



Australian Government



# **AUSTRALIAN SPORT:** emerging challenges, new directions



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### **THE NEED FOR REFORM**

Australia has long over-achieved and out-performed our competitors on the sporting stage but that stage is becoming increasingly crowded and competitive. Whilst new competitors are emerging and old foes are growing stronger, Australia must adapt to these changing circumstances and embrace change. No longer can it simply be business as usual.

Reform of the Australian sports system – both at elite and community level – can be put off no longer. Over the past decade there have been many reports into sport – the Oakley report, the Senate's inquiry into women in sport, a review of the ASC act, an unreleased plan for disabled sport – and yet very few of the recommendations have been acted upon.

It is clear that we need new directions in sport to meet the emerging challenges and to maintain our status as one of the world's greatest sporting nations.

If we are to act responsibly and safeguard the future of Australian sport, we must now embrace reform. And it must range from the very highest levels of elite sport, right down to the grassroots.

The Rudd Government believes we need new direction in two key areas: the way we support elite sport; and the manner which we use sport to boost participation and physical activity to help build a healthier nation.

Federal sport policy is delivered through a range of structures. These include the Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority and the Department of Health and Ageing. In turn they talk to stakeholders including the State Government and their institutes and academies, the National Sporting Organisations, athletes and bodies such as the Australian Olympic Committee, the Australian Paralympic Committee and the Australian Commonwealth Games Association.

While this paper outlines the direction the Rudd Government believes sport policy should move, further detailed conversations need to take place with each stakeholder.

The Rudd Government is not seeking to tear down the structures and systems that have made Australian sport as strong as it is today. Rather we are building on the good work done in the past to make sure Australian sport stays strong into the future.

We believe the system needs to be modernised to meet the new and emerging challenges of the global sporting environment.

In addition this paper will outline a number of specific projects that this Government will focus upon in this parliamentary term, namely improving the status of women in sport, improving delivery of indigenous sport and will examine how to improve access for disabled athletes at both elite and grassroots level.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT

Sport is integral to Australia's way of life, our view of ourselves and how we are viewed by the rest of the world. It helps build the social cohesion that binds families, communities, regions and the nation. No other facet of our culture has the capacity to bring together so many different streams of Australian life in mutual joy and celebration. Cathy Freeman's 400m win in 2000, John Aloisi's penalty against Uruguay that sealed our first World Cup qualification for 32 years, or Kieren Perkins astonishing gold medal win in Atlanta are not only great sporting moments but great Australian moments.

Sport is important for more than just reasons of national pride, or even as a way of building a fitter, more vibrant nation. Sport reaches across our society in ways which are not always apparent, and involves even those who profess no love of sport.

Sport and recreation are major components of the national economy, be it through employment in the sport and recreation industry (75,155 people in 2006), sales of goods and services both domestically and internationally and small business development.

In 2004-05, the total income generated by the sport and recreation industry in Australia was estimated at \$8.82 billion. The income reported by sports and physical recreation clubs, teams and sports professionals was \$1.88 billion and sports and physical recreation administrative organisations was \$1.53 billion.

Sport is also a powerful tool for international engagement. We must not overlook the importance of sport in tourism, aid and trade.

Australia has developed an international reputation for sporting excellence, through our national team performances, the staging of major international events including the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2003 Rugby World Cup and the Federal Government is supportive of the Football Federation's bid to bring the World Cup to Australia in 2018.

Major international sporting events yield opportunities in tourism. Such activities attract people to Australia's rural and regional areas as well as major cities generating income and employment for local economies. Further, it can be said that major events attract sizeable global television audiences, providing significant opportunities to promote Australia as a tourism destination.

Sport also provides an opportunity for Australia to show leadership in assisting developing countries through the provision of resources, services, knowledge and facilities, to access the benefits of physical activity and sport including social cohesion, capacity building within communities, and raising the profile of other nations. The intersection of sport and international volunteering also gives rise to some strong regional engagement opportunities.

At a local level, involvement in sport builds families as well as communities. Active parents provide positive role models for children for engaging in sport and for maintaining lifelong activity. As importantly, the parents who are involved in their children's sport through coaching, umpiring and general volunteering send a powerful message about the importance they place on sharing and valuing the efforts and interests of their children.

Sport has a range of benefits at both the community and individual level. At the community level, sport brings people together, break downs barriers and unites those who may have nothing else in common. Sport has a unique ability to transcend race, religion, gender and creed. It is truly a tool of social cohesion.

