



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology
and the Arts References Committee report:**

**About Time!
Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia**



Australian Government

Statement by the Minister for Sport, Senator the Hon Kate Lundy

Australian Government Response to About Time! Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia

October 2012

The Australian Government has undertaken significant work in addressing the issues raised in the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee report *About time! Women in sport and recreation in Australia* (About Time Report). This response to the About Time Report outlines action taken by the Australian Government, its current priorities and future agenda in this area.

For ease of reading, each recommendation of the About Time Report is cross referenced by footnote to "[Appendix 1](#)".

The Australian Government seeks to ensure that the agenda for women in sport is reinvigorated as we consider contemporary issues emerging in the sports sector. It is important to move away from a focus on assertive action in a limited number of areas to implement a range of new initiatives that have been introduced since the About Time Report.

Historically, women and girls have experienced barriers to their participation in sport, recreation and physical activity. Over the last decade in particular, strategies have been developed in Australia to redress this situation and advance opportunities for women and girls. These strategies have resulted in more women and girls being involved in sport, recreation and physical activity (for adults up from 59.9 per cent per cent in 2002 to 63 per cent in 2009–10¹ and girls aged 5 to 14 from 61 per cent in 2000 to 67 per cent in 2009²) and more competitive opportunities for them, both in Australia and internationally.

However, barriers to women and girls participation unfortunately still exist. In 2006, the About Time Report found the factors that are directly responsible for the low participation rates of women and girls in sport, recreation and physical activity included:

- lack of access to appropriate, accessible, affordable and acceptable facilities and services
- lack of culturally appropriate facilities/programs
- social stereotyping
- lack of role models
- lack of time
- lack of childcare and lack of awareness of childcare options
- fewer opportunities available for participation
- reduced leisure time owing to family responsibilities
- lack of skills or perceived lack of skills
- lack of financial resources
- harassment
- lack of confidence in approaching activities alone, poor self image
- cultural and social pressures.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics 4177.0—Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 2002 and 2009–2010

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics 4901.0.55.001—Children's Participation in Sport and Leisure Time Activities, 2000 to 2009

These factors indicated that major challenges would need to be overcome before women and girls could enjoy full participation in sport, recreation and physical activity. They also indicated that to understand and address the complex influences on female participation, issues such as the broader social, economic, cultural and physical context of the lives of women and girls and the impact of the current infrastructure of sport and recreation would need to be considered.

The Australian Government supports encouraging choice and opportunity for women and girls to take part in physical activity, as recommended in the About Time Report³.

The Australian Government has made significant progress in this area since the release of the About Time Report. In 2010 the Australian Government announced its new policy, Australian Sport: The Pathway to Success, which identified the importance of boosting the number of Australians participating in sport. Key elements of this policy are:

- increased funding to targeted national sporting organisations to increase the focus on sport participation outcomes as part of their partnership with the Australian Government
- new funding measures to address particular issues affecting women's participation, advancement and leadership in sport
- increased support for training opportunities for community coaches and officials.

On 10 June 2011, Sport and Recreation Ministers from the Commonwealth and all states and territories unanimously endorsed a National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework to guide the development of policies, strategies and programs by governments. The Australian Government led this process in the pursuit of a high performing sport and active recreation system that delivers increased participation, success in international competitions and strong national sporting competitions.

The Framework identifies priority areas for cooperation across government and provides a basis to set clear targets for a range of objectives including community participation, international success and sustainability of the Australian sport system.

Despite the positive developments the Australian Government has supported, the opportunity to accelerate progress in addressing the complex influences on female involvement in sport, recreation and physical activity continues to be a focus.

The Australian Government has identified opportunities presented by the reintegration of competitive sport in the education curriculum, and continuing to improve governance arrangements and the number of women in executive roles. This will better prepare national sporting organisations to take the next step to improved commercialisation opportunities of women's elite sport competition.

Increasing the commercialisation potential of women's sport through better governance of national sporting organisations and representation of women in executive roles will support the membership growth of sports and the participation rates of all Australians, promoting a positive sporting culture, providing strong leadership and ultimately contributing to strong, sustainable sports organisations and the broader sport system.

