

# ***Sessional Committee on Sport and Youth***

## **CHAIR'S STATEMENT 21 February 2008**

Madam Speaker, in my capacity as the new Chairman elect of the Sessional Committee on Sport and Youth, I seek leave to make a report in relation to the progress of this Committee's inquiry since the last statement made by the Committee Chair in November 2006.

[WHEN LEAVE GRANTED]

I would like to begin by thanking the previous Members of the Committee for their enthusiastic and comprehensive contribution to the inquiry and these are the former Chair, my colleague, the Member for Port Darwin, Kerry Sacilotto, the now Ministers for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, Len Kiely and for Sport and Recreation, Matthew Bonson and the newly elected Leader of the Opposition, Terry Mills.

In doing so, I pay tribute to their work during their terms on the Committee. Although I have not had a lot of opportunity to get across all of their work of the past two years, I do know that the Committee has reached a stage where it is almost ready to bring down its first report and I extend my thanks to them for this.

I also take this opportunity to welcome on board the other new Members, the Member for MacDonnell, Alison Anderson, Member for Greatorex, Matt Conlan and also Member for Arnhem, Malarndirri McCarthy, who is rejoining the Committee. I look forward to working with these Members, along with those remaining on the Committee, Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood and Member for Katherine, Fay Miller.

I would like to remind Parliamentary Members of the Terms of Reference for Sport and Youth, which give the Committee three areas upon which to concentrate, namely –

- the ability and effectiveness of existing structures and programs, from grassroots to elite, to deliver in urban, regional and remote areas, and recommendations for improvement;

- the role and benefit of School Sport NT programs and links to participation; and
- demonstrated links between participation in sport and reduced antisocial behaviour.

In the Committee's last statement, the Chair outlined what she saw as the Committee's role, of investigating how to change or improve the way sporting programs for our young people are delivered right across the Northern Territory. This is with the aim of ensuring that more young people are able to access, and more importantly are motivated to do so, a range of sporting activities. I wholeheartedly endorse this role, as I am sure will the other new Committee Members. The range of suggestions, ideas and input the Committee has received in the last year from Territorians is encouraging, which is why I today intend to express some of the preliminary policy directions that the Committee has previously endorsed.

In doing this, Madam Speaker, I would like to emphasise that the Committee still has work to do on finalising its report which I anticipate will be tabled in the April/May sittings. The report will expand greatly on what I will be saying today and will contain the Committee's definitive findings and recommendations.

However there are a number of areas where the reporting direction has been endorsed and I will go through these today.

Before doing so, I wish to recap the work of the Committee since the then Chair reported to Parliament on behalf of the Committee in November 2006.

Shortly after the last statement, the Committee received feedback from Members on sporting initiatives for young people in their electorates that were showing encouraging outcomes for young people, in terms of participation and positive lifestyle changes. I thank those Members who responded for their constructive comments. It was pleasing that Sport and Youth Committee Members were able to meet with some of the organisers mentioned by Members during the extensive community consultations in the latter part of last year.

In her November 2006 statement the former Chair indicated that the Committee's community consultation program was yet to be finalised but I am pleased to report that this has largely now occurred. A comprehensive program was developed and commenced in July 2007 with the initial public hearing being held in Darwin.

I should mention that at this time, July 2007, the Committee, in view of the uncertainty in various remote communities regarding the then recently announced federal interventions, agreed that addressing of the last of its Terms of Reference, which would necessarily involve hearings in remote communities, be deferred for the time being.

All Members would agree, Madam Speaker that the last thing remote communities needed at that stage of uncertainty was more politicians asking more questions about young people.

As a result, the decision was made to focus on the first two Terms of Reference, in relation to how effective the existing structures are in delivering sporting outcomes for all our young people as well as the operation of School Sport NT.

Since this time, hearings have been held in Palmerston, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Batchelor. The Committee will travel to Katherine in two weeks and the Jabiru Town Council is to be requested to compile a submission representing the views of that community.

These sessions have provided the Committee with an excellent opportunity to liaise with members of the public, representing a wide range of groups. Parents, teachers, coaches, sports administrators, police, recreation officers, council members, facility operators, researchers and young people have all made valuable contributions to the inquiry and given the Committee an extensive overview of the current status of program delivery and how changes may improve some situations.

In excess of 70 individuals have spoken with the Committee and I thank them all for their contributions.

