

**Media Release – The Future of Australian Sport (Author: David Crawford)
November 19 2009**

Parks and Leisure Australia, whose 2000 members are responsible for more than 3 billion dollars of community sport and recreation facilities from Playgrounds to Olympic Podiums – and more!...congratulates David Crawford and his team for producing a national review and detailed direction which seeks to benefit all Australians through sport, recreation, physical activity and healthy lifestyle choices.

Parks and Leisure Australia supports the direction of the report, through its endeavors to move beyond just the Olympic elite (whilst still recognizing and supporting such) toward a broader and more holistic understanding of sport and physical activity – from community sport to international representation. Congratulations must also go to Minister Ellis, for her commitment to support a review which goes beyond the single Federal tier of government right down to where the vast majority of sport and recreation activity takes place – at the local government, community level.

Parks and Leisure Australia’s membership – close to 2000 professionals engaged in planning and managing community recreation opportunities – have been strong advocates of a number of the directions highlighted in the Crawford report. Issues addressed include:

- A recognition that sport and recreation success is as much about supporting the junior netballer, the lawn bowler, or the older adult walking group, as it is about the Olympic rower. All should be supported and all require access to appropriate facilities.
- A recognition of stronger support of community facility infrastructure across a number of community partnerships – e.g. local councils, schools, and universities. The report recommends a national sports facilities fund of \$250 million per year for 4 years. Whilst this is an admirable start, it is certainly nowhere near the amount necessary to “partner in local government community infrastructure” funding for sport and recreation.
- A recognition that the “drought proofing of community assets” is an important priority – as PLA members well know - the cost in both social capital and facility re-establishment if fair and equitable access to water is not available for community activity.
- The recognition of a need for greater community access to education facilities outside of school hours. Whilst these facilities generally fall under the governance of State authorities, a nationally coordinated solution to “opening the gates” outside of school hours is essential, if these assets are to be a part of the “shared sport and recreation facility base” which exist within all communities. PLA has been a strong advocate for developing a coordinated national solution which moves beyond the attitude or goodwill of a school council or principal. If local communities are to maximize sport and recreation facilities, Federal and State Government must work together with local government in order to plan, manage and share these community assets.

The report also promotes the development of a National Policy Framework for Sport (PLA suggest this should include recreation as well) which includes the need for improved national data on participation and infrastructure. Both of these items have been long overdue. Parks and Leisure Australia – along with other colleagues - has made a number of representations to SCORS regarding the need for a nationally integrated spatial database system – linked back through the local government systems, for informed decision making and efficiency of government grant allocations. At the present time there is no national or state inventory of sport and recreation infrastructure, or credible participation data.

In reviewing the Crawford Report, Parks and Leisure Australia make specific reference to the following sections:

Chapter 1 – Defining Our Nation’s Sport Vision

PLA believes the report certainly moves beyond the federal government previous “elite view” of sports support. However, it still needs to recognise that the vast majority of Australians do not play competitive sport but participate in a broad range of participative social recreation, and if our nation is to address healthy lifestyles, obesity, diabetes etc., it must include the comprehensive sport and recreation pursuits of all Australians.

Chapter 5 – Putting Sport and Physical Activity Back Into Education

The direction of the report recommends a strengthening of sport and physical education as a key learning area in schools. Whilst this goes part of the way toward an individual’s introduction to activity and healthy practices, it does not go far enough in making the essential community sport and recreation links with the community in which the student lives. Without those connections which enable lifestyle behaviours, it remains as a school based activity subject and not a part of a lifestyle practice. Perhaps the report would do better to have recommended school based sport and recreation facilitators who could introduce activity within the school setting, as well as link it to a lifetime opportunity within the community - another reason to enable a seamless relationship between local community facilities and school sport and recreation facilities!

Chapter 6 – Building Community Sport with People and Places

It is to be applauded that the report recommends a role for the Federal Government to re-join in partnership with State, Territory and Local Governments, to play a role in the funding of community sport and recreation infrastructure. The Federal Government has been noticeable in its absence in the provision of financial support at the community grass-roots level for far too long. It is important that such re-involvement be carefully developed in consultation with input from organisations such as Parks and Leisure Australia; in order to ensure all aspects of sport and recreation are recognised, and the depth of involvement goes beyond past fast fix, ad hoc and spasmodic programs of support.

In conclusion, Parks and Leisure Australia endorse and applaud the direction of the report and encourage the Minister to continually progress the report through ongoing partnerships with government and industry partners such as PLA. We look forward to assisting with the further development of these and other initiatives which ensure a comprehensive and inclusive focus on sport and recreation for all Australians.

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