



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission



AUSTRALIAN
INSTITUTE OF SPORT

Review of High Performance Structure in Australian Women's Artistic Gymnastics

**Innovation and Best Practice
February 2007**

Reviewer: Jackie Fairweather



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a result of discussions to further optimise the quality and depth of elite competitors in women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) and concerns over the lack of a high performance program and culture in the biggest membership state, NSW, a review of the High Performance Structure of WAG was undertaken by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), in partnership with Gymnastics Australia (GA).

Australia's results at international level have improved dramatically since the mid-1980s due to the strength of the AIS, WAIS, VIS and QAS programs. Apart from the recent emergence of three club programs with quality coaching, the national WAG high performance structure is very much reliant on these four high performance centre programs to place athletes on national squads and teams.

In order for Australia to make the step up from being a top eight nation to being a consistent podium contender, the system needs to increase the pool of highest quality athletes from which national teams can be selected and optimally prepared. For this to happen there needs to be enhancements made in the following areas:

- Ensuring talented athletes around the country are identified and have the opportunity to develop their potential with the highest quality coaches, in supportive, specific high performance environments.
- Ensuring an understanding, appreciation and support of the high performance structure by the broader WAG community nationally.
- Clarification, communication and collective ownership of the aims, objectives and roles of the national high performance structure.
- Establishing the crucial contribution and buy-in by the state of NSW to the high performance structure.
- Developing and solidifying links, relationships and cooperation between the broader club base and the high performance structure.
- Coach support, education, mentoring and succession planning.
- Sport science and sport medicine funding, support, research and dissemination of information.

In order to achieve the aims of this review and further evolve, unite and enhance the current structure, taking into consideration the history and culture of the sport, the following recommendations were made:

- 1. It is recommended that the four existing AIS/SIS/SAS programs are prioritised and sustained as the pinnacle programs for dedicated high performance preparation and service provision.**
- 2. It is recommended that GA drive communication and promotion of the high performance pathway and programs nationally, through its website and other means.**
This would include such initiatives as:
 - A High Performance section/tab on the GA website,
 - Depiction and explanation of the National High Performance Pathway, including options for progressing through the levels and opportunities for support.

- Information on the National Squad program (Add to existing info on National Squad athletes, including their coach and home club).
 - Information on AIS program and its benefits.
 - Information about the SIS/SAS programs and their role and benefits.
 - Athletes writing about their high performance experiences.
 - Acknowledgement of clubs and coaches contributing to the national objectives.
3. **It is recommended GA lead further initiatives to share ideas to enhance the WAG national high performance system, including conducting a National Forum in 2007 (and if possible, beyond).** The forum should include the AIS/SIS/SAS Program Managers, GA Head Coach and Sport Director, and Coaches from AIS/SIS/SAS, major high performance clubs, including representatives from SA and NSW, **collectively planning for 2008-12 including:**
 - Clarification of national high performance aim, objectives and strategy.
 - Defining of roles and responsibilities at various levels.
 - Improving connections between high performance clubs and AIS/SIS/SAS.
 - Improving underpinning structure (satellite clubs).
 - Improved club support of the national high performance plan.
 - Consider ways to appropriately recognise High Performance Clubs (coaches and athletes) who are able to produce athletes making national teams.
 - Enhanced coach mentoring and education throughout the system.
 - Creating broader buy in and understanding of national high performance objectives.
 - Collective support and ideas for solving of any individual state issues.
 4. It is recommended that Gymnastics NSW put forward its own proposal to GA for a high performance structure for the state. The submission should include best use of resources available and role of clubs, state body, NSWIS and GA.
 5. It is then recommended that GA and GNSW work together to establish an agreed upon high performance structure, congruent with the National structure.
 6. It is recommended that, utilising the knowledge of those involved in and responsible for the existing SIS/SAS programs and highest level clubs, GA develop a best practice model for high performance centres/clubs.
 7. That this High Performance Club Model be used strategically, where and when needed to enhance the national high performance pathway.
 8. It is recommended that a National Junior Development Coach / Coordinator be appointed in 2007.
 9. It is recommended that GA, with appropriate assistance from the ASC, prioritise the development of its new coach education system where coaches have incentive to progress up the ranks, and in doing so, gain appropriate expertise, recognition and credibility.
 10. GA, in consultation with the ASC's developing programs in High Performance Coach Development and Support, explore initiatives for assisting coach development around program leadership, management and cross-cultural issues.

11. The Coach mentoring system that has started through the Women in Sport Grants and ASC coach scholarships must continue as an established systematic GA program.
12. An annual Coach Forum be established for all high performance (International Stream) coaches Nationally.
13. Additionally it is recommended that there be twice yearly targeted technical workshops for elite high performance coaches – i.e. all coaches who have put athletes on a national team, possibly as part of AIS national camps.
14. It is recommended that at the National High Performance Forum (recommendation 3), the group (including GA) determine the viability of any possible equitable and sustainable strategies for rewarding coaches, athletes and/or programs for performance at the highest level.
15. It is recommended that as part of the AIS program budget, an amount is allocated (e.g. \$3000 per athlete per annum) for additional SSSM support in the home environment. This would apply to all AIS/GA National Squad camps scholarship athletes. (n=7)
16. It is recommended that GA continues to support and enhance commitment to SSSM support, research and injury prevention, as well as coach integration and education.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

During the Gymnastics 'Beijing Athlete Program' meeting on 3 July 2006, involving key stakeholders, there were discussions about both the depth of high performance athletes and the lack of a high performance program in NSW for Women's Artistic Gymnastics (WAG). As a result, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) agreed to conduct a review of the High Performance Structure of WAG in Australia, on behalf of and in partnership with Gymnastics Australia (GA).

The Aim of the Review was to develop recommendations for an enhanced national pathway, with optimal use of resources, and maximisation of opportunities for female gymnasts in Australia, in order to achieve international success. This was done through evaluating the effectiveness of:

- the elite athlete development pathways for Women's Artistic Gymnastics in Australia
- the aims, roles and contributions of all the various stakeholders and organisations
- best use of resources across the national system
- both athlete and coach development and how they inter-relate
- the various parts of the program structure nationally and how well they integrate to make up the whole and support the strategic plan of Gymnastics Australia.

Preliminary work on the review began in early August with initial consultations and background research. From mid-September a total of over 40 interviews with 55 people were conducted (see Appendix A). Those interviewed included current and former athletes, club coaches, coaches from State Institute and Academy (SIS/SAS) programs, program managers, Gymnastics Australia staff, CEO's and staff of state bodies (WA, NSW, VIC, QLD), International level Judges, Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and SIS/SAS program staff including Directors, and Sport Science & Sport Medicine (SSSM) service providers.

Extensive consultation and collation of the data, and collaboration between the ASC and GA, lead to the production of this report and the recommendations here within.

BACKGROUND

There has been significant development of WAG in Australia over the last 25 years. Since the inception of an AIS program (1981), followed by programs in Western Australia (WAIS from 1985); Victoria (VIS from 1991) and Queensland (QAS from 1995), Australian gymnasts have progressed from being one of the lowest ranked countries, to a top 12 nation from 1991 (6th in 1991), to solidifying a top 6-8 ranking since the late 90's (See Fig 1 and Appendix B). The women's team broke through to win the bronze medal at the 2003 World Championships and Monette Russo also won a bronze in the Individual All Around at the 2005 World Championships.

The next step is to become a firm contender for podium positions, especially at Olympic level where our results have lagged behind those at World Championship level and a top six result (team or individual) has not been achieved to date.

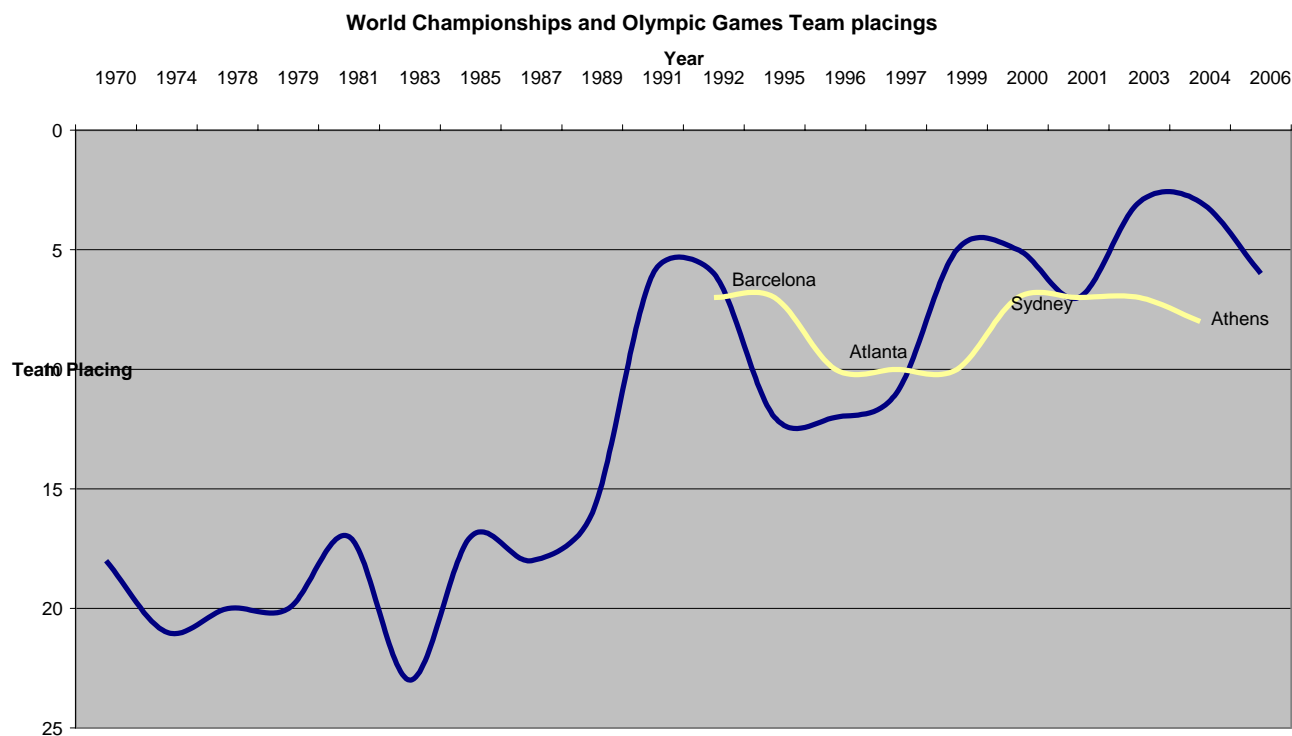


Figure 1. Progression of Australian WAG Team results at World Championship and Olympic Games.