Participation

The Australian Government plays an essential role in supporting community sport and encourages participation in sporting activities with an emphasis on enjoyment. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) works with national sporting organisations (NSOs) to facilitate structural and cultural changes in sport to provide a rewarding experience for all Australians from grassroots to an elite level, including through programs of inclusive participation⁴.

At a practical level, to encourage participation in sport and recreation activities, the ASC provides development opportunities supporting community club level sporting organisations through the Active After-school Communities program, the Community Coach Training program and the Club Development Network resources. These initiatives aim to provide an environment that attracts and retains participants. The ASC has a long standing relationship with the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation in developing participation programs, especially the Active After-school Communities⁵.

3 About Time Report Recommendation 2

4 About Time Report Recommendation 5

5 About Time Report Recommendation 1

In 2011–12, the ASC allocated a total of \$20.5 million in ongoing and one-off funding to support participation initiatives in sports, consisting of:

- \$17.2 million across 51 national sporting organisations (including the Australian Paralympic Committee)
- \$1.1 million across eight national sporting organisations for people with disability
- \$2.2 million to support ‘Participation Demonstration Projects’ across eight sports.

Currently, a total of 24 sports are working to achieve participation outcomes with under-represented population groups and 11 national sporting organisations have been funded to support initiatives to increase participation by women. The 11 that have specifically identified women as a targeted population for additional assistance within their participation growth strategy are:

1. Australian Football League
2. Netball Australia
3. Basketball Australia
4. Australian Rugby League
5. Bowls Australia
6. Australian Rugby Union
7. Cricket Australia
8. Tennis Australia
9. Football Federation Australia
10. Touch Football Australia
11. Hockey Australia.

Other initiatives supported by the Australian Government assist women and girls in regional communities in addressing barriers to participation by:

- providing funding support to NSOs to deliver coaching and officiating programs, especially in regional areas
- funding the expansion of talent scouts and talent identification programs in regional Australia
- doubling the Local Sporting Champions program to provide financial support to 4000 more young Australians and their families to help junior athletes attend competitions across Australia.

One significant barrier to participation in organised sport, especially for young women, is body image. While the contributing factors to body image can vary considerably for individuals, the sport uniforms required to participate can also contribute. The regulations around uniform policies are generally mandated from international federation policies on uniforms. Where this is not the case, most national sports have policies in place that impact only at a national level, not at a club level. The Australian Government strongly encourages sports to review their uniform policies where appropriate⁶.

Sport in education

In Australia, nearly three quarters of children do not meet the daily physical activity requirements of at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Furthermore, in the most recent research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on this issue undertaken in 2009, 37 per cent of children aged between five and fourteen years of age did not participate in any sport organised by a school, club or association.

Despite compelling evidence of the critical role that sport and physical education plays in the development of a child’s intellectual, social, emotional, physical and linguistics skills, sport and physical education has become progressively marginalised in the school curricula. As a result, children are missing out on the opportunity to develop their motor skills along with broader life skills such as discipline, confidence, leadership, tolerance, cooperation and respect for others.

⁶ About Time Report Recommendation 4

The Australian Government recognises the importance of physical education in schools and at their meeting on 15 April 2010, all Education Ministers agreed to prioritise health and physical education in phase three of the development of the Australian Curriculum. Education Ministers also agreed to the inclusion of health and physical education as a core learning requirement for all Australian students from Foundation to Year 10 and to maximise the number of school hours that students participate in quality physical education and sport each week as part of the school curriculum. The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education is expected to be published in late 2013.

Australian Sport: The Pathway to Success lists as an Australian Government priority a National Sport and Education Strategy, which will aim to firmly embed quality sport and physical education in our schools. The Australian Government is currently leading the development of the National Sport and Education Strategy in an effort to overcome the participation barriers faced by some children, and measures will be developed to address the high attrition rate of adolescent females.

Facilities

The Australian Government is supportive of measures put in place that will facilitate women's access to sport and recreation services given the many barriers women face depending on their social and cultural backgrounds, their career and family commitments. Facilitating access to sport and recreation services is one way of making it easier for women to better manage the time pressures they face as a result of combining work and family responsibilities⁷.

