



AUSTRALIAN WOMENSPORT AND RECREATION ASSOCIATION INC

2007 ELECTION POLICY

1. Introduction:

The Australian Womensport and Recreation Association (AWRA) is an enthusiastic and dynamic volunteer organisation committed to providing leadership and advocacy for Australian girls and women in sport and active recreation.

In two years AWRA:

- has developed its Strategic Plan,
- completed a national survey on women's sport issues,
- commenced the development of a web-site,
- developed web-based learning modules on women's governance and leadership
- has produced and distributed bi-monthly E-newsletters to members and the wider community;
- has presented at various conferences and contributed to the 2006 Senate Inquiry into Women's sport and recreation in Australia
- has lobbied government and other agencies with issues relating to women in sport.

While much has improved in Australia for girls and women in sport and recreation, there is still much more than needs to change before there is gender equity in the Australian sports industry.

In this Federal election year AWRA is lobbying our national political parties for a more level playing field in the sports industry and, as a starting point, is seeking support for the recommendations of the 2006 Senate Report *About Time!*

Women in sport and recreation in Australia. While this was a bipartisan report with all members of the Senate Committee agreeing that strong and urgent action was needed to give women a better sporting go, nothing has happened since. There has yet to be a government response through the Minister for Sport, Senator George Brandis, or an Australian Sports Commission response. Further, the 2007-2008 government budget did not allow funding to implement any of the Senate Report recommendations.

The Confederation of Australian Sport has recently released its 2007 Federal Election Policy Platform (www.sportforall.com.au) which addresses international sporting success, the obesity crisis, sport in schools, sport and recreation facilities and play spaces, industry investment, establishment of a Sport Equality Commission and volunteers. AWRA supports CAS's recommendations in regard to these headings.

2. AWRA wishes to highlight the international documents that Australia has signed in support of gender equality. These are:

- 1979, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- 1994, the Brighton Declaration (UK)
- 1998, Windhoek Call for Action, (Namibia)
- 1995, Beijing Platform for Action
- 2002, Manchester Communiqué from the Manchester Commonwealth Games

The above Manchester Communiqué is very relevant today. It states that the Sports Ministers:

- ✓ are committed to developing a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport
- ✓ are committed to creating a positive environment in which all women have an equal opportunity and adequate resources to be involved in all areas of physical activity and sport of their choice and at their chosen level and capacity
- ✓ are committed to improving and promoting opportunities for women in sport at every level – whether as participants, competitors, coaches or administrators
- ✓ recommend active cooperation between sport and health, education, and gender agencies at national and international level and in particular within the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Looking at the global context Australia still needs to follow-up it's signing of international documents and further progress its implementation of change and action within the sports industry. There needs to be systematic and effective implementation of these charters, which requires strong political will, resources and mechanisms for action and securing accountability.

Further, gender equality and the empowerment of women is a development goal in its own right and is essential for the achievement of other goals in all socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental areas. The positive links between gender equality and empowerment of women and effective and sustainable development are very clear. Women represent half the resources and half the potential of families, communities and nations. Progress for women is progress for all. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Anna, has said that “there was no development tool more effective than the empowerment of women”.

While this dialogue may present as “a women’s sport issue” it is an issue for the whole sports industry and for Australian society in general. Sport is no different to the rest of our society where board rooms are dominated by men (7:1 ratio in the sports industry). Gender equality and empowerment of women across the sport and recreation industry is really men’s and women’s business. What is needed is a partnership of women and men working together to create and implement change, to introduce the solutions to the challenges faced by women’s sport.

3. International Developments

Many western countries have instigated successful policies and programs in recent years and Australia could learn from, and indeed adapt, some of these.

3.1 In April 2007 the UK government implemented its **Gender Equality Duty (GED) legislation, which aims to improve sporting opportunities for women and the wider community.** It places a statutory obligation on all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between men and women and eliminate discrimination and harassment. The GED provides a framework (a planning tool) for authorities to better understand the barriers to participation and to provide facilities and activities that meet the needs of their communities.

Traditionally, discrimination law (in the UK and still the case in Australia) has relied on individuals to prove that discrimination has occurred. The GED requires a change of mind-set, with the emphasis now on the pro-active promotion of opportunities.

At this early stage over 70 governing bodies and sports organisations have met stage 1 of the legislation. Sport England is delighted with this progress which is significantly greater than originally anticipated. Local authorities will now have to monitor who is using their sports facilities, and put in place measures to better promote them to under-represented groups. It is expected that the GED will address such traditional problems such as a lack of female changing facilities and the historic block booking of pitches for men’s clubs.