The view is widely held that we have the base numbers and athletes with the talent in Australia to win medals at international level. There are just over 100,000 registered gymnasts throughout Australia, of which approximately 20,000 are ‘competitive’ WAG gymnasts and of the 77,000 ‘General Gym’ participants, 75% are female.

The key questions to be addressed are:

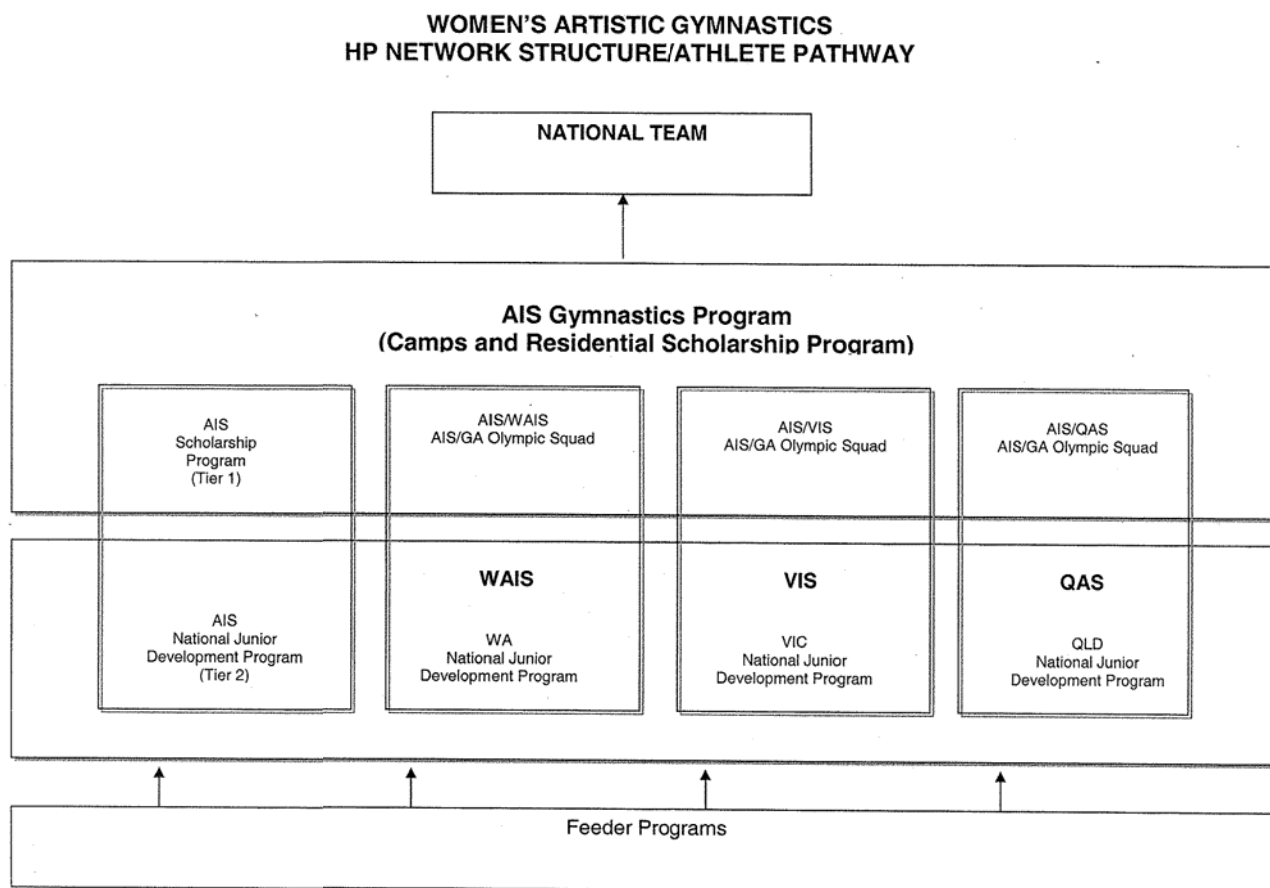
- *How to provide ever improving quality of coaching to promising young gymnasts so the base competencies and quality of our athletes rises right through the pathway.*
- *How to maximise the identification and development of talented athletes from a young age across the country and link them into the national high performance program.*
- *How to improve the numbers of top quality athletes at the Senior International level, thereby increasing the depth of talent we have from which to select our national teams.*
- *How to increase the support to our best athletes so their experiences are enhanced, their injuries minimised, and their performances optimised.*

To this end, one of the stated outcomes within the 2005 – 2009 GA High Performance Plan is the need for: ‘A high performance network that is unified, sustainable and financially viable, supporting and contributing to the National Program’.

Four High Performance Centre Programs

The current high performance structure of WAG in Australia has evolved to the presence of four dedicated High Performance Centre (HPC) programs at the AIS and three State Institute/Academies (WAIS, VIS, QAS). These four HPC's are the backbone of the national program, with each making consistent contributions of athletes to major National Teams since their inception (See Appendix C). The four HPC's are supported by an AIS camps component to optimally prepare athletes for International competition. The GA depiction of the high performance pathway is as shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2.



With the exception of the AIS program, all three SIS/SAS HPC programs started from a club program and evolved, through the exceptional vision and leadership of one or two individuals, to become high quality programs backed by the state body and the state institute/academy. The AIS program was the only HPC initiated by the national body. Historically WAG high performance was formed as a centralised program at the AIS. The AIS program and the head coach, Ju Ping Tian (1985-2005), made significant contributions to the emergence of Australian WAG on the international scene, however the concept of very young girls (with or without their families) having to relocate to Canberra with no guarantees of success and leaving a big hole in their home clubs, meant the AIS did not work culturally as *the* stand alone HPC program. The centralised program

concept has been the source of much debate within the sport over the last 20 years and although bringing the best athletes together (at the AIS) for a period of time to prepare for major events is recognised as ideal, a small number of high quality training centres around the country is generally accepted to be the best model for development of Australian's elite gymnasts.

The emergence of strong SIS/SAS HPC programs in three states, has been very positive for the sport, providing options and stand alone development pathways in those states. It must be noted that each SIS/SAS HPC program evolved on its own (under strong leadership), rather than being planned and built as part of a national system by GA. The structure that has evolved is now strongly supported by GA and it is widely felt that all four HPC programs are necessary and to lose any of them would be a significant threat to the sustainability of the system and Australia's performance at international level. Outside of these High Performance Centres and their direct underpinning programs, there are very few gymnastic clubs/programs feeding into the national pool of high performance talent.

Requirements for success

The success of a high performance centre in producing world class athletes, in its most simplistic form, depends on a coach with very high technical expertise and international experience being able to focus his/her attention on a small number (2-4) of talented athletes who have been schooled impeccably from a very young age (6-8 years old) in the skill, technique and physical preparation required.

Because of the need for correct development from a very young age and the large attrition rate for a wide variety of reasons (opportunities, access to quality coaching, insufficient talent, growth, injury, change in interests, other sports, social reasons, family, etc), it is essential that any high performance program have access to a large pool of developing athletes, taught by very high quality coaches, to feed into (or become) the scenario of the top coach working with the small number of top athletes. As the athletes develop towards the highest level the training commitment builds to the 30-35 hours per week required by a Senior International gymnast (by age 15-16). In Australia, the very best coaches (usually foreign) are generally employed by the AIS/SIS/SAS, with a handful of top coaches also in private clubs. As there are a limited number of very high quality coaches, there is a constant issue of balance between these coaches working with elite and/or developing athletes.

Apart from access to the highest level coaches, the pathway for a talented female gymnast is not as simple as moving through the ranks towards being a 'Senior International' elite. The existence of 'National Stream' and 'International Stream' provides increased opportunities for achievement but complicates the pathway due to the fact that not all talented gymnasts are necessarily directed towards the International Stream (and World, Commonwealth, Olympic representation), as achievements in National Stream are of great importance to many club programs, as well as to the athletes and their parents. Moving between the two streams is possible but not well used or understood.