At the individual level the Rudd Government believes an involvement in sport from an early age can help build character and discipline in children that they can be applied to other aspects of their lives. The precepts of hard work, self-esteem, good health, discipline and team work that are necessary to achieve success in any sporting endeavour can be translated to everyday life.

Sport is also a powerful tool in building the health of the nation. The Rudd Government has already ensured that sport is an integral part of its preventative health agenda.

## **ENSURING AUSTRALIA'S CONTINUED SUCCESS AT ELITE LEVEL**

### **Background**

Australians have become used to over-performing at elite level competition. From the nadir of failing to win a gold medal at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, and only garnering five medals in total, Australia has rebuilt its reputation as a formidable sporting nation that consistently excels at Olympic level.

At the 1988 Seoul Games we won 14 medals, three of which were gold, at Barcelona this improved to 27 in total, seven of which were gold, further improvement was achieved at Atlanta with 41, including nine gold, which was followed by the fantastic success at Sydney 2000 with 58 medals and 16 gold and then Athens with 49 medals in total and a record 17 gold.

Outside the Olympics we have seen our national teams achieve phenomenal international successes, with world championships in rugby, cricket, women's basketball, men's and women's hockey, rugby league, cycling, women's lacrosse, and netball to name just a few.

The establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport in 1980 was a key reform that paved the way for much of the subsequent success. We pooled our resources, found a new focus in sport science and placed the benefits of excellence in coaching at the hub of the system.

In many ways the AIS was a pioneer in its field, not just in Australia, but globally and developed a reputation as the Harvard of world sport academies.

The formation of the Australian Sports Commission was another pivotal moment but more than 20 years on the ASC must also adapt to the changing circumstances it now finds itself in. The ASC has provided powerful leadership for sport in the past and will continue to do so in the future as part of a newly co-ordinated sporting landscape.

### **Emerging Challenges**

It is clear global competition is getting tougher and many of our competitor nations are devoting increasing resources to sport.

Many countries have adopted elite sports structures and programs similar to those in Australia, and many Australian coaches and scientists have accepted opportunities overseas, with some now making substantial contributions to the performances of Australia's major competitors.

It is true the raw numbers are against us. Our elite talent pool is estimated at 200,000. Compare this with the United States' 2 million and China's 20 million. Australia's population is also ageing while countries such as China have far younger populations.

In addition, available information points to the fact that a number of Australia's closest competitors in major international competition have dramatically increased the resources available for sport in total. Many have adopted targeted programs to develop successful athletes in particular sports.

The British government, in particular has ramped up its spending in sport, after many years of neglect, as it prepares for the Olympic Games in London in 2012. Many European nations are building resources in sport where they have been traditionally weak, but in which Australia has been strong.

There are also anecdotal reports that China has as many as 20,000 full-time athletes in training as Beijing prepares to host the 2008 Olympic Games.

While Australia may not be able to compete on a dollar-for-dollar basis with some of these larger countries, it is clear we need to respond to the emerging challenge they pose.

## **New directions**

The Rudd Government will reform the delivery of our elite sporting programs to minimise duplication and maximise the benefits and effectiveness of available resources.

We must use sports funding smarter, re-committing to science and technology, sharpening and reshaping existing structures and redefining the relationship between the AIS and the state and territory sports institutes and academies to better focus our investment. We will remove the duplication where it exists between the AIS and state institutes and ensure that every dollar being invested in elite programs is being used most effectively.

Innovation, research, science and technology will be the drivers of Australian sporting excellence in the decades to come and we will look for ways to work closer with our universities to improve our sport science base. We will prioritize investment in sport science as a key driver of our competitive advantage.

We need to put the necessary reforms in place now to resume Australia's innovative approach to elite sport or risk jeopardising our place as a leading sporting nation.

We can lock in beyond doubt the AIS's reputation as the Harvard of world sport but the Federal Government cannot continue complacently. Some of these reforms will be difficult and controversial but they are necessary.

We will also take into account the relationship between the ASC, the AIS, National Sporting Organisations, State Governments and their sporting institutes and academies to find the most effective way of structuring their interdependent relationships.

The Rudd Government will appoint an independent panel to advise upon the best means to implement such change.

