



## **THE HON SUSSAN LEY MP**

Minister for Health  
Minister for Sport  
Minister for Aged Care

### **SPEECH**

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It's a great pleasure to be here today at such an important event and to have the opportunity to speak with you all.

I've been asked to talk about the role and responsibilities of the Australian Government in formulating and implementing elite sport policy.

So the first point I would make is this. For many of us, while sport seems to have defined Australia as a nation forever, and notwithstanding our proud record of elite sporting achievement, it's only been in the last 40 years or so that the national government has had significant involvement.

Before the 1970s, sport policy was almost absent from Australia's national public policy landscape. What policies, programmes and funding there were, were usually driven by committed individuals in government.

In what could arguably be called the halcyon days, the 1950s and 1960s, Australia – tiny Australia – had many sporting heroes and heroines: track and field athletes Betty Cuthbert, Shirley Strickland, John Landy, and Ralph Doubell; swimmers Murray Rose, Dawn Fraser, and Lorraine Crapp; tennis players Lew Hoad, Ken Rosewall and Margaret Court; and golfers Norman von Nida, Peter Thompson and Kel Nagle, along with the world's best cricketers.

But none, one would have to say, owed their success to any involvement by the Commonwealth Government.

Things began to change in the early 1970s when a clear sport policy agenda started to emerge along with a Sports Ministry.

Associate Professor John Bloomfield, top sportsman and academic, noted in his book, *Australia's Sporting Success: the Inside Story*, a growing number of sports advocates (himself included), were pressuring the Australian Government over the lack of involvement. They asserted, referring to the efforts of the United States and

European nations in particular, that the government's failure to engage with sport was reducing Australia's competitiveness.

These critics urged Australia to follow the lead of other nations by establishing a ministry of sport to oversee the development of a professional sport system.

Bloomfield's landmark report recommended, among other things, the establishment of a national institute of sport, but it wasn't until later in the decade, that things really started to happen.

And the impetus came not from any ongoing sporting success, but from sporting failure – the 'disaster' of Australia's 1976 Montreal Olympics performance where we recorded just one silver and four bronze medals – and not one gold.

It was the first time Australia had not won a gold medal at the Games since 1936, and the lowest medal total since then – and Australians weren't happy about it. The unthinkable was happening – we weren't winning. Still a plucky competitor, yes. But winning? – no.

Sport was on the front page – but for the wrong reasons – a situation compounded by the divisive impact of the upcoming 1980 Moscow Games. Enter Minister for Home Affairs Bob Ellicott in Malcolm Fraser's Government, who had seen the concept of a national sports institute while on a trip to China in 1979.

And so it was Ellicott's political acumen and can-do approach that led directly to the official opening by Prime Minister Fraser of the Australian Institute of Sport on a muddled building site in a tranquil bush setting in Canberra in 1981.

Assuredly, Australia started to return to its winning ways at the elite level – with Los Angeles, Seoul, Barcelona and Atlanta culminating in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, arguably Australia's greatest sporting triumph.

Since 1981, and the foundation of the AIS, Australia has continually developed and refined its elite sport policy and practice, with its development and implementation being led by the Australian Sports Commission since 1985.

As sport has become more professional, specialised and globalised, Australia has continued to "punch above its weight" in the sporting world relative to population size and funding levels for the past 30 years.

The ASC's focus on both elite sport and participation and "getting the balance right" has been a difficult and well contested journey.

The development and implementation of elite sport and participation policy hasn't been a consistent and even process in this country. Over the long-term, unexpected issues have emerged – from a health perspective, not the least being the growing crisis in lifestyle-related chronic disease and childhood obesity, which poses a major challenge to develop the next generation of elite athletes.

New challenges for athletes, coaches, administrators and policy makers have arisen – constantly. Competition gets stronger all the time. Resources get tighter – reinforcing the need to get more bang for our sports buck.

And as needs change, priorities have been reassessed and strategies revised.

Accordingly, changes have been iterative, building on prior learnings. Regular reviews in response to ever-changing domestic and international challenges have allowed the system to evolve and adapt.

Worldwide, high performance sport is sophisticated and increasingly science and technology driven. The cost of achieving podium success is increasing as the sporting world gets more successful. This is also true of Paralympic sport where technology plays a fundamental role in an athlete's competitiveness.

Australia sees three key pillars to the successful conduct of sport – developing high performance excellence, building participation in sport and increasingly, maintaining the integrity of sport.

The Government's commitment to sport has been consistently premised on supporting sport at all levels – from the grassroots to the elite – to compete at the highest level, and to win; but also to contribute to building, active, healthy Australian communities.

