



**Submission to the  
Victorian State  
Government**

Review of the Planning &  
Environment Act

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## 1. VicSport

VicSport is the peak body representing Victoria's sport and active recreation sector. Our Mission is to lead the sport, active recreation and associated health agendas into the future. As an independent member based organisation, VicSport represents the needs and concerns of over 170 member groups including State Sporting Associations (SSA), Regional Sport Assemblies (RSA), Local Government Authorities (LGA), active recreation organisations, University, TAFE and school sport groups, as well as organisations representing specific sub-groups of the sector such as the Victorian Council on the Ageing, ACHPER Victoria, Aquatics and Recreation Victoria and the Australian Drug Foundation. Through our extensive network VicSport supports over 20,000 clubs and associations, and over 1.8 million participants, workers and volunteers in the sport and active recreation sector across Victoria. The activities these organisations offer play a vital role in promoting better physical and mental health outcomes for Victorians, as well as creating vital capacity within metropolitan and regional communities.

As Victoria's Peak-Body for sport and active recreation our key roles are to:

- Advocate: as the "Voice for Sport", VicSport represents the interests and concerns of the sector to government, to statutory authorities and to the broader industry.
- Inform policy development: VicSport listens to members and uses this feedback to provide visionary strategic advice to key policy and decision makers.
- Facilitate program delivery: VicSport works with government, statutory authorities and key external stakeholders to develop strategies and provide support required to assist members deliver participation opportunities for all Victorians.
- Build Members' Capacity: VicSport supports and educates members through the provision of quality advice and consultation services and delivery of professional development opportunities.
- Research: through industry research and development, VicSport analyses issues, identifies trends and develops innovative strategies that play a vital role in planning for the future.

## 1. Importance of Sport and Recreation

Sport and recreation are key leisure activities in Australia and integral components of our national culture, identity and social life. In 2005, over 69% of Australians aged 15 years and over, or 11.1 million people, participated at least once per week in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport. In addition, an estimated 7.1 million Australians (42%) aged over 15 participated 3 times per week or more, the minimum recommended for maintenance of physical health benefits. (ERASS, 2006) Community sport and active recreation plays a multi-faceted role in promoting better health, social inclusion and community capacity building and as a result our sector makes a significant contribution to the economic, social and community well being of all Australians.

### 2a) Victoria's Sport and Active Recreation Landscape

Melbourne has been described as the 'ultimate sports city' as a result of its success in attracting and hosting major sporting events. The Victorian sporting events calendar attracts participants and spectators from across Australia and overseas, adding an estimated \$1.2 billion each year to the Victorian economy. (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2007)

While elite sportspeople and major television or spectator events are at the forefront of most people's consciousness regarding sport and active recreation, millions of Australians and a large majority of Victorians are actively involved in sport and active recreational pursuits at a community level. Our society embraces active participation as well as indirect participation such as officiating, spectating and supporting friends and family members.

The primary role of community sport and active recreation organisations is to either directly provide, or facilitate the provision of, low-cost participation opportunities for members. Recent research conducted by VicSport suggests there are at least 840,000 SSA registered sport and active recreation organisation members across Victoria, and a total of 1.1 million participants over the age of 15, and 1.77 million participants aged 5-14 years. In total 2.87 million Victorians participate in sport and active recreation pursuits. The activities Victoria's sport and active recreation organisations offer not only play a vital role in promoting better physical and mental health outcomes for individuals, they also play a key role in building communities via the integral social capital and infrastructure they generate.

## **2b) The Benefits of Involvement**

The sport and active recreation sector plays a fundamental role in promoting better health, social inclusion and community capacity building in Australia. The benefits of this involvement are now tangible. International research supports the social, economic and health outcomes associated with sport and recreational activity. In its Discussion Paper 2005-2010 (Department for Victorian Communities, 2004) the Government articulates the contribution sport and recreation makes to Victoria's health, social and economic wellbeing by making important contributions to community, the economy, creating jobs and providing opportunities for physical activity for all Victorians.