Since 2007–08 the Australian Government has invested more than \$675 million in the development of sport and recreation facilities ranging from redevelopment works at large elite facilities to the construction or upgrade of smaller regional facilities. This funding has supported a wide range of sport and recreation activities at the local community level including upgrades to training facilities, lighting, clubhouses and establishing new playing fields. By increasing the number and quality of sport and recreation facilities the Australian Government has improved accessibility to infrastructure for women across Australia⁸. The Australian Government will pursue enhanced access for women to sport and recreation facilities in future funding proposals.

This funding support will continue with further funding available for eligible sport and recreation infrastructure projects from the \$1 billion Regional Development Australia Fund.

The Australian Government has made a significant investment in school infrastructure, including infrastructure which could be utilised for physical education and sporting activities, through the \$16.2 billion Building the Education Revolution component of the Nation Building—Economic Stimulus Plan. There is scope for these same facilities to be used out-of-school hours by community groups for sporting activities as the Building the Education Revolution guidelines state that schools must agree to provide at no, or low, cost community access to libraries and multipurpose halls funded under the Primary Schools for the 21st Century element of the program. This includes reasonable access for community or not-for-profit groups in the local community⁹.

Partnerships between schools and sporting clubs can maximise shared facility use to better enable sports to service local needs. School facilities have been traditionally underutilised in the after school and weekend timeslots. Greater community sport use of school facilities in these timeslots will produce economic efficiencies in terms of facility maintenance, repair and upgrade (particularly in drought and/or flood affected Australia) and allow these to be undertaken in a more timely and effective manner. A priority area in the National Sport and Education Strategy will be to improve community access to school facilities.

The Australian Government recognises the valuable role that occasional child care services play in delivering flexible, quality child care and enabling women to participate in sport and recreation activities. In order to assist parents' awareness of child care, this Australian Government created the mychild.gov.au website, Australia's online child care portal. Here they will find information on different types of child care and how to get assistance with the cost of child care including where to find services with vacancies in their local area.

7 About Time Report Recommendation 7

8 About Time Report Recommendation 8

9 About Time Report Recommendation 3

The Australian Government provides the Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Rebate to assist families with the cost of approved child care, including occasional care. The Australian Government has increased the Child Care Rebate from 30 to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket costs and up from a maximum of \$4354 to \$7500 per child per year to 2014. The Australian Government also increased the frequency of Rebate payments from yearly to quarterly, and has now introduced fortnightly Rebate payments¹⁰.

The Australian Government will bring forward an agenda item at the next meeting of the Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood to consider ways to address barriers to increasing the supply of child care in Australia.

High performance

Through increasing participation in active recreation and community sport, Australia will grow its pool of elite athletes who will continue our fine tradition of excellence at national and international levels. The Government is committed to assisting athletes to pursue education and learning opportunities while participating at an elite level and pursuing career paths beyond sporting participation.

The National Athlete and Career Education program provides support for athletes at the elite level to help them achieve balance between sport and other aspects of their lives without compromising their sporting goals. It assists eligible athletes with career, education and personal development services as well as transitional support for athletes going through personal and sporting changes¹¹.

As at 9 April 2012, a total of 280 females were receiving scholarships at the Australian Institute of Sport. The ASC provides funding to support elite athletes through the Direct Athlete Support scheme. Through this scheme in 2010–11, \$4,082,050 was provided to female athletes.

As part of the 2010 Budget, the Australian Government announced a \$324.8 million increase in ongoing sport funding which included significant investment in our high performance athletes and retention of our high performance coaches. In addition, in early 2011, \$3.55 million was allocated under the Green and Gold program to sixteen of Australia's Olympic sports to enhance Australia's medal outcomes at the 2012 London Olympic Games.

A further \$300,000 was allocated for the Australian Paralympic Committee to support Paralympic Green and Gold initiatives, including developing a national scholarship scheme. In March 2012, additional funding of \$640,000 through the Green and Gold project was announced bringing the total to almost \$4.5 million. The focus of this funding was to deliver a range of projects primarily driven by the Australian Institute of Sport, aimed at enhancing athlete performance in London.