We recognise that success in high performance sport must be underpinned by a strong community sport participation base. We are providing increased opportunities for our school kids to be physically active; to improve their motor skill development; and to enable them to participate in safe, fun and supervised activities.

We are also developing clear and seamless pathways for emerging sports talent – with schools and clubs; between junior, youth and senior competitions; between regional state and national programs; and among the Indigenous community.

And all the time this is helping to address those lifestyle-related health issues I just referred to.

Certainly, as both Minister for Health and Minister for Sport, I am able to take a balanced approach to sport and health. We have a proud sporting pedigree in this country and I want to leverage that to make us happier, healthier Australians – starting with putting down the remote, getting off the couch, and getting active.

Last month I was joined by female soccer players of all ages and abilities, on the lawns of Parliament House as part of a call to action for women to remain physically active.

It's no secret that young women, particularly in school years, experience a number of barriers that prevent them from being as physically active as young men. Research identifies the fear of being judged or ridiculed as a key barrier for young women wishing to be physically active.

However, this issue is often masked by other practical and emotional barriers. The main barriers given are feeling unskilled, self-conscious, concern about their appearance - both with their bodies in general and how they look during and after exercising as well as a general lack of interest.

Beyond the school years, different barriers emerge, including time and cost, lack of information about available options, and guilt about spending time & money on themselves.

Predominantly, these are social and cultural barriers and the last thing I want to do is lecture women about the importance of physical activity. But I do plead with them to put their health first and get active to ensure they – and their families - live more healthy, happy and productive lives.

Our current high performance 'elite sport strategy' is known as Australia's Winning Edge.

Winning Edge is a 10-year game plan for getting value for the taxpayer's sports dollar with the AIS at its centre.

The AIS, so fundamental in those early days of getting Australia back to its winning ways, continues to hold a unique place in the elite sport landscape through a state of the art high performance environment, offering the sports science and nutrition services to sporting organisations to help give athletes that "winning edge."

Other support to elite athletes and teams comes via State Institutes and Academies of Sport; and through direct athlete support.

The ASC has also developed a national sport participation strategy Play. Sport. Australia to support and encourage National Sporting Organisations to increase participation through new approaches.

Strong sports participation is critical for maintaining long-term elite sport performances. A broad and deep participation pool increases the possibility of the best 'natural' talent finding their way into sport.

But it's not just numbers. "Physical literacy" or skills development plays an important role. Children need to learn all the components that support good gross motor skills (coordination, balance, muscle strength, etc) at an early age to ensure they have the best chance of building the sport-specific technical skills required later on.

For almost two decades, Australian governments have been providing funding in support of sport participation for children. Our current programme is Sporting Schools – and we are firm supporters of it. It provides funding so sporting clubs can deliver sport-specific age appropriate training in schools. The Government has allocated \$100 million over three years to the initiative.

Increasingly, integrity in sport is playing a crucial role in supporting and protecting elite sport. The Turnbull Government is committed to sport being free from match-fixing and drug use.

The threats posed to the integrity of sport in Australia from the manipulation of sports competitions and the use of prohibited substances by athletes raise a number of complex challenges. These are beyond the control of sporting codes and require a coordinated response from all stakeholders including government.

While the Australian Government has developed and adopted a number of world's best practice sport integrity initiatives, no country is immune from these threats and every nation must remain vigilant.

The explosion of online betting products in the last decade presents obvious risks for many sports. As betting markets grow, so too does the temptation to manipulate the outcome of sporting events.

The Australian Government will continue to seek opportunities to strengthen the sport integrity environment in Australia and to contribute to the development of consistent international arrangements to protect the integrity of sport around the world.

To conclude - Australia continues to strive to sustain its place at the top table of elite sports performance. We have refocused and reprioritised our elite sport approach following London 2012 and look ahead with optimism – albeit cautious, realistic optimism – to Rio 2016 and the first test of Australia's Winning Edge.

Historically, Australia's elite sports policy has shown a readiness to evolve and adapt to circumstances and events. I believe in the future we will continue to review our performance, our programmes, and our institutions, drawing on the achievements and knowledge of other nations as they have so often drawn from us.

Be assured that the Turnbull Government will continue to provide the necessary support to Australia's elite athletes, both able-bodied and disabled, so they have the best possible chance of success on the world stage.

I also remain committed to driving sports participation, not just in the search for the future gold medallists, but also for the obvious health benefits of the nation.

We are all too aware of the focus of other countries seeking to take our place on the Olympic podium and we know too well the fine margins for success. No pressure.

However, with its energy, expertise and willingness to learn, I believe Australia will long continue to be at the forefront of elite sport policy and performance – helping to prepare people to succeed not only in sport, but in life as well.

Thank you