

**NATIONAL WOMENSPORT AND RECREATION SURVEY**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Submitted to**

**AUSTRALIAN WOMENSPORT AND RECREATION ASSOCIATION**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Introduction**

The survey was conducted on behalf of the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association (AWRA) in response to the recommendations made in the Senate Report *About time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia*, and implemented online in February 2007.

Critical issues impacting women's sport in Australia have not been formally and systematically explored. Therefore, a survey was conducted of all National and State Sporting Organizations (NSO and SSO respectively), local clubs and associations, media, government agencies and other businesses involved in women's sport in Australia. The focus of the study was to provide insights to the barriers to women participation in sports and explore the policies and strategies presently employed by sports organizations to encourage and increase female sports participation and involvement in Australia.

The report that follows contained the results of this survey representing the views, experiences and outcomes of those who responded to the survey. However, questions relating to the results of this survey or about issues related to female participation in sport and recreation could be directed to AWRA.

### **Study Design**

A cross-sectional survey was used to invite AWRA members and organizations on the list of NSO, SSO and other sport related businesses and organizations to participate in an online survey. The first survey was sent to a total of 500 confirmed contact and member listings in February 2007. The response rate stood at 301 (62%) when the survey 'closed' on February 14<sup>th</sup> 2007, with over two thirds of respondents being female.

Survey questions asked included respondents' opinions on the following issues:

1. Barriers to women participating in sport
2. Strategies used by sports organizations to encourage greater participation by women in sport
3. Responses to the Senate report
4. Strategies used by sports organizations to encourage greater media coverage of women's sport and women in sport

### **Respondents' Profile**

SSO members represented nearly half (43%) of the survey respondents followed by the NSO (19%), and other organizations and businesses. Twenty six percent (26%) of these organizations are located in Victoria followed by ACT (18%) and Western Australia (18%). One in four respondents was the organization Chief Executive Officer (CEO), which was followed closely by those in administrative and volunteer positions. The average time in their respective position was six years and the average age of respondents was 43 years. The results showed that while females, on average, represented about one in two sport participants, they were under-represented in the area of governance for the sport. This ranged from board members, to officials and coaches and were least represented in the position of chair/presidents. (Table 1)

Table 1. Description of respondents

Variables	Percentage (%)
<b>Type of Organization (N=301)</b>	
SSO	43
NSO	19
Club	9
Regional	5
Government	4
Business	3
Media	1
Others	16
<b>Location of Organization (N=301)</b>	

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New South Wales	15
Victoria	26
Queensland	15
South Australia	2
Western Australia	18
Tasmania	5
Northern Territories	1
Australian Capital Territory	18
Role or Position in the Organization (N=287)	
CEO	25
Development	11
Administration	23
Finance	1
Volunteer	22
Other	18
Years of service in this role/position (N=287)	
10 years	23
5 – 10 years	19
3 – 5 years	15
1 – 3 years	26
< 1 year	18
Age (N=284)	
> 50 years	38
41 – 50 years	26
31 – 40 years	18
21 – 30 years	16
< 21 year	1
Female representation in the organization	
Board member	38
Chair/President	34
Staff	54
Participant	47
Official	38
Coach	42

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## Major Results

### *Barriers to women participation in sports*

Respondents were asked the extent in which the following issues prevent or inhibit females from participating in sport. Table 2 showed that the most significant barriers to female participation in sport related to time (both family – and work – related) and cost issues, with time-family related issues posing the most significant barrier (47%). When asked if their organization have specific policies to encourage participation and involvement of women in sport, results showed that their organization, according to the priority of ratings, offers elite programs (50%), grass roots participation (49%), coaching (42%), talent ID (42%), volunteer roles (41%), officiating (40%), and governance (36%).