As part of the 2012–13 Budget, the Australian Government announced a \$1 million commitment to the development of women's football. This funding will support the expansion of the elite women's competition (the W-League) from a seven team, 10 round format to an eight team, 12 round format. This will increase the potential for women's football to attract broadcast and sponsorship funding and work towards becoming self-sustaining. The W-League provides a key stage in the development pathway for talented women footballers between state-based, community football and national team representation. The competition also provides women coaches, referees, other technical football staff and sporting administrators with enhanced opportunities to pursue a career path in the their chosen sport and profession.

An issue that is not only limited to women's sport is the importance of reasonable coordination between national league competition programs and international representative commitments of athletes. While the scheduling of national league competitions is a matter for the responsible NSOs, the Australian Government encourages NSOs that administer or are associated with such competitions to consider international representative commitments of athletes in scheduling national league competition programs¹².

¹⁰ About Time Report Recommendation 6

¹¹ About Time Report Recommendation 9

¹² About Time Report Recommendation 11

Recognition

The Australian Government believes it is important to recognise the achievements of Australian sportswomen and to promote them as role models to women and girls, as well as to the wider community. The promotion of role models, including from a range of diverse backgrounds, is one avenue for motivating women and girls to pursue a career in sport or to commence or continue participation in sport and recreation activities.

To ensure Australia's elite athletes make the most of media coverage, the ASC provides media training for AIS athletes on an as needed basis¹³. Additionally, the Australian Government provided \$1 million to the Australian Paralympic Committee to assist in the broadcast of the 2012 Paralympic Games¹⁴.

In 2008–09 the Australian Government commissioned research, *Towards a Level Playing Field: Sport and Gender in Australian Media*, which confirmed that female sport and male sport receive starkly disproportionate amounts of coverage on Australian television, despite the ongoing successes and strong participation levels of women in sport.¹⁵ This research followed and is more expansive than, the 1996 research, *An Illusory Image*.

The *Towards a Level Playing Field: Sport and Gender in Australian Media* report assessed the quantity of media coverage and the representation of women and sport in that coverage. The report provided empirical data about the media coverage of female athletes that can be used to benchmark future research in this area. Coverage of women in sport made up nine per cent of all sports coverage in Australian television news and current affairs media, while seven per cent of non-news sport content on television was devoted to female sport. Male sport, on the other hand, occupied 81 per cent of television news and current affairs reporting and 86 per cent of non-news sport coverage on television. In each case the balance of coverage was 'mixed gender' or 'other' sport. The 'other' sport was almost all horse racing. The Australian Government will continue to work with the sport sector and the media to develop further strategies to improve the level of media coverage of women's sport and support women and girls in sport.

To this end the Australian Government allocated \$1.45 million in 2011 towards a one off scheme for Women in Sport Media Grants. Under this program, funding was allocated to NSOs to support media exposure of women's sport in Australia. The funding assisted in production costs, marketing and promotion of the broadcast of national or international level Australian women's leagues and competitions.

As a result of the positive outcomes from the initial funding, a further \$2.7 million is being provided to targeted sports over the next two years (2011–12 and 2012–13) for the development of strategies to build capability in both new and traditional media that will be aimed at generating sustainable increases in media exposure. Sports receiving funding over the period include: Surfing Australia, Cricket Australia, Netball Australia, Football Federation Australia, Swimming Australia, Hockey Australia, Cycling Australia, Australian Rugby Union (Rugby 7s), Rowing Australia and Snow Sports Australia.¹⁶

The key element of these grants is that they support the growing professionalism of all aspects of women's sport and provide resources to support live broadcasts directly to sports. The Australian Government will continue to support women's sport broadcasting in the future and work with the sports to further enhance the commercial viability of their live sport broadcasts.

Commercialisation

Women's sport is yet to receive the same commercial value or attention as its male sports counterparts. It lags well behind men's sport in relation to its live to air broadcast coverage. While this has improved since the release of the report it is not yet at a satisfactory level. The Australian Government will continue to promote women's sport and consult with relevant stakeholders to ensure the commercial capabilities of women's sport continues to grow.¹⁷

13 About Time Report Recommendation 17

14 About Time Report Recommendation 16

15 About Time Report Recommendation 18

16 About Time Report Recommendation 15

17 About Time Report Recommendation 10

Leadership

For too long the governance and administration of sport has been seen as a low priority. The Australian Government recognises that women are still underrepresented in sport leadership positions. To support organisations to improve their governance and administration the Australian Government this year released a revised set of sport governance principles for Australia's NSOs to improve their governance arrangements.