3.2 In 2005 the French Government adopted two ministerial sport objectives: to improve leadership access for women and the development of women’s and

girls' sports in disadvantaged urban areas. To improve leadership access for women an agreement was reached between the government and the sports federations, with a call for proportionality between the number of registered female participants and the number of women holding leadership positions in sports organisations.

3.3 In 2005 Canada instigated the successful *Coach for Canada* program to improve the numbers and retention of women in sports coaching. The program commenced with three sports in eight provinces and has since increased the number of sports and extended the program to more provinces.

3.4 German free-to-air television hosts a daily 15 minute keep fit program which targets older women and men and caters to those with limited mobility.

3.5 France has a successful award scheme to promote the image and role of women in sports and physical activities. In 2005 there were four prize categories for the National Award for Women and Sport, awarding 5-10,000 euros to the winners and there were 24 regional awards with 275,000 euros distributed to 188 winners.

3.6 Germany and France have national resource centres for Women and Sports, to collect, organize and analyze data, to promote innovative practices in sports and to provide training for female coaches, officials and management.

Australia can learn by looking at other national initiatives, which have been instigated by governments committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and improved sporting outcomes.

4 .Health Benefits of Women Participating in Sport and Recreation

Participation in physical activity contributes to the overall physical and psychological health of individuals of all ages and social groups. The benefits of a healthy and physically active community have been well recognised, not just for significant economic benefits through reduced health budgets, but for the social and cohesive benefits to local communities.

The Senate Report looked at the health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation. AWRA contributed the following:

- Reduction in cardiovascular disease which is the leading cause of death in Australia – and recent research indicates that physical activity benefits women more than men in this regard
- Reduced risk of breast cancer
- Reduced risk of reproductive cancers
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Reduced risk of osteoporosis
- Reduced risk of diabetes

- Reduced risk of falls and fractures
- Lower body weight and adiposity
- Improved quality of breast milk
- Improved mental health, with improved learning efficiency and less risk of depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease

From a health perspective, and particularly because of the epidemic of overweight and obese individuals, it is extremely important that Australian girls and women are encouraged and motivated to be physically active, whether this activity is in the context of organised sport or recreational activities.

Further, there needs to be greater cooperation between the education, health and sports sector to tackle the obesity and overweight crisis so that as a nation we are working together to produce healthy Australians.

5. Australian Facts and Figures

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data for 2003 indicates that;

- Across all age groups boys had higher participation rates (69%) in organized sport than girls (54%).
- Participation in sport and physical activities for males was 62.4% and females was 59.9%
- Non organised participation revealed a lower participation rate for males (30.7%) than females (31.4%).
- Women born in non- English speaking countries have significantly lower participation rates in sports and physical recreational activities (46.3%) than women born in Australia (63.6%) or born in English speaking countries (66.5%).

In the area of leadership and governance, women continue to be under represented in the decision making structures of sports organisations. Statistics indicate that the number of women on national sporting organisations (NSO) boards is at a very low level, with a national average of one woman to seven men on boards in 2005. Consistent with this is the low number of women in executive positions, with women holding only 135 of executive officer positions in the top 40 funded NSOs.

Women continue to be under represented in coaching, officiating and administration roles. In 2006 the Australian Sports Commission data reveals a total of 46,743 male accredited coaches to 25,102 female coaches. The figures for accredited officials in May 2006 was a total of 3025 male officials to 1950 female coaches.

The media coverage of women's sport indicates entrenched sexism. While Australian women achieve wonderful results, often outshining the men, the media

coverage is very low and has hardly improved in the last 20 years. Across television, the coverage is about 2%, with Fox Sports, SBS and the ABC making up this figure as the commercial free-to air networks show hardly any women's sport and do not report their data on sporting coverage. Print media coverage is about 4-10% depending on events and radio coverage is most disturbing of all, usually with little to no coverage of women's sport.

AWRA's January 2007 national survey showed that respondents rated media coverage of women's sport in Australia today as poor (52%) or terrible (23%).

6. Senate Report Recommendations

AWRA strongly supports all the recommendations from the Senate Inquiry.

Grass roots participation: Recommendation 1

That the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and state and territory sport and recreation authorities, in collaboration with the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, develop and implement strategies to address the issue of the high attrition rates in female participation in sport and recreation activities.

