the vast array of skills and experience they are able to bring to the table

- Promotion of the value that women bring to the sport and recreation sector.
- Promotion of the achievements of women in sport and recreation at all levels
- A clear focus on issues related to the quality and quantity of media coverage for women in sport and physical recreation and work to encouraging greater public acknowledgement of women's achievements.