Additionally, with the age of elite competitors being so young in women's gymnastics, the role of the family and the welfare and development of the athlete within the context of their family is a vital issue which needs to be considered at every step of the pathway.

The structure of WAG in Australia is such that the number of coaches and clubs that 'feed into' the AIS/SIS/SAS HPC's is relatively small. This is due to the factors above and other factors such as: geographical location, HPC capacity, quality and focus of club programs, as well as the relationship, cooperation and history with the HPC and the coaches and/or managers involved on both sides. The result is that not all talented athletes are identified or have exposure to highest quality coaching, and the current SIS/SAS programs (and to a lesser extent the AIS) are unable to exist purely as one or two of the very best coaches working with 2-8 of the very best athletes. All SIS/SAS have also found the need to have inbuilt development programs, with between 50 and 150 athletes and 4-6 coaches. This set up makes the programs very expensive to run, with each of the SIS/SAS programs running on a total budget of approximately \$500,000 supplemented in every case by athletes paying fees, with high level athletes paying between \$3000 to as much as \$15,000 per annum. It is only National Squad athletes, who are relieved of paying fees, according to criteria within each SIS/SAS program.

While the current AIS/SIS/SAS HPC structure is strong and produces a steady stream of 8-10 competitive senior international gymnasts per cycle, there is a need to *'increase the number of quality athletes competing for a position on national squads and teams'* in order to optimise the preparation and performance of teams (6 gymnasts), as stated as an outcome in the 2005 - 2009 GA High Performance Plan.

The limitations to increasing the number of top quality gymnasts are:

- High costs of training for the athletes and of running a HPC program for the SIS/SAS.
- The resulting challenge of sustaining the SIS/SAS and AIS support of WAG and ensuring value and viability of these programs for the key stakeholders.
- Anecdotally, across all individual sports, it is very rare for one coach working with a group of competing athletes to be able to produce more than two internationally competitive calibre athletes simultaneously. If there are only four HPC's with only one high performance group (lead by one coach, even with assistant coaches), then generally the likely number of athletes rising to the highest level will be two from each centre, or eight in total.
- Due to costs and structure, SIS/SAS HPC programs generally have only one coach group working with the top group of athletes.
- The effectiveness and efficiency balance of the best coaches working with the best athletes Vs working with/ ensuring the quality of developing athletes.
- The number of top level coaches working with the best athletes in the entire system.
- The omnipresent risk of injury or illness to top athletes.
- The number of coaches around the country capable of, and in the right circumstances for, developing athletes to the highest level.
- Identification of, and the number of clubs willing to hand on, talented athletes into the AIS/SIS/SAS and high performance system.
- The fact that there is no high performance centre and very little high performance culture in NSW, the state with the largest participant base (30,000 registered gymnasts and growing - of which up to 75% are female).
- The travel involved and/or risk for athletes and families of relocating to attend one of the four AIS/SIS/SAS programs. i.e. the geographical coverage limit of four HPC's.
- Roles and capacities within the system are not always well defined or understood.

- The fact that the national high performance structure is not clearly defined, articulated, publicised to the broader WAG community.
- Negative connotations associated with high performance women's gymnastics – hard work, serious, pressure cooker, 'not fun', not looking after holistic development of the child.

Despite these issues, many of the elements of a good high performance system are already in place, including: a number of passionate and knowledgeable high performance coaches, officials and administrators; a sizable pool of athletes; and four strong High Performance Centre programs. *The major gap in the system is the dearth of high performance feeder programs and irregularity of linkages and cooperation between programs, for talent identification and athlete progression.* The current structure is producing results consistently in the top 8 in the world, putting Australian gymnasts in with a chance of medals from time to time. There is, however, an opportunity to further define, clarify and unite the current structure and address the issues above to push evolution of the structure in a direction that will enhance the chances of our gymnasts to feature more prominently on future World and Olympic podiums.

CURRENT HIGH PERFORMANCE NETWORK

In each of the three states with SIS/SAS programs and at the AIS, the models have evolved differently to suit need and demographics of the cities in which they are situated.

No model was without some criticism, and certainly none was seen as a perfect model to replicate nationally. There were elements of all that others could learn from. Generally it was felt that the model for each program and in each state was an evolution of needs, personalities, demographics such as population density and resources. That evolution is ongoing.

The AIS Program was originally set up as a central model for high performance WAG in Australia. The rest of the country fed gymnasts into the AIS and the AIS Head Coach actively recruited top gymnasts to relocate to the program. Over time, the AIS program has evolved to become just one of four SIS/SAS HPC choices for young gymnasts, albeit one on which the other SIS/SAS were modelled. Since the establishment of the SIS/SAS programs, the majority of athletes have feed into the AIS from NSW, SA, ACT and country areas throughout Australia. The AIS caters for athletes who don't have a SIS/SAS HPC locally, and/or for those for whom the particular set up of the AIS are appealing. It is the only fully funded residential program in the country. The big advantages of the AIS program are the extensive sports medicine support; the fact that all needs are catered for onsite including the residential option; lower coach:athlete ratios for sub-junior, junior and senior athletes; and the fact that no fees are payable. However, with a small population base in the ACT, and less interstate parents willing to relocate their families or send young athletes to the AIS, it has been identified as becoming harder to find quality athletes to feed into the program.

The AIS is also the camps base for the National Squad, with all National Squad members having AIS camps scholarships and most being dual badged with their SIS/SAS program. Camp scholarship athletes have all camp costs covered, as well as funding for any selection trials and receive full AIS SSSM support while in camp. They also receive \$600 Direct Athlete Support from GA per 6 month scholarship period. There is negligible tangible AIS support outside of camps and selection events.

The camps program is working very effectively, with the AIS facility widely recognised as the best place to bring Australian athletes together for camps and final team preparations. There is willingness and desire to further expand the camps program at the AIS, encompassing further coach and junior development.

Budget: \$609,350 + \$185,890 joint operational/administration budget with men's program.

These funds are sourced solely from the AIS and are not transferable to the broader WAG budget.

Scholarships: up to 24 residential; up to 10 camps (7 AIS/GA National Squad, 3 visiting); currently 10 residential and 5 camps scholarship holders

Coaches: Valery Kaladinski (Head Coach), 4 assistant coaches

Western Australia:

The WAIS Program was the first of the SIS/SAS programs established and despite only 7000 registered gymnasts across all disciplines (between 6000 and 9000 annually since 1995), WAIS has managed to put an average of 1.18 athletes on every World, Commonwealth Games and

Olympic team since 1989. This equates to 23.89% of all possible spots on these national teams. (See Appendix C)

Under the management of Liz Chetkovich, the WAIS program has a number of clubs feeding into it, each with a clear understanding of the pathway in WA and their role in it. With a lesser population density compared to the big cities, the WAIS program is a truly centralised program for WA, clearly providing the leadership, direction, coach development, resources and dedication for high performance in the state. The gymnastics population is such that there is really not the market for any club program to develop the capacity to sustain a top end high performance program. WAIS works effectively with a number of satellite/feeder clubs. Without the WAIS program, it is very difficult to see WA having the resources to develop Senior International Gymnasts on its own.

WAIS Budget: The full program includes: cash components of \$60,000 from GA, \$226,000 of support from WAIS, approximately \$30,000 from GWA, \$17,000 ASC-WAIS, \$12,000 ASC (NSCP) and athlete fees of approximately \$202,000. Total budget almost \$550,000

Scholarships: Program caters for up to 50 gymnasts across all GWA/WAIS squads. 3-4 in top tier (Junior and Senior International); 3-5 in 2nd tier (Level 10).

Caters for: Level 1A through to Senior International.

Coaches: Liz Chetkovich (Head of Gymnastics Coach) Nikolai Lapchine (Senior Coach); Martine George (Senior Coach), plus 2 full time coaches, part time choreographer, 3 part time development coaches.

Victoria

The VIS Program was born out of the initiative of Fiona Bird at the Cheltenham Gymnastics Club in the very early 1990's. It now has a dedicated state high performance facility in Pahrn where the State program, The Victorian Women's High Performance Centre (VWHPC), runs side by side with, and underpinning, the VIS program. There are several other recognised satellite clubs which support the VWHPC and VIS program. The Head Coach is highly respected and the VIS program has a very good record of producing high quality gymnasts. Highlights of the program include the very strong group of girls who made up the bulk of the 2000 Olympic squad and contributed half the final team, as well as Monette Russo, Australia's only Individual All Around World Championship medallist from 2005.

Budget: VIS budget is \$210,000 with \$60,000 from GA, \$120,000 of support from VIS, and approximately \$30,000 from GV. The VWHPC also has its own budget and total budget for the two programs is approximately \$500,000, with athlete fees making up the balance.

Scholarships: Currently 11 full VIS scholarship holders, plus 6 development and 1 associate (USA college based).

Caters for: VWHPC/VIS caters for 60-70 girls Level 1A through to Senior International. Kindergym also at VWHPC . Total 150 kids.

Coaches: Mikail Barabach (VIS Head Coach); Tracey Penaluna (GV Program Manager and Assistant coach); 2 additional senior coaches, 5 underpinning coaches.

