

# Women's Affairs

Investigation into Females in Sports  
and their Representation in the Media

Committee Investigating Women's Affairs

# Investigation into Females in Sports and their Representation in the Media

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## Terms of Reference

The Women's Affairs Committee have enquired into a myriad of issues concerned with the representation of females in sport and in the media in New South Wales.

1. The lack of media coverage and representation for professional sports women.
2. The lack of female perspectives when it comes to journalism.
3. The gender stereotypes applied to female athletes compared to the men in their field.
4. How the negative portrayals of women in the public eye can discourage young girls from pursuing sports.
5. How gender discrimination exists in the gender pay gap between male and female athletes

# Table of Contents

<b>Terms of Reference</b>	1
<b>Table of Contents</b>	2
<b>Chairperson’s Foreword</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>Background</b>	5
“Unwatchability”	6
Finance and Funding	6
Uniforms and Exploitation	7
Impact of Sporting Stereotypes on Young Girls	9
Uncredited Journalism	10
The Public Eye	11
Factors influencing participations	12
<b>Recommendations</b>	13
General	14
Advance more women into leadership positions and develop respectful and inclusive sporting cultures	14
Offer genuine and equitable high-performance pathways	14
Offer the same articles of clothing (sporting uniforms) for both women and men.	14
Monetary	15
Strive for equal investment	15
Take simultaneous practical actions to close the gender pay gap for elite athletes	15
Advertising and media	15
Fund effective advertising campaigns and promotional materials for professional women’s sporting teams and events	15
Provide accessible and highly functional facilities for professional female athletes on respective levels.	16
Recommend state-wide standards for media coverage	16
Education and Social	16
Make current best sporting practices for young girls the standard practice in educational settings	16
Implement the Women in Sport Strategy NSW	16
<b>Final Recommendations</b>	17
Recommendation 1	17
Make current best sporting practises for young girls the standard practice in educational settings	17
Recommendation 2	17
Recommend state-wide standards for allocated media coverage	17
Recommendation 3	18

Take simultaneous practical actions to close the gender pay gap for elite athletes	18
Recommendation 4	19
Offer genuine and equitable high-performance pathways	19
<b>Dissenting statements</b>	20
Statement 1 in regards to Recommendation 2: Recommend state-wide standards for allocated media coverage	20
Statement 2 in regards to Recommendation 3:	20
Strive for equal investment	20
Fund effective advertising campaigns and promotional materials for professional women's sporting teams and events	21
Provide accessible and highly functional facilities for professional female athletes on respective levels.	21
<b>References</b>	23

## Chairperson's Foreword

Participation in sports creates an inclusive, equitable, healthy, and safe environment for women and girls. The rise of women's elite and organised sports in NSW provides significant opportunities to challenge traditional norms and stereotypes, and promote diversity in sports leadership. An empowering social shift to increase the representation of women in organised and elite sports will break traditions, and expectations and create a new cohort of role models.

In NSW, women continue to be under-represented in organised sports - as participants, coaches, officials, administrators, and board members - when compared to their male cohort. Whilst a variety of strategies exist to help equalise opportunities for women and girls, concerns continue on how gender bias will prevent them from receiving the full benefits sport and physical activity can offer. Sports coverage is hugely powerful in shaping norms and stereotypes about gender. Media has the ability to challenge these norms, promoting a balanced coverage of men's and women's sports and a fair portrayal of sportspeople – irrespective of gender.

In NSW, men are more likely to feature in the media (both playing and commentating). This can provide a biased view of sports participation as a male-oriented activity. Since media coverage can have a direct effect on a sport's ability to attract commercial sponsorship, the lack of coverage can have significant impacts on the sustainability of female athletes, sports, and competitions. The 2017 Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport highlighted that in Australia approximately 8% of sponsorship is directed to women's sports and 7% of broadcast coverage – so the correlation appears quite strong.

I am pleased to present The Committee Investigating Women's Affairs Report of Females in Sports and their Representation in the Media to the 2022 Youth Legislative Council for consideration. This Committee recognises the contentious nature of this issue, however, also acknowledges although controversial it is multifaceted. The Women's Affairs Committee have conducted a comprehensive investigation into a range of issues and current policies advancing on the perpetuating limitations that women face in a male-dominated world of sports.

I hereby commend this Report to the House and to the floor.

**The Honourable Jade Poulton, Youth MLC**  
**Youth Minister for Women's Affairs**

## Introduction

In NSW, the engagement, participation, and competition of women in sport has come a long way in promoting female sport and supporting various female team's sporting codes. But whilst improvement has been seen in overall de-stigmatisation and perceived stereotypes of females in sports, factors such as media coverage and representation and limitations in monetary benefits continue to perpetuate a gender bias, preventing females from receiving the full benefits sport - whether recreationally or at an elite level - can offer.

The Women's Affairs Committee defines female as;

A person whose gender identity is female, including those who are assigned female at birth and those who are not but identifies as such.

Additionally, the Committee hopes that the implementation of proposed recommendations will cement NSW as a national leader in empowering women and girls in sport, aspiring that proposed ideas will further:

- Enable quotas and industry standards to be disregarded as they become redundant for women in sport
- NSW as a desired destination for national investment in female athletes
- Recognise that women who play, compete, and lead in sport are equally valued, recognised and celebrated as their male counterparts
- Allow for equal prize money in competitions to be established, as well as introducing simultaneous practical actions to close the gender pay gap for elite athletes

Participation in sport creates inclusive, equitable, healthy and safe environments for women and girls. The rise of women's elite sport in NSW provides significant opportunities to challenge traditional norms and stereotypes, and promote diversity in sport leadership. It is an exciting and empowering social shift that is breaking traditions, expectations and creating a new cohort of role models.

