

## **Remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the 5th International Working Group, World Conference on Women and Sport**

20 May 2010

THE HON KATE ELLIS MP  
MINISTER FOR SPORT  
REMARKS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF  
THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP  
WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND SPORT  
SYDNEY CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE

Thursday, 20 May 2010

Thank you for welcoming me here this evening to be a part of the Official Opening of the 5th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport.

I am thrilled to be here today to contribute to this conference and to speak about a topic that I am very passionate about - women's sport and the role of women in sport.

Like most Australians, I take great pride in the battles won and sometimes lost, by our nation's sporting heroes and come the weekend I passionately monitor the progress of my respective teams.

But if I am honest with you, I find it confronting that as a sports mad nation, we still persistently see the relegation of women's sport to second place.

Given that sport is so centrally tied to how we define ourselves as a country I am sure that you share my frustration that women's sport is treated differently and in many ways is seen as a poor cousin of men's sport in Australia.

If sport is to be seen as a symbol of our national identity, then surely it must be reflective of our values as a people values like fairness, equality and respect.

Our Government believes that sport has a unique capacity to bring communities together and we are committed to forging a new path forward for sport one that is more inclusive and one that better reflects our diversity. And that means both genders.

And we have great ambitions for women's sport both on and off the field.

It has been a big couple of weeks for sport in this country.

Just last week the Government released Australian Sport: Pathway to Success, our new vision for sport in this country. That vision is backed by a record \$1.2 billion for sport over the next four years, including \$195 million in new funding the biggest funding injection to sport in our nation's history.

With this record funding and the policy that accompanies it, we will be able to support sport and athletes to a level not previously possible. We will also be able to progress several of our policy priorities. And as many of you would know, women's sport is firmly on our agenda.

One of the biggest challenges is of course getting women seen, heard and supported by our media so that we can end what seems to be the never ending cycle of no media coverage equalling no resources.

Today, I am pleased to release the new report Towards a Level Playing Field; a report that provides a valuable insight into the gender inequity of sports media coverage in Australia.

While the report did find that the proportion of media coverage that relates to women's sport has actually increased over time and that stereotyping women as being emotionally and physically inferior to men has decreased, it does confirm that women's sport is indeed the forgotten child when it comes media coverage.

Towards a Level Playing Field reveals that in 2008, coverage of women in sport made up just 9% of all sports coverage in Australian television news and current affairs with a miserly 7% of non-news sports programming on television devoted to female sport.

On the other hand, male sport occupied a whopping 81% of television news and current affairs reporting and 86% of non-news programming on television.

To put this in context - horseracing alone receives more airtime than all women's sport combined, in Australian television news.

There is no doubt an untapped market in Australia and in other countries where women's sport could thrive and we are all well aware of the vicious cycle that exists between a lack of media exposure limiting sponsorship opportunities, which stifles professionalisation which, can in turn limit media opportunities.

While international experiences have shown us that women's sport can be profitable to media organisations - for example, women's netball is a ratings success in New Zealand - the lack of coverage in Australia continues to cause serious problems for our women athletes.

Over our 2 years in Government we have undertaken several measures to attempt to address this. These initiatives include the Government's \$2.4 million investment in the Trans-Tasman netball competition which includes \$400,000 to support and promote the free to air television coverage of the ANZ Netball Championships. And our delivery of \$32 million over 4 years to the Football Federation Australia, which includes funding to support a televised Westfield Women's League.

Last week's funding increase ensures that we can build on this assistance going forward. A dedicated pool of funds will now be established through the Australian Sports Commission to provide women's sport with additional resources, to boost the media coverage of women's sport in our country. We are determined to work in partnership with Australian sport in order to lift the profile of our female champions.

In support of raising the profile of women's sport, I can also announce the establishment of the Women in Sport Awards to recognise exemplary initiatives which provide special support for women's and girls' participation in sport, whether as players, coaches, administrators or officials and to recognise and reward outstanding media reporting.

But all of us here tonight know that media coverage is only part of the challenge that faces women's sport.

Women have a key role to play in the development of sport in Australia - as participants, volunteers, athletes and sports leaders as coaches and administrators. And yet we still see women facing barriers to participating in sport across their lifetime.

In terms of participation in sport, we know that during the 12 months to April 2009, 1 million children aged 5 - 15 did not participate in any organised sport outside of school hours, with a higher proportion of girls (44%) not participating in organised sports than boys (30%). Obviously this has health implications for our girls but also social implications and lost opportunities with long term effects.

Last week we announced a range of new initiatives that will enable the Government to work in

partnership with our national sporting organisations to improve women's and girl's participation and leadership in sport.

The Government is requiring national sporting organisations, as a condition of their funding, to develop plans to ensure that our nations' diversity is reflected in sporting participation. And through the Australian Sports Commission we will fund sports to work directly with community clubs, schools and local government to achieve this goal.

We have long heard of the specific barriers to female participation. Both the Senate Inquiry into women's sport and the National Advisory Group on Body Image have raised issues around body image sensitivities and uniforms, particularly for girls.

In a new partnership, I have requested that the Commission now work with sport and other key bodies, such as the Butterfly Foundation to develop strategies and best practice to tackle body image issues and to disseminate this information to sport so that we can together help build environments that support girls getting active.

Beyond participation though, another key task for sports policy makers and administrators is to address the barriers that currently prevent women's participation within sporting organisations themselves.

When I was first appointed Minister for Sport, the Commission organised a series of lunch meetings in Capital cities to informally discuss pressing issues with the leaders, Presidents and Chairs of Australian sport. I looked around the room and saw that surrounded by over 40 sports leaders - I was the solitary female in the room.

This must change.

Once again, in a nation that celebrates sport as being a central thread of our community these numbers are ludicrous. The culture of sport itself is long overdue for a significant shake up. And this is what we have signalled we will do.

The Australian Government will require all national sporting organisations to annually report on the gender representation of their boards - with this information then being published.

These figures will be made public so that organisations can be judged on their progress by you and their communities.

Too often we have heard excuses for the frequently dismal representation of women on sporting boards like "if there was a woman with the appropriate skills, we'd appoint them". Well I'm sorry but I do not accept that with over half the population we can not find women with business expertise, marketing expertise, accounting expertise or sporting expertise. I just don't.

But if it is really that hard for sport then we are happy to help.

I am pleased to announce that the Government will establish a register of women with appropriate skills and experience to assist sport to improve this record. The Women in Sport Register will enable women to register their skills and interest in being involved in sport and sports can readily access potential candidates and find a match to their needs.

This initiative is not only about growing the number of women on Australia's sporting boards, it is also about working from within to promote healthy sport cultures and that requires women.

Nothing delivers a statement about women's leadership in sport more than initiatives like this conference - where sport, women and community leaders can come together to share our experiences and our ambitions for women's sport.

Together we have the opportunity to strengthen women's sport and subsequently sport as a whole.

I thank you all whole heartedly for the pleasure of being here tonight and I look forward to hearing about all of the great things you do over the coming days.  
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