Two large clubs within Melbourne also run successful high performance programs. Methodist Ladies College (MLC) is a club attached to an exclusive girls high school and is run by Mark Carlton

(formerly a coach at both AIS and VIS) and Michelle DeHighden, (former VIS coach). MLC has yet to have an athlete gain a place on the National Team, but has had athletes on the National Squad. Former VIS and AIS coaches John Hart and Shao Yi Jiang are also prominent in the success of Waverley Advanced Gymnastics Club, which recently boasted two girls on the 2006 World Championships team. The emergence of clubs placing girls on Junior and Senior National Squads is relatively recent. While their contribution to the national team is most valuable, their sustainability is yet to be proven. The relationship between the VIS and these high performance clubs is still to be fully considered and defined so as to best support the athletes. It is definitely arguable that Melbourne as a city is large enough to sustain two high performance clubs in addition to the VIS/VWHPC centre, especially clubs of the standard and professionalism of Waverley and MLC. The challenge is to find a balance between sustaining the value, support and success of the VIS program, and acknowledging and valuing the role a small number of high quality high performance club programs can play - By defining the relationships while harnessing positive competitive pressures to further lift the standards.

Queensland

The QAS Program is currently rebuilding after a period of some instability, partly involving coaching staff. Most of the high performance coaches in the national system are from either China or former Soviet States and there are times when ideologies clash. The QAS Program has been running since the mid 1990's and is the only program, apart from the AIS, that runs both men's and women's artistic gymnastics. The QAS program also has an inbuilt development program, but now has a philosophy to enhance, not to compete with, the club structure in the state. Value-add initiatives such as clinics by QAS coaches at satellite clubs in each region, build relationships and provide professional development opportunities for club coaches. The Gymnastics Queensland (GQ) WAG State Squad is decentralised, but coordinated by the QAS/GQ Program Manager.

Budget: \$105,000 from QAS for WAG, \$80,000 from GA (for both men and women), approx \$263,020 from GQ (\$196,720 - Salaries including 50% of Program Manager Salary plus \$66,300 = 50% of Operational Costs) = Total budget approx \$438,020. (Coexists with men's program).

Scholarships: 8 QAS Scholarship holders (5 at QAS centre, Chandler + 3 at MBC). Also 30 WAG Gymnasts in the Qld HPC squad program. Criteria: from International Level 6 who are medallists at National Championships, through to Senior International.

Caters for: Level 1A to Senior International (but emphasis on Level 6 and above).

Coaches: Guo Xin Min (QAS Head Coach), Stephania Iliesu (Coach & Choreographer), Xi Quanzhi (Coach), Vladimir Zakharov (Coach), John Curtin (GQ & QAS Gymnastics Program Coordinator).

Two of the Russian coaches who left the QAS during the instability, along with former head of GQ, Peter Dowdell, now form the backbone of the Moreton Bay College (MBC) Program. Along with MLC and Waverley, MBC is the other high performance club to have placed athletes on the national squad and team. As in Victoria, the relationship between the SIS/SAS program and the high performance club, is not yet in complete harmony, but relationships between the Head Coaches of the two programs is apparently good and the QAS has developed a flexible model allowing funding of National Squad athletes outside of the QAS program (contributing to fees and reimbursing SSSM support). GQ have considered the ramifications of the existence of high performance clubs

along with a QAS program and sees the value in the choices the two programs can provide and the different contributions they bring to the state high performance structure. The structure in Qld is still fragile, with many scarred by events in the recent past, but they are rebuilding with the philosophy of being open and inclusive and of QAS and GQ program coaches reaching out to support development of club programs.

Other States

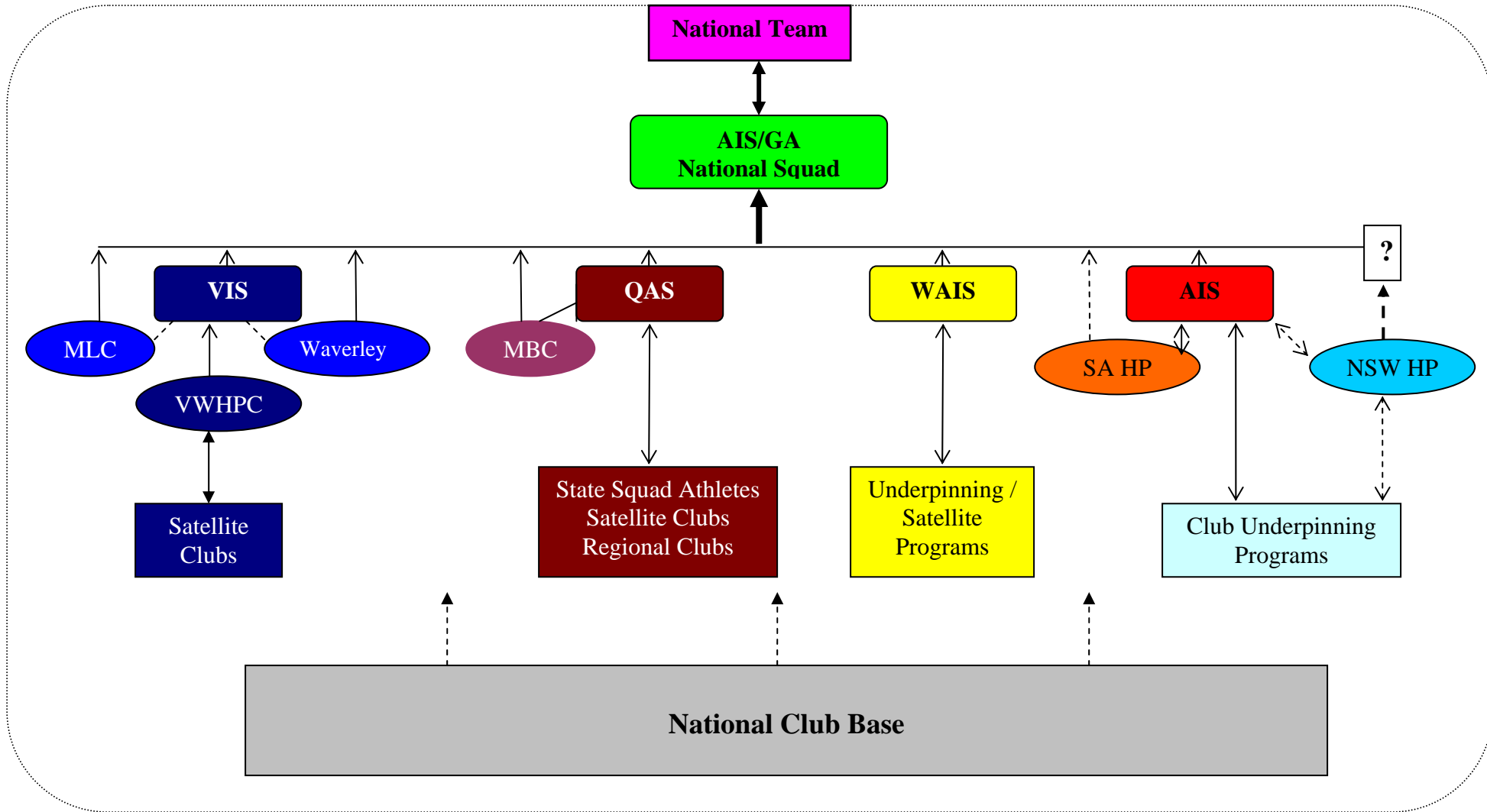
Tasmania and Northern Territory have only small numbers of registered gymnasts and do very little in the way of high performance gymnastics. **ACT** also has very small numbers, but has the advantage of an AIS program on their doorstep which is always on the look out for any talented young girls and there generally exists a culture of handing athletes onto the AIS.

South Australia has produced some high level gymnasts over the years and has at times, had a link with SASI, who now runs an 'Aerials Program' catering for trampolining, diving and gymnastics. Top WAG gymnasts in SA become part of the state high performance program which by all reports is a good program with some excellent coaches and is producing athletes who are nationally competitive up to International Level 10. The most promising young gymnasts from SA have traditionally been encouraged to go to the AIS. There is a strong high performance culture in SA and potential for further strong contribution which should not be overlooked and should be supported. (Note, the reviewer did not visit SA, but did observe the coaches and athletes in action at Club National Championships. Attempts at contact were not successful within the review timeframe).

New South Wales is the state with the largest gymnastics membership base of approximately 30,000 and as many as 180 clubs. There are some very strong clubs in the state, but only a handful of them are pursuing high performance (International Stream). NSW is the leading state in National Stream performances. Talented WAG gymnasts in NSW are currently a lost opportunity. The NSW high performance program has always been the AIS in Canberra. Consequently NSW has never had any reason, or 'ownership' to develop a high performance program or structure of its own. Over the years very small numbers of clubs have been willing to feed talented athletes into the AIS, but the vast majority have not. Recruitment by the AIS of athletes identified as talented is often not seen as positive and the value of the AIS to the athletes and their home clubs is not well articulated or understood. The overwhelming feeling in NSW is that athletes are 'lost' to the AIS and high performance, and the feeling nationally is that high performance in NSW is scant and an untapped resource.

A reviewer's depiction of the current structure is shown below at Figure 3, with arrows and lines showing the direction and strength of coach and athlete linkages between programs.

Fig 3. National WAG Structure 2006



Clubs and the club culture:

As outlined above, there are several High Performance Clubs that have emerged over the last four years or so and are contributing strongly to National squads and teams. The three biggest and most successful of these are Moreton Bay College (Qld), Waverley Advanced (Vic) and MLC (Vic), all three of which are led by former SIS/SAS coaches. Historically club programs have not significantly contributed to major national teams (Appendix C) and sustainability at this level is not yet proven, however these three clubs have a number of very good athletes backed by excellent coaching and passionate, driven high performance teams.