One of the foremost aims of our report is to ensure that females are able to further their involvement in state sport, working to improve social connections established through sporting opportunities or even aiming to pursue a career in the elite athlete world. Our goal as the Women's Affairs Committee is to implement recommendations to improve the nature of female participation and competition in sport and subsequent media coverage opportunities for all women in New South Wales. In doing this, we aim to increase the propensity for new recommendations and legislation to be implemented with more ease.

## Background

### “Unwatchability”

Biased views of sports participation as male-orientated are perpetuated by men being more likely to feature in the media, both playing and commentating, in Australia and Internationally.<sup>1</sup> The coverage of both male and female sports persons has a significant impact on the sustainability of athletes, sports, and competitions.

Specifically, the proportion of media coverage has a direct effect on a sports ability to attract commercial sponsorship. This disparity in media coverage continues to contribute to the imbalance in the quantity and quality of media time for sports women compared to that of men. Research over the past thirty years has shown that during major sporting events media coverage of women’s sports increases, yet outside such events coverage remains at less than 10%.

The Olympic Games is hugely powerful in shaping norms and stereotypes about gender and promotes a balanced coverage of both men’s and women’s sports<sup>2</sup>. During the games, the coverage given to women in certain sports increases substantially and women are more likely to be discussed in contexts beyond results. But, outside the two week period where women dominate headlines where approximately 40% of all sport’s participants are women, only 4% of media coverage will be dedicated to women.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, in the limited time women are given media coverage, commentary is filled with objectifying and demeaning language. The tone of media attention towards female athletes and sports has a more pronounced focus on physical appearance, femininity, and/or sexuality over actual athletic abilities. Cambridge University Press<sup>4</sup> research highlighted that words associated with male athletes included: dominate, big, great and strong. Whereas words associated with female athletes included: unmarried, older, pregnant and participating.

### Finance and Funding

The commercial viability of sportswomen is affected due to the fewer endorsement opportunities they are provided compared to their male counterparts, who are often featured

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<sup>1</sup> Sport Australia. n.d. *Media coverage and representation*. [online] Available at: <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/kb/women-in-sport/media> [Accessed 17 May 2022].

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO. 2018. “Gender Equality in Sports Media.” UNESCO. March 9, 2018. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gender-equality-sports-media>.

<sup>3</sup> “GENDER EQUALITY in SPORT and the ROLE of MEDIA 1.” n.d. <https://rm.coe.int/bis-factsheet-gender-equality-sport-media-en/1680714b8f>.

<sup>4</sup> Ennis, Jessica. 2016. “Aesthetics over Athletics When It Comes to Women in Sport.” University of Cambridge. August 12, 2016. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/aesthetics-over-athletics-when-it-comes-to-women-in-sport>.

as top earners as shown in the Forbes' list of the 100 top earning athletes<sup>5</sup>. A 2019 study from the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed the median full-time annual income for male athletes from all levels that earn money from their sport is \$67,652 while women in the same category earn \$42,900, accumulating to a pay gap of \$24,752.

Gender pay gap in sport is a significant issue as it disincentives women to pursue a career in sport. Knowing that putting the same effort as their male counterpart but only gaining a portion of their salary frustrates women in the sporting industry. Furthermore, most professional female athletes have to work a second job to sustain a living because the pay for their sport is not sufficient. Although Australian cricketers are among the country's best paid female athletes, the gender pay gap is still cause for concern. Cricket Australia announced the increase of the base salary for female cricketers that hold a Women's Big Bash League or Women's National Cricket League contract to more than \$65,000. Whilst this is an improvement, it is still lower than the average retainer of \$198,000 that men's players who compete in all formats at domestic level receive.

There is also a discrepancy between the prize money females receive compared to their male counterparts, where men earn a significantly higher amount. In April of 2021, surfer Lucy Small received \$1,500 for coming first in the Curly Maljam competition whilst her male counterpart received \$4,000. Lucy earned less than half the men's prize money even though they had both surfed in the same conditions. "Thank you so much to the sponsors for the money they've put into the event," she said. "But I would say that it is a bittersweet victory, knowing that our surfing is worth less than half of the men's prize money."<sup>6</sup>

## Uniforms and Exploitation

The overwhelming exploitation and double standards in terms of uniforms originate from generational sexist stereotypes. Since its conception women's sports have failed to receive the same amount of support, publicity, funds and overall respect as their male counterparts. Due to longstanding gender stereotypes that would seep in and affect the perception of women in all facets of the sport. A prime example is a convention that women are fragile, weak and overemotional, which would manifest into the belief that due to their innate physical inability women's sports are simply inferior to men's. As stated by Greg Baum, a chief sports columnist with *The Age*, "women's soccer is a joke, women's cricket is not much better, netball is ok sometimes when there is nothing else on, but women's basketball is not, it is (women's sports) by definition, second-best." This deep-seated sexism in which women's sports had no choice but to be built upon would result in it being under-publicised and overlooked.

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<sup>5</sup> Mogaji, Emmanuel, Foluké Abigail Badejo, Simone Charles, and Jacqueline Millisits. 2021. "Financial Well-Being of Sportswomen." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 13 (2): 299–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1903530>.

<sup>6</sup> Hislop, Madeline. 2021. "'Our Surfing Is Worth Half as Much': Lucy Small Calls out Prize Money at Surfing Event." *Women's Agenda*. May 3, 2021. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/our-surfing-is-worth-half-as-much-lucy-small-calls-out-prize-money-at-surfing-event/>.



