



Melbourne University Sports Association

To: Senate Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Re: Inquiry into higher education funding and regulatory legislation

1. This submission addresses the issue of **Optional Membership of Student Organisations** as proposed in "Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future".
2. This submission is made on behalf of the **Melbourne University Sports Association** (hereafter 'MUSA'). MUSA is one of the **three student organisations recognised by the Council of the University of Melbourne** and one of its functions is to represent the sporting interests of the student body.
3. **MUSA opposes an optional services fee because it is inequitable to disadvantaged students and it will destroy sport and physical recreation at the University.** At the University of Melbourne the compulsory fee paid by every student is used to provide student services; membership of student organisations is voluntary and is not linked to the payment of this fee. Sport receives a portion of the services fee, historically between 20-25%. The remainder of the sport budget comes from fee-for-service revenue. The funds from the services fee are used in two ways: first, to encourage student participation in physical recreation programs; and second, to support the activities of sports clubs by providing them with direct financial support and use of the facilities. Without a universal services fee that subsidises the cost of sport and physical recreation, many students could not afford to undertake any organised sporting activity. It is inequitable to restrict the sport and physical recreation opportunities of students according to economic circumstances. Further, many clubs could not survive without support owing to the high costs associated with certain sports.
4. **Sport plays an important role within the University community and it should be fostered and encouraged in higher education policy, rather than threatened with extinction by this proposal.** Universities recognise the importance of sports clubs in University life, in particular through their role in providing ideal vehicles for the transition of students into tertiary education and in creating a sense of community. One of the objects of the University of Melbourne, as set out in the *University of Melbourne Act 1958(Vic)* s4A(c), is 'to equip graduates of the University to excel in their chosen careers and to contribute to the life of the community'. One of the great virtues of sport is that it fosters the skills necessary for students to become active citizens. Undermining the capacity of Universities to provide sporting opportunities to all their students would weaken higher education in this country.

Charles Parkinson
President
8 August 2003