Certainly in the bigger cities (Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane) there is a strong argument that the population base can sustain a small number of High Performance Clubs working with top level athletes. Geographically, having High Performance Clubs spread around the bigger cities, with their high density of population, will allow more opportunities for a larger number of potential high performance gymnasts. However high performance gymnastics is expensive because of the need for inbuilt underpinning development programs (anecdotally it is estimated that the cost of running a high performance program within a club costs a minimum of approximately \$250,000), and there is not the market or resources (facilities, highest quality coaches, experienced program managers, support dollars) to ever allow many to thrive.

The AIS/SIS/SAS programs by their nature are dedicated to high performance. They have the funding, facilities, capital budget for replacement equipment, SSSM back up and ability to employ the best coaches with the peace of mind of a guaranteed salary. High Performance Clubs have to be very innovative to create the environment and financial backing to succeed. This can be the basis for something very special but the ability to put together the right package is rare and can be a tenuous balance. Getting it wrong can ruin a club.

At the next level down, more clubs developing quality athletes with excellent skills, up to as high as International Level 6 to feed into the AIS/ SIS/SAS HPCs, would theoretically enhance the national high performance system. High Performance feeder programs appear to be a real gap in the system with most clubs either choosing to stick to National Stream development and/or not being willing to hand on athletes once they have developed them to the capacity of the club and coaches. The two biggest issues identified are the loss of income for the club when they lose an athlete putting in (and paying for) large weekly training hours and the loss of the “leadership” athlete who sets the standard for the others in the club. Most clubs perceive that if they can’t take their athlete to the highest level themselves, they are better off to have them win titles for the club (and the athlete themselves) at lower levels rather than hand them on and lose them to a future not guaranteed and/or a HPC that is not well understood and is effectively ‘the competition’.

The challenge is to find a way to encourage and support more clubs to prepare athletes to a higher level and feed them into the AIS/SIS/SAS, which will in turn allow them to do what they are set up to do – developing athletes at the highest level. For this to work clubs would have to believe they were gaining significantly from the process, through benefits such as:

- Significant recognition and kudos for the level of athlete they develop.
- Badging or a title to reflect their contribution to the national high performance system.
- Value-add relationships with AIS/SIS/SAS programs including coach mentoring and education, satellite club status, and maybe some link to SSSM servicing and research.

- A clarified and embraced definition of roles, relationships, expectation and capacities of the various levels of clubs and programs in the system.
- Enhancement of the professionalism and quality of the club in the way it is run, the quality of athlete preparation, results, satisfaction and enjoyment of athletes and parents and reputation.
- Other similar enhancements which would more than make up for the loss of a high level athlete from the program.
- Assurance that the athletes would prosper in the high performance environment.
- A transitional program to ensure support of athletes if the high performance centre does not work out for them.

In Australia currently there is a mixture of clubs from recreational, school, not for profit to the larger commercial clubs with huge membership numbers and paid coaching staff. Not all clubs have the capacity or desire to develop talented athletes and be part of feeding into the high performance system. Over 80% of gymnastics in Australia is recreational/participatory. Over the last few years GA has introduced the 'Club 10' program which is an excellent initiative for Australian clubs, providing them with direction and support for improving the day to day running of their clubs, including how to implement various compliance requirements. The Club 10 concept is not directed at the high performance end of the sport, however there is real scope to use the basis of this concept to increase the professionalism of the relevant clubs to enhance the high performance objectives.

The Next step:

There are some excellent programs around the country which develop high performance athletes, namely the four AIS/SIS/SAS programs and the three High Performance Clubs that are successfully putting athletes on the national squad/team. However the next step for WAG in Australia is to develop an integrated, communicative and systematic approach nationally to ensure there are opportunities for all of the most talented athletes to develop their potential and a broader base of high performance talent is developed to feed into High Performance Centres. GA along with the AIS/SIS/SAS programs have an opportunity to lead Australian Women's Gymnastics into a very successful future with a structured, coordinated approach that gives clubs, athletes, parents opportunities to contribute to and share in the success.

The key will be to create a structure where various stakeholders can work in partnership to support and enhance the national system. A structure where programs compliment each other rather than compete for the same athletes. Careful collective planning is necessary to ensure the balance is tipped towards building upon rather than threatening what exists; allowing programs to flourish and create opportunities without diluting precious resources.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Throughout this review of the WAG high performance structure, many issues were raised and a range of small and large changes/adjustments were put forward and debated. The perfect structure was elusive as many new, and old, ideas have a wide ripple effect. Like the athletes themselves, the structure was widely seen as a delicate balance between what is perfect and what is optimal. The sport has been built on people with passion putting incredible amounts of time and energy into its evolution. Rather than any one 'system', personalities, history, culture and the depth and breadth of individual clubs nationally, have shaped the sport. Therefore, the future of the sport and creating a more systematic approach has to be considerate of its past, its culture and the many people who have, and continue to, shape it. The report of this review seeks to recommended changes that are positive and progressive for the athletes and for where the sport is now in its evolution and, in doing so, create an opportunity for the system to evolve towards a more united, successful and sustainable future.

High Performance Centre Structure

Everyone interviewed as part of the review was of the opinion that the SIS/SAS programs, including the AIS, are the pillars of the WAG High Performance Structure in Australia. The continued success of *all four* of these programs and their contribution to National Squads and Teams is essential for the sustained success of Australian WAG internationally.

The review also found that there was wide support for the current role of the AIS, with camps playing an invaluable role, and the full time scholarship part of the program being essential as a unique option for many potential elite gymnasts, especially those who do not have a SIS/SAS program in their home state. Apart from the relocation 'risk', the AIS was still seen as the 'ideal' for concentrated, all-encompassing long term development of elite gymnasts. With the geographical spread of Australia and the population density of the major cities, relocation is a reality for many aspiring elites. The role and benefits of the AIS, as well as those of the three SIS/SAS programs, needs to be better promoted and understood if these centres are to remain attractive for athletes to become part of.

There was some discussion as to whether the AIS should cease the full time scholarship program and conduct only a National Camps based program. This would only be possible if and when the rest of the system was self-sustainable in terms of High Performance Centre Program options throughout the country (i.e. another 1-2 secure state high performance programs emerged). This was not seen as likely in the near future, but is a possibility for the longer term and if NSW in particular can develop a self-sustainable high performance program, then there are foreseeable benefits in optimisation of resources. There is an imminent desire to continue to expand camps at the AIS, in the areas of team preparation as well as coach and junior development.

- 1. It is recommended that the four existing AIS/SIS/SAS programs are prioritised and sustained as the pinnacle programs for dedicated high performance preparation and service provision.**

Communication

Outside of the main High Performance Centre Programs, it is generally felt that the broader WAG community does not have a good understanding of the current High Performance Program, its structure, athlete and coach pathways, aims and objectives. Indeed it is very difficult to obtain information on the high performance pathway, exactly how an athlete should progress, the functions, benefits and general information about the AIS/SIS/SAS, or even progression through the levels system and the options an athlete has there within.

With this lack of understanding comes a negative perception that high performance WAG is 'hard, mean, intense, not fun'. There is a feeling that at the high performance level it is all hard work and that the welfare of the athletes as young people is not looked after. Consequently many clubs, coaches and parents don't know about high performance, particularly don't know about the benefits of the SIS/SAS programs (especially the AIS) and believe it is not in the best interests of the child to direct them that way. The National Head Coach and each of the AIS/SIS/SAS programs are working to try and change these perceptions, however it would be highly beneficial if GA could drive an active high performance promotion campaign.

2. It is recommended that GA drive communication and promotion of the high performance pathway and programs nationally, through its website and other means.

This would include such initiatives as:

- A High Performance section/tab on the GA website.
- Depiction and explanation of the National High Performance Pathway, including options for progressing through the levels and opportunities for support.
- Information on the National Squad program (Add to existing info on National Squad athletes, including their coach and home club).
- Information on AIS program and its benefits.
- Information about the SIS/SAS programs and their role and benefits.
- Athletes writing about their high performance experiences (as part of teams, camps, programs).
- Acknowledgement of clubs and coaches contributing to the national objectives.

Each state structure was found to have its own characteristics which have evolved to suit its size, demographics, location, personnel, etc. Most states seem to be functioning reasonably well, although none were totally satisfied with their high performance structures. Issues included relationships between SIS/SAS and clubs, clearly defined roles, clarity and knowledge of athlete pathway, coach development and education, underpinning programs, accessing adequate funding and resources. The review found that there existed some great knowledge, experience, systems, solutions to common problems and ideas, but that the sharing and coordination of these could be improved and of benefit to all. This would, in turn lead to better integration of the state structures into a cohesive national structure, as well as more input into and understanding of national decisions.

GA's introduction in the last 12-18 months of the State Management Committees (SMC) in addition to the national Elite Management Committee (EMC) has been very positive for all, allowing discussion of issues and sharing of ideas. There is a real desire to develop this even

further with national high performance forums to tap into existing knowledge and experience and find ways to collectively improve the system and work together to enhance the development and opportunities for our athletes. For GA to lead a consultative, inclusive approach to planning for the future, bringing together all the key players in high performance would go a long way to achieving a more cohesive and integrated world class system.

