

4 October 2019

Contribution to Sport Australia Submission – Infrastructure Australia – National Infrastructure Audit 2019

The Coalition of Major Professional and Participation Sports (**COMPPS**) and its members appreciate the opportunity to make a contribution to Sport Australia’s submission relating to the National Infrastructure Audit 2019 (**Audit**).

1 INTRODUCTION

COMPPS consists of the following member organisations:

- (a) Australian Football League;
- (b) Cricket Australia;
- (c) Football Federation Australia;
- (d) National Rugby League;
- (e) Netball Australia;
- (f) Rugby Australia; and
- (g) Tennis Australia.

Each member of COMPPS is the governing body and custodian of a major professional and participation sport in Australia. COMPPS members play a large role in developing, promoting and presenting their sport from the grass roots through to the international level. They are not-for-profit bodies and are responsible for the long-term development and sustainability of their sports.

COMPPS members provide a wide range of public benefits through a self-funding business model. A large portion of the revenue of COMPPS members is devoted to enhancing, promoting and developing sport for all Australians. One of COMPPS’ roles is to facilitate a response to public inquiries on behalf of its member sports.

Each member of COMPPS is responsible for managing and supporting a large network of clubs and facility-providers who in turn provide a range of platforms for organised, largely club-based, sporting activity. This organised, club-based, sporting activity provides health, community and societal benefits that often out-strip simple physical activity on its own.



2 SUMMARY POSITION

COMPPS considers the inclusion of green, blue and recreational space in the Audit for the first time to be a welcome development. The positive impact that participation and support of COMPPS members has on the health and well-being of Australians is significant and investment in, and appropriate use of, infrastructure to facilitate sport is imperative. COMPPS is in a unique position to be able to provide Infrastructure Australia with collective, meaningful and open-minded input on green and recreational infrastructure projects and invites Infrastructure Australia to engage with COMPPS to ensure maximum return on investment and community benefit.

3 GENERAL COMMENTS

COMPPS considers (and the Audit itself acknowledges in discussing green, blue and recreational space) that one of the challenges facing the sector is a tendency to undervalue the importance of this type of infrastructure. This challenge is particularly acute in relation to the sporting sector, both at a community participation level and elite level. There is a risk that there is an inherent, if not expressly articulated classification of various types of infrastructure into either “hard” and “soft” categories or “essential” and “discretionary” groupings, with the “green, blue and recreation” category falling into the latter basket and then within this category itself, for the particular infrastructure required for organised, club-based sport to fall even further down the order of priorities. To an extent this is reflected in the Audit itself, which whilst addressing these matters in part in the specific section on blue, green and recreational space, does not for example even refer to sporting infrastructure at all in the Executive Summary and takes a fairly generic, broad-brush approach to the various types of infrastructure covered by this sub-category of social infrastructure.

Any such classification or treatment (whether intentional or not) of sporting infrastructure as somehow “discretionary” is regrettable and diminishes the far-reaching and significant contribution of sport (both community and elite) to the overall well-being of Australians. It is imperative that the benefits of participating in and supporting sport not be regarded, through being “indirect”, as somehow of less value than so-called “direct” benefits supplied by “harder” infrastructure such as roads and transport. In a competitive investment context, where the task of building national infrastructure of all types is necessarily never “complete”, such distinctions can lead to neglect of sporting infrastructure to the short and long-term detriment of the community.

Education aside, there is arguably no single industry sector that can have the greatest impact on overall health, well-being of individuals and community, inspiring and unifying communities and delivering immediate and long-term benefits (including economic ones) for the country, than participation and

engagement in sport, and, COMPPS would submit, organised club-based sport has a particular significance in this regard.

Our sports deliver a broad array of public benefits by facilitating significant economic growth, job creation, and positive health and social outcomes, including:

- building resilience and fostering positive mental health outcomes;
- mitigating the cost and impact of our ageing population;
- Growing national pride, inspiring communities and fostering social cohesion (including strengthening multiculturalism); and
- empowering women and young people.

The Audit discusses the significant benefits to the community, government and industry of improving access to and the quality of blue, green and recreational infrastructure (see p 429 in particular). COMPPS endorses and commends the reporting of these in the Audit and urges that this recognition become an integral part of government policy and infrastructure assessment and strategy.

