

# A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD: the case for investing in women's sport



# THE STATE OF PLAY



## DID YOU KNOW?



The full-time gender pay gap in 'Sports and Recreation Activities' sits at 30.6% – almost double the national average.<sup>1</sup>



Male sport makes up 81% of television sports news coverage, compared to women at just 7.4%.<sup>3</sup>



Women make up just 22% of board chairs and 13% of CEOs across more than 60 Australian sporting organisations.<sup>2</sup>



Young males (15-17 year-olds) are almost three times more likely than females (14.1% compared with 4.9% respectively) to have engaged in 60 minutes of exercise every day.<sup>4</sup>

The underrepresentation of women means that sporting clubs and organisations lose out on the many benefits of gender diversity. It presents missed opportunities for sporting organisations, and the broader industry, to expand audience bases, increase viewership and engage different communities in sport. Google searches for AFLW grew by 70% in 2019, following a viral image of star player Tayla Harris showcasing her strong athleticism<sup>5</sup>, demonstrating the growing interest in and demand for women's sport.

## Investing in women leaders pays dividends

The importance of women as leaders to grow the participation capacity of an organisation should not be underestimated. For example, research continues to show that increasing gender diversity is not only good for the company but the economy as a whole. Studies show that companies with three or more women directors outperformed those with no women on their boards, an example of one study<sup>6</sup> showed that boards with three or more women directors achieved an 84% return on sales, 60% return on invested capital, and 46% return on equity.



## BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

There are many barriers to women's full and equal participation in sport:

-  Negative gender stereotypes
-  Self-image and perceptions of body, especially in teenage girls
-  The unequal burden of care work
-  Less visible role models
-  Representations in the media
-  Inadequate facilities and infrastructure
-  Inadequate funding
-  Sexual harassment and abuse
-  Unequal pay

Photo credits

Front cover: *Swimming Australia and Dely Carr*

Above: *Richmond Football Club*



# WHAT COULD A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD LOOK LIKE?

Increased number and visibility of female athletes as role models breaking stereotypes and empowering women and girls to be fit and active.

Increased airtime and coverage leading to better viewership and the introduction of more female competitions and events.

Increased profits and brand loyalty for sporting organisations and their sponsors when they realise the full potential of investing in women's sport e.g. sponsorship, merchandise, ticket sales.



Increased numbers of women and girls engaging with sport at the community level, being active and building a strong pipeline of female talent to professional and elite levels. Increased numbers of women, including minority groups, as leaders across all levels of sport.

Increased numbers of women performing at elite levels leading to increased funding and in turn investment in appropriate infrastructure.

Increased economic growth and employment opportunities, and increase returns from infrastructure development e.g. change rooms and stadia.



## Bowling over the barriers to equality

Cricket Australia has developed a comprehensive approach to boosting gender equality focused on improving gender diversity within their organisation and across all levels of the sport. Since the development of their gender strategy, Cricket Australia has witnessed 700% increase in the number of cricket associations that provide an all girls competition, and the number of community level women's teams has grown from 200 to more than 750.

In 2018-19, 30% of all cricket participants nationwide were female.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Cricket Australia has made year on year growth towards its internal target of 40% representation of both men and women within its staff base.<sup>8</sup> To ensure equity at the elite level, Cricket Australia signed a landmark pay equity deal with the women's team, committing to equal remuneration. They also committed to topping up the difference in prize earnings from the International Cricket Council to ensure parity for the Australian team.

# REIMAGINING EQUALITY IN SPORT

**Harnessing the full potential of women in sport would create positive social and economic change, with benefits for individuals, communities, sporting organisations, the broader sporting industry, and Australia's global standing.**

## INDIVIDUAL

By increasing women's representation and participation in sport, the individual health impacts for women are significant. Women are half as likely as men to be adequately active, impacting overall physical and psychological wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Not only does participation in sport increase women's physical health, but the positive impact of participating in sport on mental health is clear. As many as 60% of girls say that sport helps them to forget their worries,<sup>10</sup> and studies show young girls benefit from having an activity that allows them to switch off from the pressures of school, friends and family. Additional benefits of team sports include socialisation, teamwork, resilience, learning how to manage setbacks, as well as generating a better night's sleep.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond health benefits, participating in sport is linked with the development of leadership skills. Team sports in particular, teach girls essential life skills such as communication skills and how to effectively communicate with other teammates, decision-making skills, strategy execution, realistic goal setting, the ability to influence others positively, quick problem-solving skills and team-building skills.<sup>12</sup>