- 3. It is recommended GA lead further initiatives to share ideas to enhance the WAG national high performance system, including conducting a National High Performance Forum in 2007 (and if possible beyond). The forum should include the AIS/SIS/SAS Program Managers, GA Head Coach and Sport Director, and Coaches from AIS/SIS/SAS, major high performance clubs, including representatives from SA and NSW, collectively planning for 2008-12 including:**
- **Clarification of national high performance aim, objectives and strategy.**
 - **Defining of roles and responsibilities at various levels.**
 - **Improving connections between high performance clubs and AIS/SIS/SAS.**
 - **Improving underpinning structure (satellite clubs).**
 - **Improved club support of the national high performance plan.**
 - **Consider ways to appropriately recognise High Performance Clubs (coaches and athletes) who are able to produce athletes making national teams.**
 - **Enhanced coach mentoring and education throughout the system.**
 - **Creating broader buy in and understanding of national high performance objectives.**
 - **Collective support and ideas for solving of any individual state issues.**

High Performance in NSW

NSW as a state is very much seen by all as an untapped resource in terms of elite WAG development. Creating a high performance program/structure in NSW is widely believed to be a significant opportunity for the national program. The feeling from outside was that NSW 'doesn't care' about (and many of the participants don't even know about) high performance. There are a small number of clubs who very much wish to run high performance programs but are lacking the funding or expertise at the highest level to do so. A high performance program was attempted in NSW many years ago, but for various reasons (mainly personnel) the WAG component did not succeed and was discontinued. Since that time, NSW as a state has not had the reason, motivation, support, or an organised approach, to set up its own high performance system. The AIS has become the default high performance centre for NSW. Unlike in other states, the leadership, 'driver' person has never emerged in NSW to unite and create a high performance culture. Several interviewees made the statement, "why should NSW bother with HP when AIS does it for us?" There is no passion or drive for high performance because arguably the state has never been able to really put their own mark on it.

Over time there has developed some negative sentiments towards the AIS, as a program that 'takes' athletes, or to whom NSW 'loses' athletes. It is necessary to create a high performance system in NSW where it has the opportunity to develop elite high performance gymnasts in its own right, but also from which NSW as a WAG community is happy to pass on athletes to the AIS if it is the right thing for the athlete, while still retaining ownership of the athlete as both a NSW and an Australian athlete.

During the review much discussion was had regarding options in NSW:

- creating a central program for NSW in Sydney
- appointing an existing Sydney club as the NSW high performance program
- moving the (or part of the) AIS full time program to a club in Sydney
- Supporting a number of clubs to develop as the basis of a high performance system in NSW
- Other variations of one program Vs several, NSW Vs AIS badging and funding.

The widely held view was that the size and population density of the city is a negative for a centralised program in Sydney. Appointing one central program, especially without the buy-in of the clubs and state, will be relatively expensive and not significantly change what already happens. It will only tap into a very small percentage of the population, NSW as a state will not take ownership of high performance and a very small number of clubs (mostly outside of the metropolitan area) will continue feeding into the AIS.

An elite club structure, similar to that in Australian swimming, where clubs are supported and guided to develop high performance athletes to their particular capacity, seems the best solution for the present culture and club structure in NSW. With a planned, solid, infrastructure and system/model of support, the 'right number' of top end high performance clubs for the market and population will emerge naturally. It may be one, it may be several... Ideally, as high performance clubs and athletes developed, NSW Institute of Sport would become involved to provide service support of the athletes and possibly management support of the state high performance structure.

For NSW to have full ownership and buy in, however, the 'ideal model' for a high performance structure in NSW needs to come from within to ensure the nuances, history, culture and specific requirements are all considered.

The establishment of a high performance program in NSW is critical for the WAG athlete pathway and ultimately, improved international success. The outcome of changes in NSW with regards to this will be taken into consideration in the AIS quadrennial reviews of its programs and roles in 2008.

- 4. It is recommended that Gymnastics NSW put forward its own proposal to GA for a high performance structure for the state. The submission should include best use of resources available and role of clubs, state body, NSWIS and GA.**
- 5. It is then recommended that GA and GNSW work together to establish an agreed upon high performance structure, congruent with the National structure. *(Suggested funding contribution from GA for a high performance program in NSW would be 50-100% of the amount currently contributed to established SIS/SAS programs, matched dollar for dollar from GNSW).***

Modelling of High Performance Centres/clubs

From the review it became very clear that all of the SIS/SAS high performance centre programs were developed by one or two driven, insightful individuals, out of a club basis. Similarly the three current clearly successful high performance club programs were developed by a small group of individuals who were able to work out, and pull together, all the necessary components to make such a club work. It can be expected then that for any other further high performance programs to work (e.g. high performance clubs or a central program in NSW, or SA), there needs to be good leadership, pulling together the necessary components to create a successful program. There is no need to leave this to chance as there is the opportunity to create a model of successful high performance programs derived from the experience of those who have trodden the path before, to enhance and underpin the current system.

The existing, highly successful 'Club 10' Program has created the precedent and culture within Australian Gymnastics to create a template or model for the development of any further high performance club/centre programs. (There is apparently the basis of such a model / framework in existence). Of course, the use of any such model would have to be highly strategic as GA would only want to support development of high performance club or centres where it was of value to the national high performance aims and objectives. It would not be wise to release or publicise such a model en masse as it may threaten the existing structure and even existing clubs. Along the lines of a business franchise model, high performance centre models would only be supplied to approved candidates and would be implemented in such a way as to maximise success of both the proposed high performance centre and the overall national program.

It is proposed that such a model and quality assurance framework could be developed along the lines of (but separate from) Club 10, where there is a tiered approach to criteria, creating levels of excellence in the model. For example, where Club 10 is based on a 5 point scale, the high performance centre model could contain Gold, Silver and Bronze levels. The benefit of this would be to provide an *evidence based model* of what is needed for various levels of a high performance club, thereby defining roles within the system based on capabilities against criteria. Providing they meet the criteria, it is expected that a Gold standard centre should be the AIS/SIS/SAS programs – centre's with the capacity and all the elements in place to develop competitive international gymnasts. A club such as Northern Districts in Perth, which develops athletes up to International level 6, to then feed into the WAIS program, might be a Bronze or Silver standard. The model provides recognition that the club does an excellent job of preparing athletes to a certain level, but also defines (for them and others) where their capacity lies.

The initial use of this high performance centre model would be for the development of programs in NSW. Using the model developed, existing clubs in Sydney would be provided criteria against which their current status and role within the structure could be identified and then direction and support to lift their level of capability and contribution if appropriate. For some clubs the criteria for Gold level might provide evidence that striving to attain this is not in the best interests of the club, but the kudos, recognition and benefits it receives for being Bronze or Silver and feeding its best athletes into the AIS program (for example) is very valuable for the reputation and credibility of the club.

Developing this model would be an excellent way to achieve the stated KPI in the 2005 – 2009 GA High Performance Plan, *'That national benchmarks for recognition of high performance centres, be established'*.

- 6. It is recommended that, utilising the knowledge of those involved in and responsible for the existing SIS/SAS programs and highest level clubs, GA develop a best practice model for high performance centres/clubs.**
- 7. That this High Performance Club Model be used strategically, where and when needed to enhance the national high performance pathway.**

Junior Development Coordination

Support and respect for the GA Head Coach throughout the review was very strong. While there is always some criticism, there was not one person who, on balance, did not think the Head Coach was performing well in the role. Her leadership but inclusiveness, firmness and decision making ability while respecting other high performance coaches, and her ability to prepare the team for the big competition, where among attributes that were highly valued and regarded.

What was also widely acknowledged was that the Head Coach has a huge job overseeing the entire national competitive WAG program. It was very strongly felt that support was needed for the Head Coach, especially in the area of talent identification and the development of a broader underpinning pathway to support the high performance program.

Good development links and identification of talent mainly exists in pockets around the SIS/SAS programs and within the small number of big high performance clubs. There the continuum between participation and high performance is strong and there are opportunities for athletes to progress relevant to their needs and potential. However, there are a large number of clubs around the country that develop their athletes in relative isolation and only to the level their club and coaches are capable of. There is a real need for links, facilitation and high performance contact throughout the club system in order to identify potential talent, support and encourage coach development, as well as increase the understanding and appreciation of 'high performance'.

For a short period in 2005 there existed a formal National Junior Development Coach position, although talent identification and development has been done in various forms over the years. There was almost unanimous support for the need for this position to be reinstated, to help build the links and relationships required to enhance the pathway and build *'a strong and coordinated national junior development network'* (2005 – 2009 GA High Performance Plan). Obviously the National Junior Development Coach / Coordinator would have a role in supporting development in NSW, preferably alongside a NSW WAG High Performance Coach/Coordinator.

- 8. It is recommended that a National Junior Development Coach / Coordinator be appointed in 2007.** Roles and desirable abilities should include:
- Well respected person, with high level coaching experience as well as management expertise and the ability to communicate well with a wide range of people.
 - Ability to assist with coach development, facilitate relationship management, support club management and development.
 - Establish and coordinate the national talent identification program.
 - Facilitate national network of high performance clubs feeding into the National high performance centres and Club Future.
 - Develop and implement systems to create sustainable programs.
 - Be involved in creating criteria (and model/template for direction) for high performance clubs, defining roles and capacities – including facilities, coaching expertise (international experience, results), coach:athlete ratio, dedicated program space, management structure, underpinning networks, program budget, fundraising capabilities.
 - Assist the Head Coach in visiting programs and running national development camps.