Since November 2006, the Committee has convened on 12 occasions to take evidence from witnesses, deliberate on evidence and receive official briefings from key stakeholders.

To further contribute to the inquiry, visits by the Committee Research Officer to interstate counterparts delivering sport, school sport and other relevant programs, were undertaken. This consultation has allowed for comparison with Northern Territory models and given the Committee a wide range of options to consider.

Members should be aware that School Sport NT is part of a national framework of sporting delivery for young people in all states and territories. The Committee has been very mindful that if it is going to adequately fulfil its charter with regard to the School Sport NT reference, it was essential to understand how counterparts of School Sport NT operate in other jurisdictions.

In addition, official briefings have been provided by the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport to ensure that the Committee was aware of changes to local government that may impact sport delivery, particularly in remote communities, and to also inform the Committee of activity surrounding the development of a Sport and Recreation Policy for the Territory.

Development of this policy is directed by my colleague, the Minister for Sport and Recreation and the Committee is very supportive of this initiative. Materials and information have been provided by the Committee's Research Officer to assist the policy coordination unit responsible for its formulation. The Committee looks forward to continued dialogue with this unit to ensure that feedback we have received is considered in the development of policy.

Other briefings have been provided by the Northern Territory Institute of Sport and School Sport NT, keeping the Committee up to date of most recent activity within grassroots and elite settings.

With this, and the link to policy development in mind, I am pleased to provide some feedback on a number of policy directions that the Sessional Committee on Sport and Youth has agreed to, to date, based on the evidence put to it and its deliberations on this. As noted earlier, the Committee plans to table a comprehensive report outlining its recommendations and findings in support of these later this year, once the initial inquiry phase is completed.

The policy directions from the existing evidence which I will talk about today are in relation to the first two terms of reference, that is, the ability and effectiveness of existing structures and programs, from grassroots to elite, to deliver in urban, regional and remote areas, and recommendations for improvement; and the role and benefit of School Sport NT programs and links to participation.

The timeliness of this statement today will allow the Sport and Recreation Division of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport to consider its content during development of the Northern Territory Sport and Recreation Policy which I referred to earlier.

There are a number of reasons that I take the opportunity to provide information on the Committee's progress with the inquiry on the first two terms of reference.

As I stated earlier, with the activity being undertaken by the Federal Government in Aboriginal communities, the Committee felt that to conduct hearings or community consultations in these settings would create additional confusion for community members. Until the situation becomes more stable in the bush, the Committee will not visit.

However the Committee was lucky to hear from a representative of the Jaru Pirijidi program operating out of Mt Theo and Yuendumu during the public hearing in Alice Springs. This is an excellent example of sport and activity being used to divert young people away from behaviour that could compromise their health or safety and links very closely with the third term of reference of the Committee.

A number of similar programs have come to the attention of the Committee and we would like to explore these further through community visits and as such be able to report in a more wholistic way against term of reference number 3.

Another reason is that the first two terms of reference have become seemingly intertwined with many contributors to our inquiry, highlighting the importance of sport at school as a contributor to participation in sport in the community.

Other links between the two terms of reference include use of facilities by schools and sporting groups with similar outcomes and correlation between skill acquisition during quality physical education and sporting ability and participation.

Another area of interest that has been highlighted to the Committee is participation by young people with disabilities, whether this be through school or community settings.

I look forward to reviewing more of the evidence presented to the Committee and would now like to share with you some interim policy directions which the Committee has endorsed to date.

Concerns were raised with the Committee of safety issues associated with billeting of young people. It has been common practice for School Sport participants to be billeted by families when participating in Exchange or Championship events but there is scope within School Sport NT guidelines and policies for other accommodation arrangements to be made.

This includes arranging for camping, hostel or similar style lodgings, parents making arrangements for their children to stay with relatives or friends at the event destination or the option for parents to travel with teams and accommodate their children with them. These options have cost implications, making them sometimes impractical choices.

Duty of care is provided to students while they are in the care of the teacher travelling with the sports team, but there is no guarantee for safety of students once they leave an event and enter the care of a billeting family.

While the Committee was considering the introduction of compulsory police checks for billets, there has been a recent legislative change that supports the view of Members.

The Care and Protection of Children Act 2007, assented to on 12 December 2007 will, when enacted, provide measures for the prevention of harm and exploitation of children, which includes screening for child-related employment. I refer Members to Chapter 3, Part 3.1 of this Act. It is clear from this legislation that although billeting families are volunteering for that role, they will be required to undergo relevant checks to be issued with a clearance notice.