**MYTH:** Women's sport doesn't engage audiences, and therefore sponsorship, pay and coverage should not be equitable.

**FACT:** Demand for women's sport is growing worldwide. The US Women's National Soccer team's 2019 World Cup Victory ranked as one of the most watched sporting events in history.<sup>13</sup> Closer to home, the 2018 Women's T20 International cricket match saw a peak audience of 1.3 million<sup>14</sup> and the 2019 Australian Open Women's final reached a domestic peak TV audience, a record attendance at the arena and became one of the most watched tennis matches, male or female, in history.<sup>15</sup>



## COMMUNITY

Communities benefit when more women and girls are engaged participants in sport. Millions of Australians volunteer their time to sport, creating a bank of social capital as well as improving community cohesion, wellbeing and connection. Studies show that children who participate in sport are more likely to return to education, go to university and become employed.<sup>16</sup>

Sport is also a powerful catalyst for social change; it can help shape community attitudes and perspectives and plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes. Sport teaches that women and girls can be strong, powerful and competitive, and paints these traits as healthy and normal, helping to redefine gender norms. Additionally, strong, powerful female role models increase the interest and participation of women in sport. For example, when Australian cricket star Meg Lanning was younger, she played on the boy's cricket team as there were no cricket opportunities for girls in her region. Meg's persistence and the success of the women's cricket team have ultimately led to a rapid expansion of interest from young women and girls, with Cricket Australia witnessing a 700% increase in community groups that offer an all-girls competition.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the investment by the South Launceston Football Club into infrastructure for women's teams (e.g. change rooms) boosted club participation and saw a rise in the number of women contributing across all types of roles at the club.<sup>18</sup>

### Community kicking goals for inclusion

The Traralgon City Soccer Club (TCSC) participated in the Gippsland Women's Health and GippSport 50/50 Club initiative to boost gender equality. As part of the initiative, TCSC undertook a gender audit and discovered that sexist attitudes and a concern for safety were among some of the barriers faced by women joining the club. TCSC had their club committee undertake 'Mentors in Violence Prevention' training to increase their capacity to recognise and respond to disrespectful attitudes to women, hosted a 'You the Man' event focused on how bystanders can support people experiencing violence, and applied for a grant to improve lighting in the club car park to increase feelings of safety. As a result, female membership has increased, and more women have taken active volunteer roles. TCSC learnt that a commitment to inclusion is a vital step in growing their club.



## ORGANISATION AND INDUSTRY

Every year 11 million Australian adults and 3 million children participate in sport, and approximately 8 million attend live sporting events.<sup>19</sup> As an industry, sport engages with broad cross-sections of the community, but to date, does not reflect its full diversity.

The evidence-base for gender equality is clear; improved productivity and economic growth, increased organisational performance, enhanced ability to attract and retain talent, and improved organisational reputation.<sup>20</sup> Women are responsible for 70-80% of purchasing decisions and for sports clubs and teams, this provides an immense opportunity to grow revenue bases from sponsorships, ticket sales and membership dues by tapping into the female market. Promoting women's engagement in sport as players and spectators, coaches and trainers not only has positive financial implications but research shows that when gender diversity is prioritised, connection is strengthened and poor and anti-social behaviours decrease.<sup>21</sup>

### Nike shoots for equality

Organisations and brands who recognise and support the development of women's sports witness growth in both brand reputation and revenue. In 2019 Nike launched the 'Dream Crazier' campaign spotlighting female athletes such as Serena Williams, Simone Biles, Ibtihaj Muhammad, Chloe Kim and the US Women's National Soccer Team. Following the commercial, Nike saw a spike in positive media and social media, as well as increased revenue.<sup>22</sup> Nike also has witnessed sales growth by adapting to become leaders in women's athletic wear, developing the world's first Pro Hijab for female Muslim athletes, and being a leading designer in sports bra technology. Realising the potential of women's sports and its brand growth, Nike has capitalised and built its brand reputation as one for strong, empowered and active women.



## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Sport contributes to an estimated A\$83 billion in economic, health and educational benefits annually for Australia with a return on investment of A\$7 for every A\$1 spent. The sports sector employs over 220,000 people, which represents 1.9 per cent of the Australian workforce. A further 1.8 million committed volunteers donate 158 million hours to sport each year.<sup>23</sup> Increasing women and girls' representation and involvement in, access and contribution to this previously male-dominated sector will have significant flow on effects for our economy.

Sport is also a powerful tool for diplomacy; it is a global language that connects and unifies. Sports diplomacy builds Australia's reputation on the global stage, builds trust and generates links with trade and development. Importantly, Australia's sports diplomacy program focuses on developing youth (especially young women and girls) as emerging leaders, building leadership capacity within sport and more broadly across the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>24</sup>

### An even playing field

The Paralympics are a quiet achiever for gender equality. In contrast to the Olympics and many other sports, the Paralympics allows gender mixed teams to compete in many of its sports including rowing, archery, wheelchair rugby and shooting, among others.