Given the key role sport has played historically in defining us as a nation, there is the risk of it being assumed as an unassailable feature of Australian life. The demands in modern Australia on space, time, natural resources and public resources mean that there cannot be any such complacency that sport will continue to remain part of the fabric of everyday life without express and targeted public policy and infrastructure investment.

There is a further and important point of distinction that should be made in relation to the sports that COMPPS represents. Our sports represent the interests of more than 16,000 sporting clubs, 112 professional sport teams, many senior and junior national representative teams, three Olympic and Paralympic sports and more than nine million participants who partake or engage in our sports one way or another every day of the year. When participation numbers are combined with the mass of Australians who watch and support the seven sports in their professional mode, the reach across the lives of Australians on a regular basis is significant. It is not only the *scale* of impact of the COMPPS sports on Australians that should be noted, it is the *type* of impact.

This is the additional impact that comes from participating in and supporting organised, club-based sports. Whilst not diminishing the importance of physical activity per se, and supporting public policy that increases engagement in exercise and recreation of all types, COMPPS submits that there are additional and important benefits derived from organised club-based sport that need to be acknowledged and taken into account in infrastructure investment decisions regarding “recreational” or “green space”. These benefits include the following learnings, experience and values that are built, particularly in a child’s formative

years but that are carried through adult life in all spheres, not just the sporting arena - teamwork, leadership, selflessness, commitment, accountability, camaraderie, respect (for teammates, opponents, match officials), overcoming adversity, grace and humility in defeat and victory, discipline, resilience and belonging. As an example of the value to community of investment in sport, please refer to a study conducted by La Trobe University reporting a \$4.40 return for a \$1 investment: Latrobe Value of a Community Football Club Study - <https://www.aflvic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Latrobe-Value-of-a-Community-Football-Club-Final-PDF.pdf>

COMPPS recognises the immense scale, scope and complexity of matters covered by the Audit and also recognises that the Audit is not designed to identify solutions as such. COMPPS however believes that it is critical that at the appropriate time and stage in analysing, reporting on and considering investment decisions that the approach is nuanced and fine-tuned so as to draw necessary distinctions within the blue, green and recreational space category to address the specific needs of infrastructure that supports organised sport, including the seven sports represented by COMPPS. Whilst an understandable approach to take at the level of the Audit itself, there is a risk that continued bundling of organised sport infrastructure within a generic category that also includes, for example, simple open space, community facilities and libraries, will not appropriately pay regard to the unique benefits delivered by participating and supporting organised club-based sport, both at a community and elite level. These require more than simple “green space” or public, open spaces or playgrounds that can support casual, individual recreation and play.

We encourage government to engage with COMPPS, as a collective of seven major professional and participation sports, to ensure any new investment in blue, green and recreational spaces and/or planned changes to the use of existing spaces or infrastructure maximises return on investment, increases participation in sport and is well received by local communities. COMPPS is an organisation focused on participation and access to facilities for each of its sports collectively, rather than promoting the position of just one sport in isolation. In this regard, COMPPS is in a unique position to provide a measured and cooperative view to governments in relation to sports infrastructure at all levels.

4 SPECIFIC COMMENTS

As noted above, participation in sport has the potential to make a major contribution to and positively impact the health and well-being of the Australian community. While this is a principle widely recognised across government and the health and sports industry, its impact and potential has not been fully realised. A reason for this is related to the fact that at an industry level, sport has not been able to adequately address and break down barriers to entry, such as ensuring that sport is accessible (both from a financial and physical perspective) and that there is adequate infrastructure in place to facilitate

participation (from access to courts and green-space to change-rooms and equipment).

With the rapid expansion of our cities and urban populations, which makes access to green-space difficult, COMPPS considers that State and Local governments should be looking to engage with schools around access to their infrastructure to enable the delivery and participation in sport to occur. Thus the identification of this as an issue and recognition of the under-utilisation of school facilities in the Audit is welcome. The role that school sporting infrastructure (whether existing or new) can play in delivering broader community benefits is one that deserves express treatment. In relation to new builds, the design elements should specifically have regard to maximising the ability for sporting infrastructure to be accessed and used outside of traditional school hours and practices (including for training and overflow facilities). Sharing of facilities, new ways of thinking and a flexibility of approach will assist in the removal of one of the main barriers to sports participation, that being accessibility for males and females to appropriate infrastructure. This is a key challenge to address. The COMPPS members report that ground/court/venue capacity is being stretched an unprecedented levels and the creation of additional places to play is an urgent priority.