Consequently, in order to gain attention and generate much-needed publicity female athletes were exploited. This exploitation would come to be categorised as “sexploitation”<sup>7</sup> in which their bodies and sexual attributes were centred on instead on their dedication and skill. The camera is not capturing a sportswoman but a woman, a being intended for pleasure and entertainment purposes. A fact that is clearly reflected in the following quote by Dr Murray Phillips detailing the findings of his report on the media coverage and portrayal of women’s sports in Australia: “Women were often photographed in inactive body shots, in relationship caricatures or as models; men were more often shown in active poses, less in relationships and never as models ... These socially constructed images lead to a gender hierarchy in which women’s sport is not taken as seriously as men’s.”<sup>8</sup>

A way in which this exploitation and image are communicated is through the uniforms of these sportswomen, with many sports demanding or encouraging their female players to wear more revealing or tight outfits as opposed to their male peers. As stated by Shelly Andrews, former Australian Hockeyroos player, “When we take our clothes off we get more exposure than for actually playing the game.” This further perpetuates the idea that a woman’s worth lies more so in her body as opposed to her ability, devaluing her accomplishments and reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. Bolstering a cycle of underappreciation and making it even more difficult for women in and aspiring to be in the sporting industry.

This issue was most recently addressed in the Victorian Government’s national study on “What girls want in Sport Uniforms.”<sup>9</sup><sup>10</sup> The need for this study arose due to the finding that female participation in sport is low with young males aged 15-17 years are three times more likely than young females to engage in daily exercise.<sup>11</sup> With the study seeking to find one of the factors to this lack of participation. In this National Study over 700 Australian girls were surveyed in relation to their thoughts and beliefs about sport uniforms. The overall findings of this study were that girls feeling self-conscious in sport uniforms is a prime factor in a lack of participation. Girls simply want choice in uniforms, with 88% preferring to wear shorts, 90% preferring to wear t-shirts and 65% preferring to not wear skirts. The link to exploitation of female bodies and their uniforms is evident in the following quote from the study: “I need something that is comfortable and doesn’t show off my body.” Clare Hanlon, lead researcher candidly summarised the interconnectedness of uniforms and participation in the quote:

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<sup>7</sup> Zipp, Sarah, and Sasha Sutherland. 2021. “Sexism and Sport: Why Body-Baring Team Uniforms Are Bad for Girls and Women.” *The Conversation*. August 5, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/sexism-and-sport-why-body-baring-team-uniforms-are-bad-for-girls-and-women-165546>.

<sup>8</sup> Commission, Australian Sports Commission;; jurisdiction=Commonwealth of Australia; corporateName=Australian Sports. n.d. “Australian Institute of Sport.” *Sport Australia*. <https://www.ais.gov.au>.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria, Sport and Recreation. 2021. “Uniforms Influence Girls’ Participation in Sport.” *Sport and Recreation Victoria*. February 26, 2021. <https://sport.vic.gov.au/news/articles/uniforms-influence-girls-participation-in-sport>.

<sup>10</sup> Slater, Amy, and Marika Tiggemann. 2010. “‘Uncool to Do Sport’: A Focus Group Study of Adolescent Girls’ Reasons for Withdrawing from Physical Activity.” *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 11 (6): 619–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2010.07.006>.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2019. “National Health Survey: First Results 2017-2018.” <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4364.0.55.001~2017-18~Main%20Features~Physical%20activity~115>.

"Schools and sport clubs could have fantastic facilities and programs, but if girls don't feel comfortable in what they wear as a sport uniform you're going to be flat out getting them to the venue."

The deterring of females of all ages from sport due to a constant and consistent cycle of exploitation, is a deprivation of their fundamental right to physical education and sport, as outlined in The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (whom Australia is a founding member of) International Charter of Physical Education and Sport.

## Impact of Sporting Stereotypes on Young Girls

From childhood, the idea of femininity and masculinity has been ingrained into individuals, especially in notions related to sport. These social stereotypes limit sporting opportunities for women as they discourage female participation from a young age. The systematic stereotyping of sports further deters young girls from the sport they love. In her essay 'Throwing Like A Girl'<sup>12</sup>, political professor Marion Young wrote that women are "conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society". Sport is considered a masculine activity due to its vigorous, physical and competitive nature. Hence, young girls have internalised that it is unnatural for a girl to play sport or are compelled to pick a more 'feminine' sport as a result of damaging sporting stereotypes.

The available Ausplay data<sup>13</sup> outlines that only 15% of girls carry on their team sport at a club level by the age of 25. This staggering statistic is largely a consequence of sporting stereotypes which result in the lack of opportunities for young girls. In primary school, boys have access to multiple teams in local clubs, associations and school sporting competitions where they are offered various sports. In comparison, local clubs and associations struggle to form a team for girls. If competitive sports are offered to girls at school, only more feminine and less 'aggressive' sports such as netball are options. Girls AFL, soccer or cricket teams are a rare sight, but boys teams are the norm. The very phrase "throwing like a girl"<sup>14</sup> is a casual means of stereotyping but is also pivotal evidence for the lack of girls' participation in sport. Though gender inherently makes no difference in how a throw is made, society has decided it does. Girls must work harder than boys just to fight against the deeply ingrained sexism. Girls must prove to their coaches, family and friends that they can play sports, and they can play it just as well as a boy.