The National Sporting Organisations, not governments, run sport in Australia. They perform a vital role in ensuring Australians have access to many different sports. They are responsible for developing athletes, all the way from the youngest child to our Olympic champions. They are the backbone of sport in Australia and must be nurtured and supported to help sport fulfil its enormous potential.

The Government would also like to encourage greater recognition of the importance of coaches and will examine the re-establishment of the Australian Coaching Council, or other measures, to equip them with the latest and best information in their fields. Recognition that coaches are role models and mentors needs to be enhanced. It is often the case that a junior athlete commitment and enthusiasm for a sport is based almost entirely on the quality of their coach. In many ways Australia's future sporting success is up to our coaches and training officials.

The Rudd Government also believes the ASC must continue to produce innovative programs to find and develop Australia's best athletes.

Programs such as the National Talent Identification and Development Program, which assist sports in identifying talented athletes and prepare them for participation in domestic, national and eventually, international competition are crucial in finding the next generation of athlete.

Likewise, the development of the European Training Centre is evidence of a creative approach to equipping our athletes to meet global competition. The Centre will provide, and facilitate high level support for Australian athletes whilst training and competing overseas in key international sporting events, in particular in the lead up to the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## **INCREASING PARTICIPATION RATES AND MAKING SPORT PART OF THE PREVENTATIVE HEALTH AGENDA**

### **Background**

The Federal Government believes rather than debating the merits of elite sports versus community sport, we should embrace and recognise the vital interconnections between the two. The reality is that our elite sport system only prospers when we have a strong talent base on which to draw. Equally, having successful and high performing role models in sport is integral to encouraging children to take up sport and aspire to reach their own dreams.

In recent times, junior and community sport has been approached with a focus, almost exclusively, on increasing the pool from which our elite athletes can be drawn. This focus must be dramatically expanded. We must recognise that everyone's involvement in sport and physical activity brings its own rewards.

Whereas early federal sports policy had a clear focus on community physical activity and 'Life. Be In It' style programs, this has declined over time to become virtually non-existent.

Community participation in sport spans a number of central objectives: developing basic skills and healthy disciplines in young children; contributing directly and significantly to better health and prevention of chronic disease across all segments of the community; and promoting a more inclusive and engaged community.

Yet at a community level, participation in sport and local activities is declining. Federal sports policy must fill this void and play a central role in a preventative health agenda. It is why the first decision of the Rudd Government in this area was to shift Sport into the Health portfolio.

### **Emerging challenges**

There are obvious challenges. In 2004-05, 70% of Australians aged 15 years and over were classified as sedentary or having low exercise levels. No improvements have been seen since exercise levels were measured in 1995. These low exercise levels have been a major contributor to Australia's current status as one of the world's most overweight developed nations.

Over a 15 year period, from 1989-90 to 2004-05, the proportion of obese adults in Australia has doubled (from 9% to 18%). These dramatic increases in body weight have already seen the number of Australians with diabetes triple over the past two decades. This will dramatically escalate if the historical growth rate in obesity is not abated. That growth rate, when combined with demographic ageing, could see obesity rise to some 29% of the population by 2025.

Sport and physical activity offer powerful defences against obesity and associated chronic diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes and the Federal Government is determined to get Australia active again.

At the community level, participation in sport and local activities is declining. In the past decade, time spent by Australians on sport and outdoor activity decreased on average by nearly an hour a week, while time spent on activities such as watching television and using the Internet increased by an hour.

In a recent survey, approximately 11.8 million Australians (73%) reported no involvement in organised sport. In 2005–06, approximately 5.5 million people reported that they did not participate in any sports or physical recreation activities of any kind over the preceding year.

## **New directions**

The Rudd Government has already placed the sport portfolio in the Department of Health to underscore its new approach to the benefits of sport to the general population. We will continue to champion the benefits of sport in building a healthier nation.

The Government is bringing forward this year's annual meeting of Federal and State sport ministers to quickly address these issues and to find a common ground in the best way to build participation across all age groups in community sport.

It is also being proposed that the issue of using sport to assist in the Federal Government's preventative health agenda be placed on the agenda for a future Council of Australian Governments meeting. Additionally the Preventative Health Taskforce will incorporate sport and physical activity into its 2008 agenda.

The Rudd Government will ensure that sport and physical activity are key elements of our preventative health agenda and we will deliver this through the forums previously mentioned.

In addition, the Rudd Government will work with the National Sporting Organisations, to revitalise the building blocks of school and community sports.