Coach Education and Development

In 2005 GA conducted a detailed review of coach education and development across all its programs. There had been some very good, even ground-breaking elements to GA's coach education systems in the past, however they have become somewhat outdated. GA is currently redeveloping all of its Gymsport accreditation courses, which is a huge job and will take some years to complete. The new National Coach Education Framework will consist of a five levels structure (plus a basic Orientation Course) of competency based modules. An incentive scheme to encourage coaches to progress through the system is also being developed.

Since the late 1980's Australian High Performance gymnastics have relied on imported, primarily Chinese and Russian coaches to drive its technical development. This has proven to be a very successful strategy. Meanwhile the coach education system for local coaches has remained 'intermediate'. Except for the small number of local coaches who have had exposure to the elite international coaches, the gap between those with high level international experience and the majority of coaches at clubs, has not diminished.

The issues identified relating to coaching and the high performance structure were:

- The current breadth and depth of accreditation courses is inadequate for the training needs of coaches involved with high performance programs (International Levels).
- There exists a significant gap between the coaches with international level experience and expertise (mostly Chinese and Russian Coaches) and current Australian level 2 coaches.
- There is currently no higher accreditation available than level 2.
- It is difficult for Australian coaches to gain the education, experience and the credibility compared to the imported coaches.
- There are often cultural issues around the coaches from non-Anglo backgrounds. Language barriers, as well as significant cultural differences between these coaches

and their young Australian gymnasts, can sometimes affect the training environment. Support for international coaches in relating to their athletes and the Australian culture generally, is very important.

- There is little opportunity for top coaches to share technical ideas.
 - There is a gap in information flow from the top coaches down through to club coaches.
 - Excellent quality high performance coaching is needed from at least the age of 8-9 years in order to develop world class athletes. There is very little knowledge of the coaching required outside of the AIS/SIS/SAS programs and a few high performance clubs.
 - The best technical coaches are often not the best program manager, yet if given the “Head Coach” task, they have to manage the program and staff. There is no education given for program managers – either as supplementary education for top coaches or as a separate role alongside the elite coaches.
9. **It is recommended that GA, with appropriate assistance from the ASC, prioritise the development of its new coach education system where coaches have incentive to progress up the ranks, and in doing so, gain appropriate expertise, recognition and credibility.**
10. **GA, in consultation with the ASC’s developing programs in High Performance Coach Development and Support, explore initiatives for assisting coach development around program leadership, management and cross-cultural issues.**
11. **The Coach mentoring system that has started through the Women in Sport Grants and ASC coach scholarships must continue as an established systematic GA program.** The obvious arena for coach mentoring is with the elite coaches in the SIS/SAS high performance centres. The mentoring and apprentice coach system should then be mirrored down through the linked underpinning programs.
12. **An annual Coach Forum be established for all high performance (International Stream) coaches Nationally** to share coaching concepts and innovations and to give a broad group of high performance coaches understanding of and inclusion into the national high performance structure, its aims, objectives, challenges and opportunities.
13. **Additionally it is recommended that there be twice yearly targeted technical workshops for elite high performance coaches – i.e. all coaches who have put athletes on a national team, possibly as part of AIS national camps.** These would be lead by the National Head Coach to share ideas, methods, solutions on targeted issues – weakness on an apparatus, SSSM issues, injuries, training loads, etc.

Funding and Incentives

Funding and incentives were predictably a hot topic of discussion throughout the review. The consensus seems to be that high performance gymnastics is expensive to run and everyone does it on a very tight budget. GA high performance funding primarily goes towards team travel (International competition) and camps and in contributions to the three SIS/SAS programs,

both directly and with support initiatives such as 'Team Future'. All (including GA) acknowledge that the contribution to SIS/SAS funding is barely enough and that as the pillars of the High Performance Structure, these programs must be maintained as a priority. In 2006, each of the SIS/SAS programs received from GA a funding increase of \$20,000 to off-set fees for National Squad athletes. Any further increase would only be viable if it was both equitable and sustainable.

Coach employment is the other funding area that most programs indicate as the area they need more funding for. Pay rates for coaches is not high, with very few being paid more than around \$60,000, despite high workload demands. Indications are that the highest rates of pay are for coaches in exclusive private school programs – these are very rarely our high performance coaches. There is currently no national funding to any of the high performance clubs who have athletes on National Squads or Teams. The athletes are funding by GA for national activities and the clubs are recognised for the association with their athletes.

There was much discussion about pros and cons of various payments and incentive schemes for programs, clubs, and athletes. Bonus funding for programs and/or clubs for putting athletes on national teams was argued to dilute the system. Further if this was only an annual payment, it was impossible to include in program budgets, so would make minimal difference. Coach incentives was flagged as a possibility, especially considering many of the top coaches come from a culture of such payments and would see it as a very positive incentive. There is no foreseeable increased funding for any one area, and if there was it would have to be sustainable and equitable. This is a constant challenge for GA, especially in light of the fact that it has six other sport disciplines to fund at recreation though to elite level.

14. It is recommended that at the National High Performance Forum (recommendation 3), the group (including GA) determine the viability of any possible equitable and sustainable strategies for rewarding coaches, athletes and/or programs for performance at the highest level.

SSSM Support

The big funding pressures for athletes (and their parents) are fees and SSSM costs. Apart from National Senior Squad, all junior and senior International level gymnasts pay at least \$3000 annually in training fees. Travel and uniform costs are additional. High costs for parents for high level gymnastics is a limiting factor for some talented athletes. Although all the SIS/SAS programs and most of the big High Performance Clubs, provide SSSM support, it is limited and costly. Any additional support needed (often during times of injury) is paid for by the athlete. In a sport that is so physically demanding, SSSM servicing is an absolute necessity and is already the major cost to SIS/SAS programs, after coach employment. The higher level athletes, training long hours, are in need of increased servicing to maintain health and minimise injury. Residential AIS scholarship holders are the only WAG athletes who have no restrictions on the amount of servicing they are able to access. AIS Camps scholarship holders (=National Squad athletes) do not get access to or support from AIS for SSSM outside of camps. Other AIS sports such as Triathlon (\$16,000 pa) and Sailing (\$20,000) allocate funding to reimburse athletes for SSSM servicing in their daily training environment. Given the small number of very elite

athletes are those we are relying on to deliver results at major competitions, the AIS camps scholarship holders should be given the support they need in their daily training environment to ensure optimal health and performance. A process should be established to manage support funding on a priority 'as needs' basis, by GA and the AIS.

15. It is recommended that as part of the AIS program budget, an amount is allocated (e.g. \$3000 per athlete per annum) for additional SSSM support in the home environment. This would apply only to all AIS/GA National Squad camps scholarship athletes (n=7).

In examining the fundamental issue of how do we develop a larger number of world class WAG gymnasts, the risk of losing good athletes through injury must be considered. SSSM is a very important part of high performance WAG, especially the disciplines of medicine, physiotherapy, soft tissue therapy, nutrition, strength and conditioning, as well as ACE.

Australia has world leading knowledge and practical expertise in SSSM – and advantage which Australian gymnastics needs to exploit to its advantage.

GA has recently established a SSSM Committee, with physiotherapist Keren Faulkner as the national SSSM coordinator. The aims of the committee are to coordinate both research and servicing across the WAG network; and to educate and expose coaches to best practice SSSM support for the athletes. For the last couple of years a SSSM forum has been held at National Championships, which coaches and SSSM providers alike have found very beneficial.

There are moves in all the right directions in the SSSM areas and gymnastics coaches are beginning to embrace SSSM and allowing respected practitioners to challenge some of the traditional methods. However, there is still a lot of work to be done especially in areas such as quantifying and optimising load, injury prevention and/or early identification, specific strengthening, and optimising nutrition. Funding needs to be targeted to SSSM areas of need and coordinated national plans for the various key SSSM areas need to be developed. It is essential that the services providers involved understand the sport, as it has very unique needs and culture. There are some excellent WAG providers in the AIS/SIS/SAS network, however they have very limited time for anything more than servicing. Retention and good utilisation of the best providers is of paramount importance. In turn the providers must have excellent relationships with the top coaches, as they are the ones who spend 35 hours a week with the athletes and what they know and how they use SSSM to support the athletes goes a long way to ensuring the athlete has a positive and productive experience in the sport.

16. It is recommended that GA continues to support and enhance a coordinated commitment to SSSM support, research and injury prevention, as well as coach integration and education.

CONCLUSION

Overall WAG is in reasonably good shape with quality high performance programs and Australian solidly entrenched as a top 6-8 nation at World Champs and Olympic Games level. GA appears proactive in always looking for ways to improve the system, for not only WAG, but all of their Gymsports, however with seven sports, funding and resource allocation is always a challenge. Opportunities are omnipresent for medals at World and Olympic medal. If these opportunities can be capitalised upon, the possibility of increased funding would take significant pressure off the existing structure for which both sustainability and risk Vs reward is still tenuous.