Moreover, this stereotype is further pushed in high school as some schools including single sex girls schools do not mandate sport past the senior years. At the critical stage of growing into a young woman, where it is evident that encouragement of the continuation of sport is needed, girls are ultimately at the peak stage of being deterred from sport. A common

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<sup>12</sup> Young, I.M. Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of feminine body comportment motility and spatiality. *Hum Stud* 3, 137–156 (1980). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02331805>

<sup>13</sup> Commission, Australian Sports Commission. 2021. "Sport Participation in Australia." Sport Australia. May 11, 2021. <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/kb/sport-participation-in-australia>.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, Daniel. 2018. "You Throw like a Girl: Gender Stereotypes Ruin Sports for Young Women." Healthline. Healthline Media. July 2, 2018. <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/gender-stereotypes-ruin-sports-for-young-women>.

example of where a sporting stereotype detrimentally affects young girls is in the field of cricket. In Amanda Mooney, Chris Hickey, Debbie Ollis and Lyn Harrison's exploration of 'Adolescent girls' pathways to elite cricket'<sup>15</sup> our attention is brought to the "socio-historic and cultural conditions that shape this script". They identify past and current gender discourses operating in Australian cricket which is a sport that carries a legacy of masculine privilege that informs the experiences of female pathway players<sup>16</sup> "as they navigate, contest and resist cultural scripts of gender and sexuality in Australian women's cricket". Young girls are frequently denied a cricket team or are marked down into a team that is 2 years below their age level due to the lack of opportunities.<sup>17</sup> Stereotypes are wrongly confining young girls into the sexist divide of sports, taking crucial opportunities away from them.

## Uncredited Journalism

The best available data says that current media coverage for Australian women's sports is just 7%<sup>18</sup>, and while the exact figures significantly differ across the globe, it is estimated that as little as 9% of sports journalists across the globe are women, with the number of journalists for just women's sports much lower. There is no accurate method of composing an exhaustive list of the factors that contribute to such dwindling figures, but as this report is dedicated to the media coverage of female athletes, it is necessary to understand the issues that occur as a result of the lack of diverse voices in the industry. The minor amount of journalists covering professional women's sports promotes very few angles of the respective players, coaches, teams, and leagues within a sport and thus breeds an environment where audiences are forced to perceive every opinionated element of a journalist's coverage as an indisputable fact. The opposite is displayed in the men's side of the professional sports industry, where there is almost an overcompensation of budding journalists, and the coverage is so high that audiences are invited to synthesise an individual opinion on a respective subject.<sup>19</sup>

With the rising interest in women's sports, it is true that the number of journalists dedicated to the industry is growing, however the few recognisable female journalists and presenters working in the field are largely overshadowed by men, who are almost always white, middle-aged and a retired player with few notable accolades to their name. Such a trend was

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<sup>15</sup> Amanda Mooney, Chris Hickey, Debbie Ollis & Lyn Harrison (2019) Howzat! Navigating Gender Disruptions in Australian Young Women's Cricket, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 43:1, 71-86, DOI: 10.1080/14443058.2018.1545139

<sup>16</sup> "Women and Sport in Australia—New Times?" 2014. *Journal of Australian Studies*. 2014. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14443058.2019.1579081>.

<sup>17</sup> "WHY DO WOMEN STOP PLAYING CLUB SPORT at 15?" n.d. <https://aflnorthcoast.com.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/12/Why-do-women-stop-playing-club-sport-at-15.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Sports Commission. 2017. "Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport." The Boston Consulting Group . January 2017. [https://www.sportaus.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/660395/Intergenerational\\_Review\\_of\\_Australian\\_Sport\\_2017.pdf](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/660395/Intergenerational_Review_of_Australian_Sport_2017.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Fenwick, Kirby. 2022. "In an Arena Dominated by Men, Women in Sports Media Need Allies for Real Change." *ABC News*, March 18, 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-18/women-in-sport-need-real-lasting-change-media-misogyny-sexism/100920954>.

epitomised when an all-female panel during a Channel 10 broadcast of The Matilda's, Australia's highly successful National Women's Soccer team were outspoken by the singular male commentator who repeatedly interrupted the presenters to dispute their reasonable insight and individual opinions on the game. While this is admittedly a small-scale incident, it has quickly become an accepted standard within Women's Sports in the media, displaying inherent sexism and misogyny to a likely audience of young, impressionable girls purely seeking inspiration from, and sharing their support for their national representatives. Contradictory opinions and light hearted arguments are a natural part of the game, but a continuous interruption and shutting down of the highly-experienced women in the role is one of the many obstacles that stunts the growth of Women working in sports media.

## The Public Eye

It is clearly evident through various cases that female celebrities/women in the media in general are criticised and scrutinised at the smallest mishaps. The standards and expectations placed on them by the general public are much higher compared to their male counterparts. The outrage and ridicule in return are shown to be at a larger scale as well due to the fact that men are naturally favoured by society and so are easily 'forgiven'. This leads to a tight restriction on women's freedom of speech as one distasteful action can destroy their reputation and career.

A fine example of a small matter regarding a female figure that was blown out of proportion in the public eye would be Julia Gillard's 'fruit bowl scandal' in 2005<sup>20</sup> where she was publicly mocked when an empty fruit bowl in her kitchen was noticed in a photoshoot inside her house. Soon after this, Gillard was called "deliberately barren" by a parliamentary colleague. This reaction was completely uncalled for and would not have happened at the scale that it did if any other male politicians were in her place.

It is also to be noted that in the case of sports women, the articles written about them are generally geared towards their personal life rather than the achievements they have earned in their respective field. In the cheating scandal between the two Australian Olympic swimmers, Emily Seebohm, OAM and Mitch Larkin, Seebohm was always the main centre of focus, seen in media articles such as, "Emily Seebohm has finally found the love of her life after a painful cheating scandal"<sup>21</sup> by Woman's Day, when it was her partner who had the alleged affair. Any discussions of Seebohm after that would revolve around the scandal whilst Larkin's swimming career was still intact with heavier focus placed on that part of his life.