A starting point for this would be the development of a cohesive national sport policy for women, covering grass-roots to elite participation, as suggested by AWRA in its Senate submission.

Recommendation 2

That all levels of government consider extending resources to a broader range of sports to ensure that women are provided with greater choice and opportunity for participating in physical activity including for example outdoor recreation and dance.

Recommendation 3

That in light of the pressure on available sporting facilities, state and territory education authorities should work with sporting clubs and organisations, and local communities, to improve cooperation and access to facilities for children's sporting activities, particularly schools.

Further to this AWRA would like to see more provision of sport and recreation facilities for the wider community with greater parity of funding for facilities used by women.

Recommendation 4

That the ASC inquire into the dress code policies of sports organisations with a view to encouraging clubs, schools and sports organisations to review these policies.

Recommendation 5

That sporting organisations, with the assistance of the ASC and state and territory sport and recreation authorities, develop strategies to provide more sporting activities focussed on participation and enjoyment.

Recommendation 6

That the Commonwealth, states, territories and local government recognise the importance of occasional child care in facilitating women's participation in sport and recreation.

Recommendation 7

That sport and recreation provider organisations canvass members to establish the most suitable times that will enable women to participate in sport and recreation activities and provide access to women during those times.

Recommendation 8

That the Commonwealth encourage state and territory governments, and especially local government, to address the lack of women's facilities at sporting venues.

Elite Participation

Recommendation 9

That the ASC further develop and expand the Australian Institute of Sport ACE career assistance program to enable a greater number of athletes to compete in elite sports. The committee recommends the Australian Olympic Committee expand its ASPIRE Career Assistance Program.

Recommendation 10

That a concerted effort be made by governments, sporting organisations and the media to promote sportswomen as role models to girls and women and to the wider community. This recommendation aims to motivate girls and women to pursue a career in sport and to motivate them to commence or continue participation in sport and recreation.

Recommendation 11

That NSOs review, and modify if required, the timing of national league competitions to facilitate participation by elite sportswomen in Australia's national representative teams.

Leadership and Governance

Recommendation 1

That appropriate organisations with an interest in women in sport and recreation be funded by the ASC to provide skills training in the areas of leadership, communication skills and successful team building; and that the Commonwealth fund the Commission to implement this.

Recommendation 2

That the ASC continue to provide opportunities for women sport leaders to attend workshops and forums to develop techniques for successful networking.

Recommendation 3

That the ASC Sport Leadership Grants for Women be continued and that the Commonwealth increase funding for this scheme.

AWRA recommends that the funding is increased to \$1 million (now it averages \$2500 per person or organisation, totalling only \$400,000).

While the Senate Report did not suggest targets or quotas, AWRA supports the setting of formal targets to place women into sports leadership roles. If sporting bodies do not change it is time to start enforcing the 'cracking of the glass ceiling'.

AWRA urged the Senate Committee to recommend that all sporting organisations receiving government funding should have board representation of up to 20% by the end of 2007 and that this percentage gradually increase over the next 10 years, aiming for a future minimum gender representation on boards of 35%.

Women's Sport and the Media

Recommendation 1

That the Australian Government provide financial support, to be administered by the ASC, for initiatives that provide specific opportunities for greater ongoing coverage of women's sport. The committee believes this program should administer funding of up to \$3 million per annum, and be reviewed after approximately three years.

Further to this AWRA recommends that the ASC or other federal agency should support the development and production of a quality half hour national television program on women's sport.

Recommendation 2

That the government consider allocating up to \$1 million to the Australian Paralympic Committee to assist with production and associated costs of televised coverage of the forthcoming Paralympics, and that the arrangement include stipulation that a condition of accessing this funding be that there be balanced coverage of male and female athletes.

Recommendation 3

That the Australian Government provide financial support, to be administered by the ASC, for the training of athletes and sports administrators to better utilise media opportunities.

Recommendation 4

That the government fund the ASC to replicate in 2008–09 the surveys and analysis performed in the 1996 report *An Illusory Image*.

7. Conclusion

AWRA seeks action on the recommendations of the 2006 Senate Report, with particular attention to the leadership and media recommendations.

Consequently, it is strongly recommended that a national task force is established with terms of reference and resources to implement solutions and bring about change to increase female participation in the sports industry.

Increasing the participation of women in all facets of sport and recreation benefits the individual, the organisation, the community. This responsibility rests with the sports industry as a whole and is not just the responsibility of women or women's units. Systemic change and action is required now.

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