Table 2. Responses to the extent barriers prevent or inhibit participating in sports

Barriers	Major Barrier (%)	Significant Barriers (%)
Time – family related	14	47
Time – work related	14	36
Cost	10	26
Lack of childcare	8	19
Cultural barriers	5	16
Lack of transport	5	15
Non female environs	7	13
Timing of competition	4	10
Uniform policies	2	6

*Strategies used by sports organizations to encourage greater participation by women in sport*

Forty nine percent (49%) of survey respondents reported that their organization used specific policies to improve women’s participation in sport. Through open-ended interviews, respondents were asked details, in their opinion, of the strategies and policies their sport organization employed to encouraged greater involvement and participation of women in sports. It was found that tacit encouragement through promotional and educational activities was important as well as funding and the creation of new programs to attract women.

It was reported that a range of strategies and policies were employed to *encourage* and *retain* female involvement in sport which range from passive through to more aggressive approaches. Results were categorized into six key themes including: (1) promotion, (2) trials, (3) women programs, (4) education/support, (5) organization/scheduling and, (6) Grants/Funding. Details of the themes are outlined below.

Themes	Strategies
1. Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ advertising in private schools</li> <li>▪ using a sports development officer to visit and coach schools</li> <li>▪ use of women in professional capacity as role models</li> <li>▪ use of top female athletes as role models to young females</li> <li>▪ updating local website to bring awareness of the possibilities made for women</li> <li>▪ using leaflet drops</li> </ul>
2. Trials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the use of free day trials</li> <li>▪ ‘women only, come and try days’</li> <li>▪ learn to coach days</li> <li>▪ free education for female coaches</li> </ul>
3. Women’s only programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ women specific sports</li> <li>▪ creation of new programs/games targeted at females (e.g. extensions such as non-contact rugby)</li> <li>▪ schedules/activities targeted to the needs of working mothers (e.g. organizing child minding)</li> <li>▪ provide adolescent girls age-appropriate competitions</li> </ul>
4. Education/Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ push to have female representative coaches</li> <li>▪ using coaches to push involvement</li> <li>▪ having a female coordinator and ladies representatives</li> <li>▪ encourage female peers to support each other</li> <li>▪ used of top athlete as role models</li> <li>▪ explore health benefits (e.g. weightlifting)</li> <li>▪ retaining women referees</li> <li>▪ employing a full time female coordinator to increase participation numbers and retention rates</li> </ul>
5. Organization/Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ focus organization goals on achieving greater involvement</li> </ul>

- formation of a women's committee
- offering competition at all levels from grass roots to elite for juniors through to seniors (grass roots linked with trial days)
- having new junior competitions – allows for pathways to move from junior to more senior and possibly international level competitions
- developing strategies to ease and ensure smoother transition of junior players to senior levels
- play from a central location and improve match-scheduling for both genders