The University of Cambridge conducted research where they examined over 160 million words within the sporting domain using the Cambridge English Corpus and had found a distinct gender divide when it comes to the language used for sportsmen and

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<sup>20</sup> Tovey, Josephine. 2010. "Gillard's Fruit Bowl Runneth Over." The Sydney Morning Herald. June 23, 2010. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/gillards-fruit-bowl-runneth-over-20100624-z0cv.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Sellers, Wade. 2022. "EXCLUSIVE: Emily Seebohm Has Finally Found the Love of Her Life after a Painful Cheating Scandal." Now to Love. January 10 2022.

sportswomen<sup>22</sup>. Academics found that words relating to men were three times more likely to be mentioned in relation to sport. Furthermore, out of the times that women were the centre of focus, the language around them focused disproportionately on their appearance, clothing and personal lives whereas male athletes are depicted as powerful, strong and valued as professional sportspeople. The University of Cambridge noted that this placed ‘a greater emphasis on aesthetics over athletics,’ which reinforces the harmful gender stereotypes that warp our current society.

## Factors influencing participation

With the historical view of sports being attributed as a male activity, an increase in the participation of young girls in local sports undeniably requires a dramatic shift of socio-cultural attitudes towards the presence of women in sports. The 2021 Ausplay Survey found that extra-curricular participation rates for boys and girls were admittedly quite similar in most age groups, a notable change from semi-recent years, although girls were more likely to participate in non-sport related activities, in comparison to their male counterparts.<sup>23</sup>

While individual circumstances are often considered the root of such statistics, the notion that “You can’t be what you can’t see” is perhaps one of the most important factors influencing the participation of young girls and women, a direct consequence of the female sport industry’s lack of media availability. The 2017 Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport assessed that in Australia, approximately 8% of sponsorship is given to women’s sports with only 7% of broadcast coverage.<sup>24</sup> As the rest of the budget is geared towards male-dominated sports, there is a significant disparity in the effort to engage the female audience. The rapidly-growing demand for women’s sports is not being met appropriately, and its effects are dangerously wide-spread. When professional sports are consistently broadcast, or simply played at an accessible time and venue, the participation rate at a grassroots level is influenced significantly. It was reported that Australians on average spend 2 hours and 22 minutes every week watching sport at home<sup>25</sup>; media representation can increase the popularity and knowledge of sporting activities as well as promote role models and public figures. Without inspiration and without interest, young girls are subsequently less likely to pursue any sporting aspirations.

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<sup>22</sup> “Aesthetics over Athletics When It Comes to Women in Sport.” 2016. University of Cambridge. August 12, 2016. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/aesthetics-over-athletics-when-it-comes-to-women-in-sport>.

<sup>23</sup> Sport Australia. “Participation statistics and trends.” <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/kb/sport-participation-in-australia/participation-statistics-and-trends>

<sup>24</sup> Australian Sports Commission. “Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017.” [https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/874799/Intergenerational\\_Review\\_of\\_Australian\\_Sport\\_2017.pdf](https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/874799/Intergenerational_Review_of_Australian_Sport_2017.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Fell, Ashley. “Australia, the sporting nation.” McCrindle. <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/australia-the-sporting-nation>

Furthermore, other aspects within a female's life can contribute to hesitancy in sport participation. A researcher behind VicHealth's 'This Girl Can' campaign discovered that across all life-stages, women have recorded feeling intimidated and/or embarrassed to exercise in public due to fear of judgement surrounding their appearance, abilities, and priorities. For example, new mothers may feel guilty in focusing on other activities and leaving their newborn baby, and adolescents may feel self-conscious if their abilities do not match up to that of the boys around them. These values are an inherent result of social influences in our environment and their continuation throughout the many life stages of a woman's life can dramatically decrease her confidence in performing physical activities.



# Recommendations

## General

### Advance more women into leadership positions and develop respectful and inclusive sporting cultures

Women continue to be under-represented in leadership and governance positions in many industries, especially in sport. In 2019, women comprised 24% of CEOs across 63 national sporting organisations (NSOs), and 15% of high performance coaches.<sup>26</sup> At the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, only 9% of accredited Australian coaches were women. While quotas for leadership positions are one method of addressing gender imbalances, other changes include:

- Reviewing sport association policies and procedures to ensure they reflect the organisational commitment to anti-discrimination and diversity
- Providing a strategic pathway for women to develop the skills and experience required to be effective in leadership positions
- Actively look for women with the skills and experience required to fill positions. This is not just about filling a quota but getting the right person for the job
- Consider mentoring and training programs using successful women in your community to help develop the next generation of leaders

### Offer genuine and equitable high-performance pathways

The motivation to participate in sports is one of the major challenges in establishing and maintaining young girl's involvement in sports, and limits their willingness to pursue an elite career in the field. Through implementing a state-wide system that offers support in the transition from amateur to professionalism, making such a system clear and defined, and ensuring there are clear role models that girls can aspire to, then involvement will not decrease with age.

### Offer the same articles of clothing (sporting uniforms) for both women and men.

The discrepancies in the types of sporting uniforms offered for females and males is a major factor in the lack of participation of females in sport and a prime contributor to the sexploitation of women in sports. Thus simply offering identical articles of clothing (shorts, shirts, skirts) is a practical and effective solution.

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<sup>26</sup> Commission, Australian Sports Commission. 2021. "Sport Participation in Australia." Sport Australia. May 11, 2021. <https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/kb/sport-participation-in-australia>.

## Monetary

### Strive for equal investment

Based broadly on the Victorian State Government's women in sport strategy, ensuring that investment opportunities are equal across both male and female sports is key to driving engagement and enabling more media coverage. By tracking the percentage of promotional and marketing spend in women's competition and budget dedicated to building women in sport at an elite level, it would enable an analysis into whether sponsorship dollars have been invested equally, and if internal resources have been dedicated to building women's sports. Additionally, through investigating if female athletes have access to equal conditions, allowances and development resources, the government will be able to assess whether more doctors, physios and equipment for elite female athletes is required.