The Sports Leadership Grants for Women program helps women develop the skills required to be effective leaders and role models for their sports. The Sport Leadership Grants and Scholarships for Women commenced in 2002–03 as a partnership between the ASC and the Office for Women. A total of \$3.7 million has been provided in grants over the ten years the program has been operating.¹⁸

In March 2011, the Australian Government established the Women in Sport Leadership Register to assist the placement of women on boards and in executive positions where they can apply their training and experience to benefit Australia's sport sector. The register is aimed at increasing the number of women on Australia's sporting boards and to help promote inclusive cultures that support women in sport.¹⁹

Recently the Minister for Finance, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, announced that the Australian Government will establish a Women on Boards Network. Minister Wong highlighted that women on boards is not simply an issue of representation, but an issue of ability. Additionally, the Australian Government will fund a further round of board diversity scholarships in partnership with the Australian Institute of Company Directors to help provide a pipeline of qualified women.

The representation of women on the boards of government funded NSOs in 2011 was recorded as 23.5 per cent. The Australian Government will record the gender composition of government funded NSOs boards annually. In the public sector, the Australian Government is leading by example and has committed to achieving a minimum 40 per cent representation of women on Australian Government boards by 2015. As at 30 June 2011, the percentage of women on Australian Government boards was 35.3 per cent—an all-time high for the Australian Government.

Reaffirming the Australian Government's position around the importance of governance principles and specifically to maintaining an appropriate gender balance on boards is critical to the ongoing success of the Australian Government's policies in this area. The Australian Government will drive further change in this area.

Women in Sport Awards

To celebrate Australia's achievement in women's sport, the Australian Government has committed to sponsoring the Women's Health I Support Women In Sport Awards, which will recognise our elite sports women, as well as the achievements of our hometown heroes, women in leadership positions and service to sport. In addition these awards will also include the reinstated Prime Minister's Sportswoman of the Year award.

Women in Sport Unit

To ensure that all of these initiatives continue to develop and support Australian women in sport, the Australian Government will re-establish the Women in Sport Unit within the ASC to provide support and industry advice to sporting organisations.

Conclusion

The role that women play in the development of sport in Australia as participants, volunteers, athletes and sports leaders as coaches and administrators is vital. Yet despite the significant work the Australian Government has undertaken since the About Time Report was released, barriers to participating in sport and active recreation across a woman's lifetime still exist. The new initiatives announced by the Australian Government are a further step towards ensuring equal participation and recognition for women in sport and active recreation and will be actively monitored and evaluated as they are implemented.

¹⁸ About Time Report Recommendations 12 and 14

¹⁹ About Time Report Recommendation 13

Appendix 1 Recommendations from About Time! Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia

Recommendations

1. The committee recommends that the 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.
2. The committee recommends 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.
3. The committee recommends 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.
4. The committee recommends 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.
5. The committee recommends 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.
6. The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, states, territories and local government recognise the importance of occasional child care in facilitating women's participation in sport and recreation.
7. The committee recommends 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 facilitate access to women during those times.
8. The committee recommends that the Commonwealth encourage state and territory governments, and especially local government, to address the lack of women's facilities at sporting venues.
9. The committee recommends that the ASC further develop and expand the AIS ACE career assistance program to enable a greater number of athletes to compete in elite sports. The committee recommends the AOC expand its ASPIRE Career Assistance Program.
10. The committee recommends 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.
11. The committee recommends 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.
12. The committee recommends 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.
13. The committee recommends that the ASC continue to provide opportunities for women sport leaders to attend workshops and forums to develop techniques for successful networking.
14. The committee recommends that the Sport Leadership Grants for Women be continued and that the Commonwealth increase funding for this scheme.
15. The committee recommends 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 the ASC should administer funding of up to \$3 million per annum, and that the initiative be reviewed after approximately three years.
16. The committee recommends 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 stipulate that a condition of accessing this funding be that there be balanced coverage of male and female athletes.
17. The committee recommends 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.
18. The committee recommends that the government fund the ASC to replicate in 2008–09 the surveys and analysis performed in the 1996 report *An Illusory Image*.