This review did not find radical or sweeping changes or a major reallocation of resources to be advantageous or necessary. The biggest issue was the ability to tap into talented athletes at lower levels of the pathway, especially those outside of the high performance centres, and particularly in the largest member state of NSW. If WAG is going to achieve the podium results at the highest level, there is the need to broaden the base of talented athletes feeding into quality high performance programs and subsequently increase the pool of world class athletes from which teams are selected. For this to happen it is essential that NSW steps up to give its talent an opportunity to contribute and that there is improved links, communication and cooperation throughout the entire system.

The way forward is to build on the many quality programs and strategies that already exist and provide opportunities to enhance results and sustainability through a more *clearly defined and unified system*. The time is right for the next level of evolution for WAG nationally. The next step is for GA to lead communication and consultation towards a coordinated, cooperative approach to improving the structure and linkages of the high performance pathways both at state and national level, ensuring success for Australia. Success cannot be left to chance. It has to be coordinated and supported and the lessons of the past used to create a future where Australia is a firm fixture on the podium of WAG events at the highest level. ***If the future is clear the price is easy to pay.***

APPENDIX A Review Interviews Conducted

1. Deb Waser (ASC)
2. Jane Allen (GA)
3. Don Cameron & Mike McGovern (AIS)
4. Camilla Brockett (AIS)
5. Karen Myers & Helen Colagiuri (GA)
6. VIS – Tracey Penaluna, Mikhail Barabach, Peter Spence, Annemarie Harrison
7. Jill Wright (GA)
8. George Tatai (GA)
9. SSSM Meeting (Phil Cousins, Keren Faulkner, Liz Bradshaw, Don McIntosh, Karen, Jane)
10. Trudy McIntosh (athlete)
11. Peggy Liddick (WAG Head Coach)
12. Andrea Mosler & Barry Cooper (AIS SSSM) + briefly Wendy Braeburn (VIS)
13. Lisa Gowthorp (AIS)
14. Nikolai Lapchine & Martine George (WAIS)
15. Michelle DeHighden (MLC)
16. Greg Cox (AIS SSSM)
17. Helen Wilson & ?? (Westfields)
18. Aaron Bloomfield (GNSW)
19. Jane Farrance (phone) (GV)
20. John Hart (Waverley Advanced)
21. John Curtin & Guo Xin Min (QAS)
22. Kym Dowdell (GQ)
23. Wayne Hill (GQ)
24. Mardi Watson (QLD)
25. Peter Dowdell (Moreton Bay College)
26. Allana Slater (former athlete)
27. Tim Mahon (WAIS)
28. Gratton Wilson (GWA)
29. Steve Lawrence (WAIS)
30. Liz Chetkovich (WAIS)
31. Mark Carlton (phone) (MLC)
32. Shirley Reed & Sandra (Epping YMCA)
33. Anne Scott (NSW)
34. Frances Crampton (NSW)
35. Charles Turner (NSWIS)
36. Jean Lang (NSW)
37. Darryl Durham (ASC)
38. Linda Pettit (briefly, phone) (GA)
39. Warwick Forbes (AIS)
40. Keren Faulkner (phone) (SSSM)
41. Jane Allen & Deb Waser (GA & ASC)
42. Group – Mike McGovern, Deb Waser, Peter Sharpe, Don Cameron, Rob Clement, Rob Kidston, Warwick Forbes. (AIS/ASC)
43. Peter Fricker (AIS)
44. Stacey Umeh-Lees (QLD)

APPENDIX B World Championship and Olympic Games Results History

<u>Year</u>	<u>Comp</u>	<u>Team Placing</u>	<u>Total no. Teams</u>	<u>Individual results</u>	<u>Best Individual AA</u>	<u>Total no. individuals</u>	<u>Best in App Finals</u>
1966	Worlds			77, 83,104	77	156	
1970	Worlds	18	21	96, 98,100,107,114,123	96	137	
1974	Worlds	21	22	94, 113,125,133,133,138	94	148	
1978	Worlds	20	22	102, 107,112,117,125,140	102	145	
1979	Worlds	20	27	95, 99,108,126,140,151	95	164	
1981	Worlds	17	19	81, 90,91,99,101,118	81	135	
1983	Worlds	23	28	122, 136,137,138,143,145	122	176	
1985	Worlds	17	23	60, 92,93,101,110,122	60	168	
1987	Worlds	18	31	62, 106,107,107,121,124	62	201	
1989	Worlds	16	28	48, 90,95,99,109,116	25	187	
1991	Worlds	6	28	24, 34,36,44,49,62	19	189	
1992	Worlds (App)	NA	NA				8th U bars
1993	Worlds	nil	nil	nil			
1994	Worlds (App)	NA	NA				6th Floor
1995	Worlds	12	26	41, 44,50,54,145,173,184	32	191	
1997	Worlds	11	19	39, 40,52,62,127	29	139	
1999	Worlds	5	39	10, 20,24,41,172,251	9	260	5th Vault
2001	Worlds	7	27	6, 26,36,51,127,169	22	172	4th Floor
2003	Worlds	3	34	10, 17,45,159,163,210	12	223	8th
2005	Worlds (App)	NA	NA		3rd	95	5 B&F
2006	Worlds	6	33	14, 16,31,147,149,189	5	223	6th U bars
1956	Olympics			62,63,64	62	65	
1960	Olympics			100,111	100	124	
1964	Olympics			69,70,72,74,78,83	69	84	
1968	Olympics			78	78	101	
1972	Olympics			109	109	118	
1976	Olympics			83	83	86	
1980	Olympics			50,56	50	71	
1984	Olympics			59,60	59	107	
1988	Olympics			65,75	65	90	
1992	Olympics	7	12	33,36,46,51,68,69	19	92	
1996	Olympics	10	12	37,43,44,53,77,88,90	34	104	
2000	Olympics	7	12	18,39,44,66,70,82	9	97	8th
2004	Olympics	8	12	17,25,31,73,80,90	10	98	8th Beam

APPENDIX C Analysis of Major Teams 1988 – 2006

ANALYSIS MAJOR TEAMS - GYMNASTICS 1988 - 2006															
Event	AIS	AIS %	WAIS	WAIS %	VIS	VIS %	QAS	QAS %	Canb. City	CCGC %	MBC	MBC %	Waverley	WAV %	Total in Team
1989 World Championships	3/6	50%	3/6	50%											6
1990 C'wealth Games	3/4	75%	1/4	25%											4
1991 World Championships	4/7	57%	2/7	29%	1/7	14%	N/A	N/A							7
1992 World Championships	2/2	100%	0/2	0%	0/2	0%	N/A	N/A							2
1992 Olympic Games	4/7	57%	3/7	43%	0/7	0%	N/A	N/A							7
1994 World Championships	1/3	33%	1/3	33%	1/3	33%	N/A	N/A							3
1994 C'wealth Games	1/4	25%	2/4	50%	1/4	25%	N/A	N/A							4
1995 World Championships	3/8	38%	1/8	13%	2/8	25%	1/8	13%	1/8	13%					8
1996 World Championships	1/1	100%	0/1	0%	0/1	0%	0/1	0%	0/1	0%					1
1996 Olympic Games	3/7	38%	1/7	14%	2/7	29%	1/7	14%	0/7	0%					7
1997 World Championships	1/5	20%	0/5	0%	1/5	20%	3/5	60%							5
1998 C'wealth Games	1/5	20%	1/5	20%	2/5	40%	1/5	20%							5
1999 World Championships	1/7	14%	2/7	29%	3/7	43%	1/7	16%							7
2000 Olympic Games	1/6	17%	1/6	17%	3/6	50%	1/6	17%							6
2001 World Championships	3/6	50%	1/6	17%	0/6	0%	2/6	50%							6
2002 C'wealth Games	2/5	40%	2/5	40%	1/5	20%	0/5	0%							5
2002 World Championships	0/1	0%	1/1	100%	0/1	0%	0/1	0%							1
2003 World Championships	2/7	29%	1/7	14%	2/7	29%	2/7	29%							7
2004 Olympic Games	1/7	17%	1/7	17%	3/7	43%	2/7	29%							7
2005 World Championships	1/3	33%	1/3	33%	1/3	33%	0/3	0%							3
2006 C'wealth Games	1/5	20%	0/5	0%	2/5	40%	1/5	20%			1/5	20%	0/5	0%	5
2006 World Championships	2/7	29%	2/7	29%	1/7	14%	0/7	0%			0/7	0%	2/7	29%	7
Average	1.86		1.18		1.30		1.00								
Total representatives	41/113	36.28%	27/113	23.89%	26/103	25.24%	15/80	18.75%	1/16	6.25%	1/12	8.33%	2/12	16.66%	113

* Including official travelling reserve

Event	AIS	AIS %	WAIS	WAIS %	VIS	VIS %	QLD	QAS %	Canb. City	CCGC %	MBC	MBC %	Waverley	WAGC %	Total in team
1989-1992 Summary	16/26	62%	9/26	35%	1/16	6%									26
1992-1996 Summary	11/23	48%	5/23	22%	6/23	26%	2/16	13%	1/16	6%					23
1997-2000 Summary	4/23	17%	4/23	17%	9/23	39%	6/23	26%							23
2000-2004 Summary	9/26	35%	6/26	23%	6/26	23%	6/26	23%							26
2005-2008 Summary	4/15	27%	3/15	20%	4/15	27%	1/15	7%			1/12	8%	2/12	17%	15

Statistics are included from the point at which each programme entered the selection pool (ie from when the first gymnast trialled for a major event). Statistics conclude when that programme ceased entering any gymnasts in selection trials