### Take simultaneous practical actions to close the gender pay gap for elite athletes

With the increasing difference in annual income between male and female athletes; recorded as \$24,752 in 2019 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there now exists several barriers affecting equality in sports. A large gap in pay has been observed to have detrimental impacts and create challenges in the life of these sportswomen. The NSW Government is to support and mandate that the average pay for female athletes shall meet that of the men in their profession and company. At the least, women should receive 95c to every \$1 a male elite athlete earns. As well, the Women's Affairs Committee aims for the prize money given to sporting individuals/teams of different genders to be closely examined and regulated to reduce discrimination within the pay gap and ensure transparency.

## Advertising and media

### Fund effective advertising campaigns and promotional materials for professional women's sporting teams and events

The practical and widespread promotion of major and minor events, namely the NRLW state of origin and FIFA Women's World Cup final events held in Sydney requires a larger fraction of the state budget to achieve the ultimate goal of wider public engagement, to successfully grow the established base of supporters. It is largely achieved through:

- Video advertisements televised on major channels in high-watching periods
- Long-term brand partnerships that allow visibility on a variety of engaging platforms
- Engaging and distinct advertising proposed by the individual that is otherwise unattainable.



Provide accessible and highly functional facilities for professional female athletes on respective levels.

The state government is largely responsible for the construction and upkeep of premium sports facilities, and as such, it is their responsibility to provide equal access and opportunity to women's sporting teams, as would be received by their male counterparts. This implies that optimum conditions in terms of the quality of fields (or equivalent), usability of dressing rooms and media availability must be met. The scheduling of major sporting events is also required to consider both dedicated and prospective fans in the timing and geographical accessibility of an event, in turn increasing the sporting profile and revenue created.

Recommend state-wide standards for media coverage

Establishing and upholding a minimum standards for media coverage which requires each professional sport to be represented across at least 3 widely-recognised platforms from an absolute minimum of 5 sources each will substantially boost the profile and economic value of professional women's sports on an individual and collective scale. This policy must be refined and enforced as necessary, to ensure the wide scale coverage is maintained through the industry's rapid growth periods.

## Education and Social

Make current best sporting practices for young girls the standard practice in educational settings

Currently, there are aspects of excellent provision of sport in education, but these aspects need to be established as the norm, not the exception. Through implementing:

- a voice within government around the delivery of girl's sports; and
- engaging teacher training providers and embed the marketing approach into teacher training;

Girls will not only be physically more active, but their perceived ideas of women in sports will be positively influenced. In addition to this, young girls will be happier, healthier, have higher self esteem and body image, and achieve more academically all whilst challenging societal stereotypes about a women's role in the sporting world.

Implement the Women in Sport Strategy NSW

The NSW Government is already committed to supporting opportunities that enable girls and women to actively participate in their community, but the implementation of more sporting opportunities is required. In November 2017, Minister for Sport, the Hon. Stuart Ayres MP announced the development of the Women in Sport Strategy which aims to maximise health, social and commercial benefits of sport participation. Through making the Strategy standard, the government will be able to continue engaging new partners and develop inclusive, respectful sporting cultures, clubs, and venues which cater for the needs of women.

# Final Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

Make current best sporting practises for young girls the standard practice in educational settings

To increase the likelihood of girls progressing their sports into elite careers overall destigmatising the standard of female representation in sport and the media, the Women's Affairs Committee recommends that the current standard of sport provision in educational settings be established in the same manner as some existing excellent provisions of sport education. School students should be able to feel confident in their sporting ability and school's a vital role in supporting girls in their sport journey and largely influence sporting stereotypes in young girls.

Through providing a quality health and physical education program that meets the State's curriculum requirements, a quality health and physical education program should be taught by a qualified PDHPE teacher to maximise student participation addressing the barriers girls face in their early years of sport.

It is recommended that a voice within government is established to communicate the delivery of girl's sport in curriculums, and teacher training providers are engaged to embed the marketing approach into teacher training.

- a voice within government around the delivery of girl's sports; and
- engaging teacher training providers and embed the marketing approach into teacher training;

Through this, girls will not only be physically more active, but their perceived ideas of women in sports will be positively influenced. In addition to this, young girls will be happier, healthier, have higher self esteem and body image, and achieve more academically all whilst challenging societal stereotypes about a women's role in the sporting world. Additionally, the Women's Affairs Committee recommends that an enhanced state advocacy strategy and campaign for the importance of physical education in schools be developed and launched.

## Recommendation 2

Recommend state-wide standards for allocated media coverage

Establishing and upholding a minimum standards for media coverage which requires each professionalised sport to be represented across at least 3 widely-recognised platforms from an absolute minimum of 5 sources each will substantially boost the profile and economic value of professional women's sports on an individual and collective scale. This policy must be refined and enforced as necessary, to ensure the wide scale coverage is maintained through the industry's rapid growth periods.

## Recommendation 3

### Take simultaneous practical actions to close the gender pay gap for elite athletes

The term 'gender pay gap' describes the measurement of the difference in the average wage between women and men in the labour force<sup>27</sup>. Publicly, it is used to describe the discrimination towards women shown through unequal pay and lack of opportunities across several professions. In the elite sporting world specifically, this has been a large issue for a substantial amount of time. A lower income can discourage female participation in sports and disrupt the careers of current professional female athletes as they cannot focus on their ambitions if it results in financial issues. In 2015, the Matildas went on strike to protest for minimum pay, revealing that they had to take up second jobs to survive whilst playing the professional sport.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, figures showed that in the 2019 soccer World Cup, the Australia's national male soccer team, the Socceroos earned \$8,000,000 for qualifying whilst it was expected that the Matildas would only earn 1/8th of that. If the Matildas were to win the entire competition, their prize money would only encompass \$4,000,000 - a half of what the Socceroos made without the achievement.<sup>29</sup> This is a recurring theme throughout the history of the sporting world.