We will examine ways to support community sports clubs. The Government recognises that increasing participation requires strong local clubs, which in turn are built on the unstinting hard work of volunteers, whether they be coaches, assistant coaches, umpires and referees, administrators, the dad who cooks the barbie or the grandma who cuts the oranges for the half-time break.

They are all part of a greater network of sport volunteers who have made Australian sport what it is today, and what it will be tomorrow. The Government believes they should be applauded for their selfless efforts and more appropriately recognised.

The Government will also introduce programs such as Local Sporting Champions which will be available to children and young people up to the age of 18 years old to compete in significant sport or specialist sporting events which involve travel greater than 250km.

The Government is committed to ensuring children are active. More than 150,000 children have participated in, and learned basic sporting skills in the Active After Schools Community Program and the Government will examine how this program can be further developed and improved so that more children commit to regular sporting participation as a result of their involvement. The Government will also examine how links with community clubs and sporting stakeholders can be improved to ensure the most effective structure of the program is in place.

We also recognise that many National Sporting Organisations are running tremendous grassroots programs to boost participation. The Government will work with these National Sporting Organisations to share information and expand on successful principles and programs.

We recognise that participation in sport and physical activity requires adequate local facilities. The national drought has created particular difficulties and we will discuss with State and local Government, as well as other Government departments an appropriate approach to the provision of sporting infrastructure to help sporting clubs and organisations offer the best opportunity to maximise their ability to attract new participants and develop and retain existing members.

## **PROMOTING WOMEN IN SPORT**

### **Emerging Challenges**

The Rudd Government believes women's sport has not received the profile that it deserves in a country that idolises its sporting heroes. We are a country which produces a remarkable number of truly inspiring and amazing female athletes. They deserve to be recognised and celebrated as the heroes that they are and household names they should be.

Women's sport in Australia has been victim of the vicious circle in which poor media exposure leads to lesser profile and exposure, which leads to lesser sponsorship and remuneration opportunities, which leads to less financial support and opportunities for promotional activities which leads back to less media coverage. The cycle must be broken.

Raising the profile of women in sport is an important challenge for Government. Only 53% of 14 year old girls and 30% of women over 65 participate in organised sport. Only 13% of executive positions in the top 40 sporting organisations are filled by women. And only 2% of televised sport is women's sport.

For a country that loves to celebrate our sporting achievements it is fundamental that we give all Australians recognition of achievement and sporting heroes to inspire them.

### **New directions**

Women have been sidelined and marginalised in Australian sport for too long. This has been widely acknowledged, most recently by a Senate Committee Report on Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia which was delivered under the previous Government but never responded to. It is now time for action.

The Rudd Government will examine the Senate report into this issue, along with the submissions made to the enquiry and the broader debates and finally ensure that a Federal Government responds to the issue. More importantly, the Rudd Government will act.

The Government made election commitments to help televise a new national soccer league for women and has also invested in the new Trans-Tasman netball competition.

We will also look to create more training opportunities for women, put in place a structure to appropriately recognise achievement to take real and practical steps to tackle the under-representation of women in sport.

In conjunction with the Office for Women, the Australian Sports Commission also provides funding through the Sports Leadership Grants for Women Program in five key areas: high performance coaching and officiating; Indigenous women; women in disability sport; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and women in general sports leadership.

The promotion of women in sport will be a key priority for the Rudd Government to address this term.

## **MAXIMISING EFFECTIVENESS OF INDIGENOUS SPORT PROGRAM**

### **Emerging challenges**

Research indicates between 2001 and 2005 there has been a shift towards lower levels of physical activity by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There has also been an increase in the proportion of sedentary behaviour amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aged 15 years and over during this period from 37% to 47%.

Sport and physical activity can help close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians life expectancy by providing a practical tool for Indigenous communities to achieve positive outcomes in areas such as physical wellbeing and mental health, education and social dysfunction.

### **New directions**

For too long the funding of indigenous sport has been heavily fragmented between Federal Government, State Governments, non-Government organisations and sporting bodies.

It would be a great advantage to better coordinate the different pools of Government and private dollars to use these funds more efficiently, identify duplication and focus on how it can be spent more effectively to achieve best results.

The Federal Government must work closely with National Sporting Organisations on their existing indigenous sport initiatives and ensure that Government itself has the most effective funding structure in place. Major sports such as Australian Rules Football have already made great strides in building links with indigenous communities.