There is a particular need and challenge with respect to female sport. The rise in female participation in sport is noteworthy and facilitating and supporting this growth is a key priority for the COMPPS members. However the ability to do so is impeded by the lack of adequate facilities for female participants at many local sports grounds. The Audit refers to inadequate facilities for the growing female sport population and uses the AFL and Rugby as illustrations. COMPPS can confirm that this is a pressing issue that applies across each of the COMPPS sports. As noted below, this is an area where COMPPS submits, significant reach and impact could be derived through a concerted project.

General access issues aside, it is also the common experience of the COMPPS members that the current provision of sporting club infrastructure across Australia varies widely in quality and standards, which in some cases is limiting opportunities to grow and sustain participation in our sports. Additionally, the changing landscape of sport participation over the last decade, specifically the increased focus on female and disability inclusion, has led to many facilities not meeting the requirements for participants.

In order to grow participation, improvement in the quality and access to appropriate sporting infrastructure is required. Providing access to high quality sporting venues and facilities is essential to facilitate participation, enable game development and pathways, and support the sustainability of grass roots sporting clubs.

COMPPS supports investment into joint and shared use recreation infrastructure, to overcome funding constraints and improve the utilisation of venues and facilities. This is extremely important in regional and rural areas where a certain facility of one code may have lower demand which may result in lower funding opportunities. These regional facilities are important to sustaining participation as they generally service multiple towns and bring a strong sense of community pride. In high population city areas, where green space is at a premium, COMPPS supports the use of high utilisation measures including mixed use change rooms and sports lighting. COMPPS also supports investment into synthetic fields though a strong preference remains for natural grass fields that have quality drainage and irrigation systems.

It is also important to note that by its very nature, investment in sport infrastructure at a community level, both metropolitan, rural and regional, can have a real ripple effect – where quite modest expenditure (comparative to other forms of infrastructure) can have a broad impact – both in geographic and temporal terms. This is because the investment required for such infrastructure as lighting, change-rooms etc, to be rolled out across a wide number of communities is relatively modest whilst having significant impact on large numbers of participants and providing the foundations, through increased participation in sport, for long-term improved social outcomes. For example, a targeted program addressing the need for changing spaces to accommodate the demand for and support the growth in participation of girls and women in sport would deliver incalculable wide-reaching benefits far exceeding the direct costs of such a project.

At the same time, while participation at a community level is the cornerstone of all the COMPPS members, there also needs to be due recognition of the importance of continued investment in sporting venues that can accommodate major professional and international sporting events. Not only is this critical for ensuring Australia can maintain its competitive position in attracting world events, it has important domestic relevance. Through show-casing sport at its highest level, major venues play an integral role in bringing communities together, motivating non-participants to themselves take up a sport and inspiring young Australians who already participate in sport to strive to achieve their potential. As such, these major venues are essential assets, invaluable as meeting places for fostering community connection and in so doing also provide significant economic benefit through year-round operations and event delivery.

Tourism is listed in the Audit as a key growth area. The role of sporting tourism is a specific aspect of the tourism sector warranting its own strategy. Building on Australia's reputation as a sporting country internationally and on our natural assets, investment in sporting tourism, supported by underlying sporting infrastructure, should be a priority or could otherwise represent a lost opportunity. This extends to investment in stadia that enable Australia to compete effectively for major international sporting events that generate

inbound tourism on a mass scale, but also venues in regional and rural areas that could host smaller scale events such as women's and junior international sporting competitions.

Finally, the COMPPS members have all experienced challenges and share the concern that fragmentation in government planning and delivery can lead to lost opportunity and efficiencies in the area of sporting infrastructure investment. COMPPS members can also point to cases where sport partnering with government has produced successful outcomes. COMPPS would support initiatives (eg data sharing, consistency of methodology when auditing assets) that would result in greater coordination and cooperation between governments as well as industry, leading to overall better outcomes.

5 CONTACT DETAILS

Should Sport Australia have any questions in relation to this submission or require any further information from COMPPS or its members please contact Jo Setright at jsetright@compps.com.au or at:

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Yours sincerely



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