Moving forward, the Women's Affairs Committee aims to reduce this gender pay gap for elite athletes in NSW by implementing actions that decrease the barriers affecting participation in sports. These include:

1. Ensuring that female professional athletes are provided with the appropriate facilities, resources and support e.g. travel and accommodation, equipment, health insurance, etc.
2. Regulating a reasonable minimum base pay. Women should receive 95c to every \$1 a male elite athlete earns.
  - a. To be done by incorporating a government or corporate personnel that aids in determining and funding wage payments to the athletes
3. Equal prize money for women competing in major NSW tournaments
4. Collaborating with employers on developing a flexible working schedule so that females can train and compete in the elite professional level of sports while also maintaining a stable income

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<sup>27</sup> WGEA, "The Gender Pay Gap." <https://www.wgea.gov.au/the-gender-pay-gap>

<sup>28</sup> Dingle, Sarah. 2015. "Inside the Matildas' strike." ABC Radio National. <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/inside-the-matildas-strike/6837756>

<sup>29</sup> O'Halloran, Kate. 2019. *Matildas v Socceroos: The gender pay gap is real*. ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-18/matildas-vs-socceroos-gender-pay-gap-is-real/11218580>

## Recommendation 4

### Offer genuine and equitable high-performance pathways

The involvement of females in sports experiences a major decline in teen years: the prime years in which the transition from amateur sport's player to professional occurs. This decline, although present with males, is not nearly as considerable, with one in every two Australian girls quitting by the age of 15<sup>30</sup>. Influenced by discouraging gender stereotypes and an overall lack of resources, innumerable talented sportswomen deter from the track of an elite career. Hence, the Women's Affairs Committee recommends that genuine and equitable high-performance pathways be offered to women state-wide.

This system would serve to offer support, and encourage females throughout this transition. Supporting females whom are interested in an elite career and encouraging those who, although capable, are dismayed due to: a lack of representation, outside influences (media) and overall gender stereotypes that have created a nation-wide perception that a female sporting career is not a monetarily stable nor realistic endeavour. Scope includes:

1. Providing role models, to inspire young girls.
  - a. The visitation of female sport's players to schools (aimed at grades 9-12) nationwide through excursions. This is aimed to increase female sporting participation, motivation, and break down gender stereotypes.
    - i. This would mirror the Women's Sports Foundation's Athlete Ambassador Program<sup>31</sup>.
  - b. Excursions to female sporting clubs and games.
2. Partnering with state and national sporting programs to provide high school to professional pathways.
  - a. Simply making young girls aware that opportunities are open to them, and a professional career is a tangible goal, will assist greatly in increasing participation.
    - i. Programs include: Football Federation Australia, ...
  - b. Tri-monthly opportunities for high school students to express interest in a professional sporting career (most likely to their career practitioner) and be supported and linked to these pathways and organisations.
    - i. For instance contacting a scout from a local club to watch the student play.
3. Media promotion of professional female sport clubs and organisations.
  - a. Links with Recommendation 2.

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<sup>30</sup> Suncorp, 2019. "Suncorp Australia Youth and Confidence Research." <https://www.suncorp.com.au/learn-about/teamgirls/teamgirls-powered-by-suncorp-research.html>

<sup>31</sup> Women's Sports Foundation, 2019. "Girl Serving Programs Archives - Women's Sports Foundation." [https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wsf\\_program\\_categories/girl-serving-programs/](https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wsf_program_categories/girl-serving-programs/).

## Dissenting statements

### Statement 1 in regards to Recommendation 2: Recommend state-wide standards for allocated media coverage

We agree there is an issue with the allocated media coverage of women's sport however, media outlets will have no incentive to do this as we already see majority of viewers watch mainly the men's leagues. Media outlets are ultimately still businesses and will keep providing what their audiences want, to sustain their profit and benefits. Establishing and upholding a minimum standards for media coverage through a policy will not be enough to change the minds of viewers as they will just carry on ignoring the women's sports and tuning in for the men's. In the status quo women's games are aired at inconvenient times and the media focuses on male sporting success. Standards that are punishable by law need to be established for media outlets to comply with, in order to create a difference for women's sport in the media. When you tune into 7 News in the evening you should be able to hear of the women's NRL before the Men's NRL and every other men's league in the country. You should be able to watch women's leagues in the late afternoon just like the Men's. The inherent sexism that affects women's participation in sports and already discourages viewers from watching women's sport should not be perpetrated by the media. Strict laws and policies must be put in place to create sufficient change. Viewers will not start tuning into women's sport until the media is ready to respect it.

### Statement 2 in regards to Recommendation 3:

Attempting to close the pay gap between female and male athletes through recommendation 3 can bring some positive change to the inequality in sports. However, more change will come from the investment that is placed in women's leagues. A huge issue in women's sport is the lack of funding and investment and ensuring women are given the same opportunities and playing field as men comes before ensuring they are given the same reward. Female athletes need to be looked after in their sport before the sport can look after them. They need to be given the same opportunity and resources as males so there are no discrepancies for them to be paid equally. The inherent sexism in sports will always prove paying female and male athletes equally as a challenge. However, investment into female sports is a more tangible goal to reach. Hence, we believe the recommendation 'Strive for equal investment' must be a final recommendation.