Mixed gender sports allow for equal opportunity and reward, putting athletes on an even playing field. Not only do gender mixed teams push for equality, but Australia sent its first gender equal team to compete at the 2016 Rio Paralympics, demonstrating on the world stage the value of women in sport.

### Equal investment, double the success

For Hockey Australia, investing in their athletes equally has been a core part of their strategy for several years, and the results are clear. The Hockeyroos and Kookaburras are two of Australia's most competitive sports teams on the world stage.

One way that Hockey Australia ensures equal investment in its players, regardless of their gender, is to provide matched funding where an external inequity may exist e.g. the Kookaburras receive more funding from the Australian Sports Commission to ensure pay parity for its athletes.

# HOW CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Whether you're a spectator, athlete or a CEO, we all have a sphere of influence and a role to play in advancing gender equality in sport. What actions will you take to even the score?<sup>25</sup>

## SPORTING ORGANISATIONS (ELITE AND COMMUNITY)

- Champion the participation of women and girls
- Actively seek sponsorships that invest in women's sports
- Invest in equal talent development and remuneration for men and women
- Review marketing to ensure that "public face" aligns with message of gender equality
- Invest in infrastructure e.g. change rooms to enable equal participation
- Ensure equitable representation of women as leaders in all levels of the organisation and sport

## MEDIA AND BROADCASTERS

- Review coverage to ensure reporting is equitable
- Build the profile of women's sport including athletes, coaches and commentators
- Profile top female talent
- Increase the representation of women as commentators and sports journalists

## CORPORATES

- Invest equally in women and men's sport including through corporate entertainment
- Offer flexible work arrangements for staff to engage with sport
- Ensure corporate entertainment is distributed evenly between men and women's sport

## GOVERNMENT

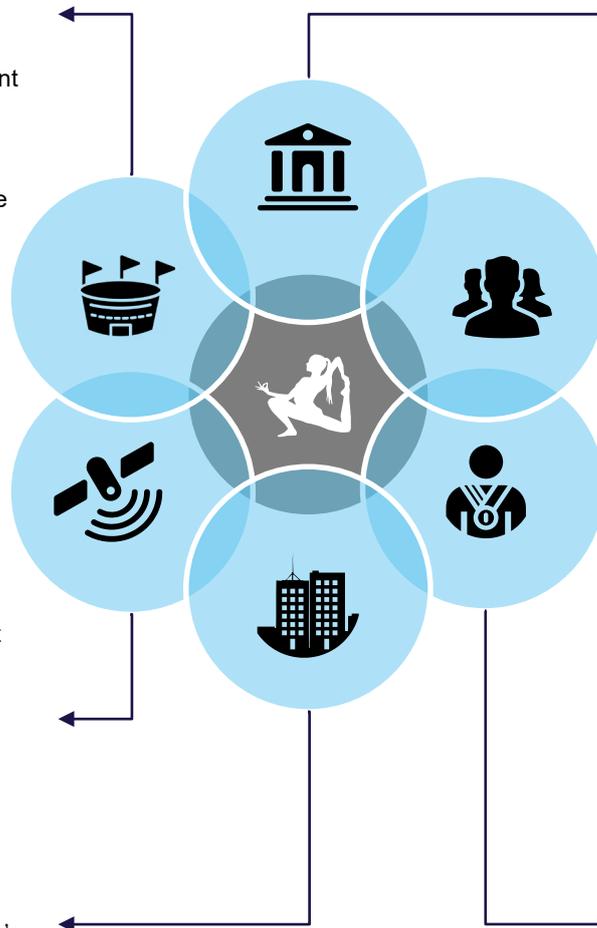
- Invest in infrastructure for women's sport
- Make pay equality conditional for funding opportunities
- Ensure funding is distributed equally between men's and women's sports with specific focus and investment on creating new pathways for women
- Ensure that when funding is provided there is an equal program for men and women e.g. Olympics

## FANS

- Generate demand for women's sports
- Attend and watch women's sporting events
- Demand intersectional coverage of women's sport e.g. Paralympics
- Play community-level sport
- Profile your support of women's sport through your personal and social networks

## PLAYER'S ASSOCIATIONS

- Advocate for equal investment in development
- Advocate for equal pay
- Advocate for increased representation of women within leadership groups



The Australian Women in Sport Advisory Group was established in 2019 to create a strategic and coordinated approach within and across sectors to achieve gender equality for women and girls in sport in Australia. One priority was to promote the diverse benefits of investing in women and girls. We would like to thank PwC for the research that they undertook to support this report.

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