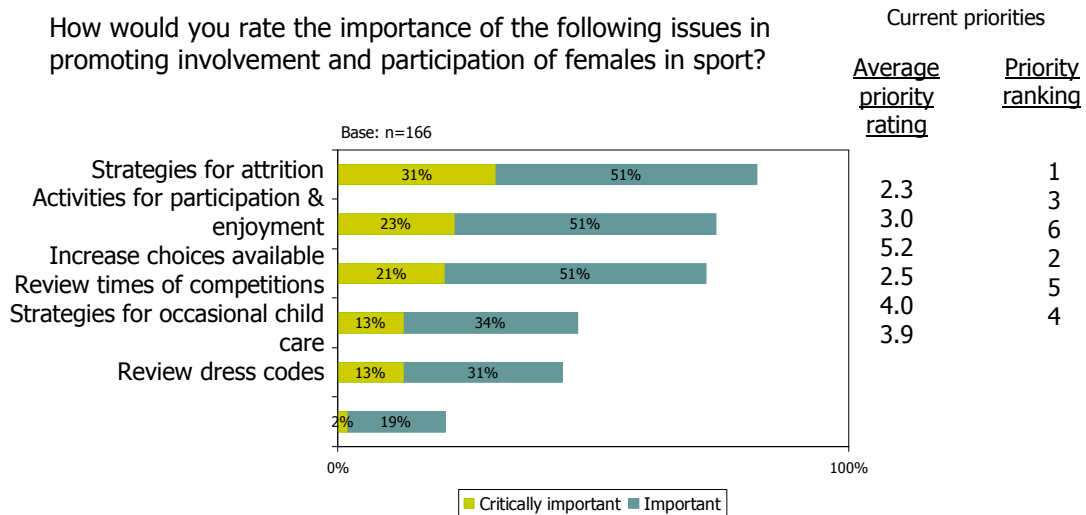
#### 6. Grants/Funding

- accessing grants to encourage/reward women
- working with the government on facility grants
- gaining of a special imitative grant from the state government aimed to expose women participants to the governance elements of the sport (allowed for modification of playing environment)

#### *Responses to the Senate report*

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a range of issues in promoting involvement and participation of females in sport. The survey found that respondents felt that the most critically important issue related to strategies for attrition. This rating concurred with the number one national priority ranking, as shown in Figure 1. Incongruencies were found with other national priorities and those of survey respondents rating in the other categories. Activities for participation and enjoyment was ranked as second in overall importance by respondents, followed by increase choices available which was ranked as number three and six in national priority respectively. The respondents' lowest rating was related to dress codes.

Figure 1. Responses to Senate Report (N=166)



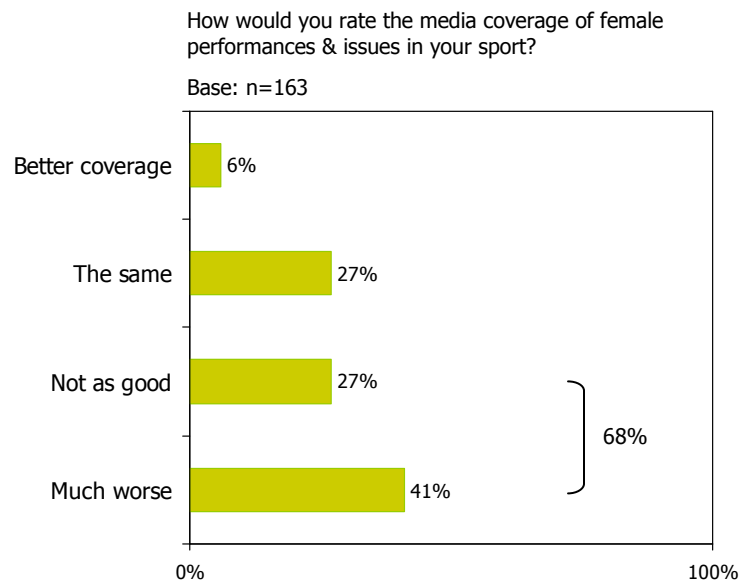
*Strategies used by sports organizations to encourage greater media coverage of women’s sport and women in sport*

Table 3 illustrates the media coverage of women’s sport. It was found that media coverage of women’s sport in Australia today was mostly rated by the respondents as poor (52%) or terrible (23%). This is congruent with the respondents rating of the media coverage of women in their own current sport as also poor (38%) and terrible (36%). Figure 2 shows the rating of the respondents towards the media coverage of female performances and issues in their own sport as predominantly much worse (41%).

Table 3. Responses to media coverage in percentages (n=163)

Media Coverage	Excellent	Good	Undecided	Poor	Terrible
Media coverage of female sport in Australia today	1	14	10	52	23
Media coverage of women in your sport today	3	14	9	38	36

Figure 2. Media coverage of female performances and issues (N=163)



Respondents were also asked to explore their perceptions of the methods that their sports organizations employed as a means of increasing media coverage of women in sport and female sport in Australia. Their open-ended responses reveal that a range of strategies are reportedly employed. These were categorized into five key themes: (1) partnerships/relationships, (2) continuity, (3) digital explorations, (4) consultancy and, (5) media releases. These themes are further discussed and explored below:

- | Themes         | Strategies  |
|----------------|---|
| 1. Partnership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ collaborating with other sports or using female ambassadors</li> <li>▪ build positive relationships with the media so they are more aware of the sport and female athletes</li> <li>▪ use relationships with sponsors to help get media coverage</li> <li>▪ remind national association of its obligations to promote players</li> <li>▪ creating strong media personalities for key athletes</li> </ul> |
| 2. Continuity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ being regular and persistent in media releases</li> <li>▪ follow potentially good players early and consistently</li> <li>▪ remain proactive with media releases and following up</li> </ul>   |

contacts to increase interests

3. Digital exploration
  - using online media such as the Internet to post online videos, podcasting etc.
  - online use is frequented by young women, allowing greater reach by this targeted audience
  - website placing profile of players to act as role models
  - continually improve website content use of radio
4. Consultancy
  - external - recruiting services of marketing company to increase coverage and profile of the sport and it's athletes
  - internal – hiring of full time media coordinator, using publicity officer
  - employ a journalist with strong networks across all media
  - obtain educational training on the media and how to work with the media to understand the realities of the industry
5. Media releases
  - maintain greater contact with media by writing own articles for them to post
  - provide the media with photos to use
  - early 'heads up' of events
  - contacting local newspapers for area specific stores

## **Discussion**

Family related time issues appeared to be the most limiting factor for women in regards to participating in sport followed by cost issues. The sporting organizations involved in the survey, however, appeared to be in-line and in-tune with the needs of the respondents with regards to these limiting issues and methods of increasing participation and involvement. It was also found that it was important to focus on female involvement across a continuum from juniors through to seniors. In particular, to foster female development and continuation in sports participation across these age groups, it was important to assist in smoother transition of junior players towards the more senior levels. Use of role models and female peers to support each other was found to be of vital importance, particularly through the encouragement of coaching positions. It is suggested that strategies to encourage initial participation by women in sport relate to the

development of women only sports, sports such as rugby adapted to 'tag only', free trial sessions and the availability of childcare facilities in organizations or sports institutes.

The media coverage of women in sport and of female sports was viewed overall by participants as being rated poor or terrible. Media coverage was viewed as opportunistic as content by media outlets need to be noteworthy or interesting. To overcome this limitation, it is recommended that sports organizations should employ an external marketing company to assist in their promotion, coverage and profile of the outstanding achievements of elite female athletes. If budgets and costs are a concern, it is recommended that sports institutions and governing bodies aim to increase their knowledge regarding the media. The realities of the industry as such can be understood by each sport and barriers identified and worked through to allow for an overall increase in the media coverage of females in sport.

A major limiting issue felt by respondents with regards to the media relate to the little support the public media held for women-sports related issues. This was due to the fact that women and sport were regarded of little priority or newsworthiness and hence were regarded of lesser priority. A majority of the sporting organizations found that preparing media releases for events or providing free entry for journalists to attend events to be a limiting method for gaining exposure. It was very much dependent on the media organizations themselves and their own interests. It was important to take a far more proactive approach. Some organizations have recently began developing partnerships with sporting organizations, obtaining female sports' ambassadors, employing publicity officers and journalists with strong media networks throughout the industry, and partnering with radio stations. These approaches are highly recommended than the ad hoc activities that are currently utilized to promote women's sport.

## **Recommendations**

AWRA should change its priorities with regards to the issue of promoting involvement and participation of females in sport to coincide to and relate with the views of the

respondents. Some priorities are incongruent with the responses found in the survey on critically important issues. Strategies for attrition, activities for participation and enjoyment and increasing choice available should rank as the top three priorities for AWRA respectively. It is highly recommended to increase media coverage of female sport, women in sport, and female performances in sport as they are viewed as predominantly terrible and much worse on average by respondents. AWRA should also seriously consider the suggestions of respondents on the strategies that promote women's participation and involvement in sport and make use the recommendation as a national agenda. It is timely to make changes in the current policies in light with the findings of this survey.