### Strive for equal investment

"Based broadly on the Victorian State Government's women in sport strategy, ensuring that investment opportunities are equal across both male and female sports is key to driving engagement and enabling more media coverage. By tracking the percentage of promotional and marketing spend in women's competition and of budget dedicated to building women in sport at an elite level, it would enable an analysis into whether sponsorship dollars have been invested equally, and if internal resources have been dedicated to building women's sports. Additionally, through investigating if female athletes have access to equal conditions,

allowances and development resources, the government will be able to assess whether more doctors, physios and equipment for elite female athletes is required”

This recommendation should be implemented because it provides a better gauge of the shortcomings which lead to female inequality in sport. Recommendations and steps taken to improve an issue are pointless if there are no methods put in place to assess the success and limitations of them. It also holds groups accountable for not complying with set rules and legislation. Closing the pay gap between male and female athletes may be important but investment is foremost and it is crucial that female athletes receive the same opportunities and resources.

## Fund effective advertising campaigns and promotional materials for professional women’s sporting teams and events

“The state government is largely responsible for the construction and upkeep of premium sports facilities, and as such, it is their responsibility to provide equal access and opportunity to women’s sporting teams, as would be received by their male counterparts. This implies that optimum conditions in terms of the quality of fields (or equivalent), usability of dressing rooms and media availability must be met. The scheduling of major sporting events is also required to consider both dedicated and prospective fans in the timing and geographical accessibility of an event, in turn increasing the sporting profile and revenue created.” One of the current issues of females in sport and their representation in the media is that women’s sport has not received the same attention as men’s sport. Whilst broadcasting times are a factor in this, advertising also plays a significant role in grasping audience’s attention. Funding effective advertising campaigns and materials for professional women’s sporting teams is essential to promote women’s sport. Implementing this recommendation will increase the audience bracket. An example of the positive impacts of advertising is the 2020 T20 Women’s Cricket World Cup, held on International Women’s Day in Melbourne. The Australian government spent large portions of money with tv advertisements, posters, billboards and other promotional material, on this event. Like celebrity performances in men’s sporting games, Katy Perry was announced to make appearances performing before and after the women’s T20 game. The attendance at this event was 86,174. This established several records including : the largest audience for a women’s cricket match, the largest audience for a men’s or women’s ICC T20 World Cup Final, the largest for a women’s sporting event in Australia and the largest for a final of the Women’s T20 World Cup. The display of women’s talent at this event led to a higher viewership of women’s cricket in future matches. For example in 2022 the Women’s ICC World cup in New Zealand was confirmed to be the most engaging women’s cricket event on digital platforms, with 1.64 billion video views across all ICC channels, and the third highest most digitally engaged ICC event. The increase of views can be linked to the increased amount of advertising for the tournament.

## Provide accessible and highly functional facilities for professional female athletes on respective levels.

“The state government is largely responsible for the construction and upkeep of premium sports facilities, and as such, it is their responsibility to provide equal access and opportunity



to women's sporting teams, as would be received by their male counterparts. This implies that optimum conditions in terms of the quality of fields (or equivalent), usability of dressing rooms and media availability must be met. The scheduling of major sporting events is also required to consider both dedicated and prospective fans in the timing and geographical accessibility of an event, in turn increasing the sporting profile and revenue created."

This recommendation is a practical step similar to the recommendation of 'Strive for equal investment' that can bring much needed, effective change in women's sport. Currently, female athletes are not prioritised when it comes to accessibilities in sporting. This furthers the message that women in sport should not be taken seriously and adheres to ingrained social stereotypes. By improving playing conditions and giving female athletes the same opportunities as male, this will empower female athletes and challenge such social stereotypes. This is the bare minimum in creating opportunities for women, and must be included as a recommendation.

Offer the same articles of clothing (sporting uniforms) for both women and men. "The discrepancies in the types of sporting uniforms offered for females and males is a major factor in the lack of participation of females in sport and a prime contributor to the sexploitation of women in sports. Further, the skimpy uniforms of some more "feminine" sports play into the deeply rooted sexism in sports. Thus simply offering identical articles of clothing (shorts, shirts, skirts) and clothing that athletes are more comfortable wearing is a practical and effective solution"

This recommendation must be implemented and though it is a small step it is an extremely impactful step in tackling the sexploitation prevalent in sports. It is a step towards equality and breaking sporting stereotypes. Ensuring female athletes are comfortable and given the same resources as male athletes should be of utmost concern. An example of where clothing articles create inequality and an opportunity for sexploitation is in volleyball. "They're affectionately referred to as bum-huggers by the girls and women who play the sport. Those tight, virtually nonexistent shorts that are the norm on indoor volleyball courts".<sup>32</sup> Another example is gymnastics. In the 2020 Tokyo Olympics the German Gymnastics federation supported their athletes by allowing them to wear full-length leotards in order to ensure they felt comfortable while competing. Allowing athletes the choice is a positive move to establishing a standard of bodily autonomy, especially in gymnastics which is a sport that has repeatedly come under fire for the overt and abusive sexualisation of their athletes.<sup>33</sup> Evidently, it is crucial that female athletes are identical articles of clothing and that they feel comfortable in. Though the Opals had been successful in their push for basketball bodysuits in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, all other women's leagues should be given the same choices. Equal and comfortable uniforms must be mandated across all women's sports.

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<sup>32</sup> Dana Hunsinger Benbow. 2016. "Skimpy Difference: Women's Athletic Uniforms vs. Men's." The Indianapolis Star. IndyStar. November 5, 2016. <https://www.indystar.com/story/sports/2016/11/05/skimpy-difference-womens-athletic-uniforms-vs-mens/91405172/>.

<sup>33</sup> "Uniforms Have More Meaning than What We Wear - Siren." 2021. Siren. August 2, 2021. <https://sirensport.com.au/op-ed/uniforms-have-more-meaning-than-what-we-wear/>.

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