I anticipate that the Committee will also suggest a review of the management structures of School Sport NT, with the possible investigation of the establishment of a Foundation, as presently operating in some other states, which would be responsible for generation of sponsorship and funding. The Foundation could be financed on a commission basis, that is, individuals/business' responsible for sourcing funds would receive commission.

Guidelines for expenditure of the funding need to be developed and possibly directed towards those in most need, such as remote and disadvantaged participants. This could be expanded to become a Junior Sport Foundation and cater for mass participation programs as well.

The Committee sees this is necessary because of the need to address funding shortfalls for resources, equipment, travel, uniforms, expert training and facilities - all common concerns raised through the community consultations. In fact the whole area of funding School Sport NT to allow it to operate effectively and deliver on its programs would appear to need to be addressed.

I should emphasise at this point, Madam Speaker that the management of School Sport NT is dedicated and enthusiastic, but the operation of the body is not readily understood by those outside the organisation and in fact confusion was noted both from parents and from peak sporting bodies. I would also think, Madam Speaker that teachers and program deliverers with skills in coaching and event management should not be required to undertake fundraising or administrative tasks – these should be done by staff skilled in these areas.

The Committee is also concerned at the workload required of the seven existing Physical Education Coordinator positions. I would think that by ensuring that each of the eight school clusters has its own dedicated PEC – Physical Education Coordinator – their ability to operate effectively for the young people in the cluster is maximised.

It should be noted that 50% of the PEC's role is to support and deliver School Sport NT programs, while the remaining time is to assist schools with professional learning and support for delivery of quality physical education curriculum programs.

The Committee was greatly impressed, during a visit for hearings and meetings in Alice Springs, to witness an example of a successful physical education program. In Alice Springs, schools participate in a weekly inter-school sporting program. This has been conducted regularly for primary schools and, in 2007, was introduced for secondary students. The secondary program is driven by the School Sport NT Cluster Committee. The Sport and Youth Committee can see huge benefits flowing from the Department of Employment, Education and Training introducing this model into all Territory primary schools at least as a compulsory, weekly activity. It is considered that the infrastructure currently exists for PEC's and School Sport NT to deliver this.

This model would be ably supported with all Primary Schools being encouraged to have an identified physical education teacher or at least a suitably qualified generalist teacher to support other teachers in the classroom. This identified teacher should have, as a minimum, training in motor skill development. This is another area that the Committee is looking at for its report.

Another issue is with regard to sporting access for young people with disabilities. The Committee would like to see the re-establishment of a Disability Sport Education Officer position within the Department of Employment, Education and Training. Joint funding options between the Office of Sport and Recreation and the Department of Employment, Education and Training for this could be explored.

This position was formerly housed in the Sport, Health and Physical Education School of the Department of Employment, Education and Training. Since its abolition, there is no longer a central point of contact for students with disability, teachers or parents of students with disability to access information and support for their inclusion into sporting programs, whether they be school or community based.

Evidence received by the Committee from a young man with disability highlighted how different his experience with sport would have been, had such a position been in place. While providing education and support to the school environment, this position could also link with community providers including sporting groups and non-government bodies such as Total Recreation.

The Committee also sees benefits in the re-establishment of the Junior Sport Reference Group, under the auspices of the Division of Sport and Recreation in the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. This Group would provide ongoing advice to government and relevant Ministers on the needs of sport for young people. It could benefit from being strategically linked with the Youth Round Table and other existing youth groups.

An important link in sports participation, identified by much of the current literature, is that between school and community sport. Further investigation by the Department of Employment, Education and Training into mechanisms for making school facilities available for use by community groups could be of value. By the same token, use of community facilities by schools should also be expanded.

As already mentioned, the Committee intends to table a comprehensive report of our findings and recommendations during upcoming sittings. The policy directions I have highlighted thus far will be further explored in the report and I look forward to presenting it to Members.

Again, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of former Committee Members and thank them, along with the many members of the Northern Territory public who have contributed so thoughtfully and comprehensively to the Committee inquiry. I look forward to fruitful deliberations with my colleagues, the new and continuing Members of the Sessional Committee on Sport and Youth.

Madam Speaker, I move that the progress report of the Sessional Committee be noted.