The Government must build on existing programs such as its commitment to help fund a team from the Northern Territory to play in either the South Australian National Football League or the West Australian Football League. Such a program is aimed at maximising the career potential of young Indigenous players without forcing them away from their homes and to also offer a clearer pathway to the Australian Football League for the elite players.

The Government will enhance the capacity and coordination of sport participation and development programs for Indigenous Australians in partnership with State and Territory Government sport and recreation agencies, through the engagement of Indigenous Sport Development Officers, and National Sporting Organisations.

Further, we will promote Traditional Indigenous Games and Cross Cultural Awareness programs, as well as support talented Indigenous Australians to progress along mainstream sporting pathways.

## **ENHANCE SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION OF DISABLED SPORT**

### **Emerging challenges**

There are clear impediments to participation in organised sport and physical activity for people with disabilities. In line with the Government's commitment that everyone will have the opportunity to participate in sport, recreation and physical activity, we need to ensure that, at the community level, there are no barriers for people with disabilities to participate.

## New directions

Another report commissioned under the previous Government, this time on disabled sport also lies idle. That report needs to be examined to find methods to improve pathways into elite for disabled athletes but also to improve participation more broadly.

Elite athletes with disabilities are elite athletes and should be recognised as such. Having opportunities and access to sporting pathways are paramount to the success of these athletes.

The Federal Government will consult with State and Territory Governments, various sporting groups for the disabled including the Australian Paralympic Committee and National Sporting Organisations to ensure that there are appropriate opportunities and access to sporting pathways to support athletes with a disability.

## ONGOING APPROACH

The Rudd Government is not seeking to tear down the structures and systems that have made Australian sport as strong as it is today. Rather we are building on the good work done in the past to make sure Australian sport stays strong into the future.

In this regard there are a number of areas where the Federal Government will seek to address long-standing issues that have still to be fully resolved by sport.

We believe Australia should be at the forefront of the war against doping in sport. The Rudd Government makes no apologies for taking a tough stance on drugs in sport and will be vocal and strong in delivering its anti-doping message both at home and internationally through its strong representation on the board of the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) is already acknowledged as a world leader in its field and the recent appointment of John Fahey as WADA President will give further weight to Australia's leadership in the fight against drugs in sport.

ASADA was created in 2006 in order to establish a new, independent body to ensure all doping allegations are fully and rigorously investigated. ASADA has the important role of implementing the Australian anti-doping regime consistent with the World Anti-Doping Code and the powers provided by its enabling legislation.

ASADA's role is also to assist National Sporting Organisations, athletes and support personnel to meet their anti-doping responsibilities through the delivery of a range of programs, including education services.

It has more tools than ever before to catch those who try and cheat not only the system but their fellow athletes. ASADA can now detect anti-doping rule violations through a strategic, targeted and efficient detection program that incorporates both testing and investigations.

The Rudd Government will continue to ensure Australia remains a world leader on anti-doping.

High profile athletes are also well placed to be positive role models for our current and future athletes and to the community more generally. The Government has already engaged with the professional sports as part of its campaign to address the problem of binge drinking in our community.

We see athletes and sporting organisations as being ideally placed to spread the message about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. They are an important part of the solution and not the cause of the problem. It is important that our sporting community is utilised to spread positive messages and not just negatively lambasted when scandal arises.

Similarly, the Government believes athletes have an important role to play in reinforcing the Government's campaign on illicit drug use.

Sporting heroes are significant role models in our community who have the capacity to send mixed messages about the impact of dangerous drug use on a person's health and wellbeing.

The Rudd Government will work with the National Sporting Organisations to implement a consistent illicit drug strategy which is aimed at both player welfare and broader messages to the community.

We recognise the important role that sport can play in whole-of-government initiatives whether it be in community information, social inclusion or multicultural integration. To this end the Rudd Government will seek to strengthen the relationship to National Sporting Organisations and appropriately expand the role of sport.

## **CONCLUSION**

Australia has a long and proud sporting history but to maintain our position, and to enhance it, change is a must. The Rudd Government believes as a nation we must re-apply ourselves to the pursuit of sporting excellence.

At the same time the Government also believes that sport plays a crucial role in developing a vibrant, healthy nation and that sport can be a powerful, uniting force for all Australians.

To stand still is not an option.