Compelling scientific evidence shows increased levels of physical activity can bring wide-ranging health benefits. These benefits extend beyond the obvious physical health outcomes and include other positive impacts relating to mental health and personal development. The sport and recreation sector is viewed as a priority area for increasing rates of physical activity in order to extract these benefits. (Jackson, Howes, Gupta, Doyle, & Waters, 2005)

Of particular importance is the fact organised sport is a feature of the lives of many thousands of young people growing up in Australia. Involvement in sport and active recreation offers young people opportunities to form lasting friendships and learn social values and organisational skills that will serve them well in other areas of their lives. (VicHealth, 1999)

## **2c) Social Capital**

Much has been written about the contribution sport and active recreation pursuits make to the social fabric of communities. Social capital refers to the networks of trust, solidarity and reciprocity that exist in a well functioning community. (Putnam, 2000)

In a report on Social Capital and Social Wellbeing, the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated participation in community sport and active recreation helps to develop the community networks and bonds important for social cohesion. Participation in culture and leisure activities also provides individuals with a sense of belonging, support and social interaction. Some studies suggest a potential link between participation in sport and recreation and a reduction in crime and other anti-social activities. In addition, in both suburban and rural areas, sport, recreation and cultural activities provide a strong community focal point. (ABS, 2002)

## 2d) Developing Communities

Community-based sporting organisations provide the structures for addressing many of the social issues facing Australia. Issues such as racial vilification, equity, diversity, access for people with a disability, Indigenous Australians, new arrivals, cultural and linguistically diverse populations, older aged participants and young people for example are all being addressed by community clubs, organisations and associations in a positive manner.

Community sport and active recreation provides many opportunities for members of our society to meet, interact, develop and grow. Young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous Australians face additional challenges in their developmental pathway that makes them vulnerable to social and structural disconnection. In these cases sport and recreation can provide an increased range of opportunities to connect with the community. (Department for Victorian Communities, 2004)

## 3. Benefits of Thorough Planning

The beneficial outcomes of participation in sport and recreation are also closely related to the design of communities and neighbourhoods. An American study indicated persons living in walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods have higher levels of social capital compared to those living in car-oriented suburbs. Respondents living in walkable neighbourhoods were more likely to know their neighbours, participate politically, trust others, and be socially engaged. (Leydon, 2003)

Sport and active recreation activities create hubs for social gathering, communication and interaction in a predominately creative and supportive environment. This is particularly important for regional and remote communities. (Driscoll & Wood, 1999)

A review of the literature showed children's participation in physical activity is positively associated with publicly provided recreational infrastructure (access to recreational facilities and schools) and transport infrastructure (presence of footpaths and controlled intersections, access to destinations and public transportation). At the same time, transport infrastructure (number of roads to cross and traffic density/speed) and local conditions (crime, area deprivation) are negatively associated with children's participation in physical activity. (Davison & Lawson, 2006)

The 79 Local Government Authorities (LGA's) in Victoria are the single largest providers of community sport and recreation facilities in this State, hence a large proportion of sporting activity is undertaken on council owned land and facilities. Historically, LGA's have had adequate sport and recreational facilities to supply the demand of the community. However with increased urban development, population growth, and greater demand from a wider variety of sports looking to expand participation, LGA's, particularly those located in built up urban areas, are finding it difficult to satisfy the demand for sport and recreational facilities. Many LGA's are limiting the number of teams/participants in structured sporting events due to the maximum utilisation of their facilities. Correct urban planning from the outset can minimise this concern in the future for newly developed land.

## 4. Review of the Planning Act

### 4a) Planning to Reflect the Community

Effective planning must ensure that the needs of the community are identified, addressed and fulfilled, therefore it is imperative that the provision of sport and recreation facilities is directed by the new or amended Planning Act.

Underlying planning documentation, such as the Victorian Planning Provisions and the Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines must also address sport and recreational facility provision in a prescriptive and comprehensive manner, leading to fair and equitable development of sporting facilities across Victoria.

### 4b) Addressing Sport and Recreation in the Planning Act

As identified in the 'Modernising Victoria's Planning Act' document, health and well being is not specifically mentioned in the current Planning Act, and as significant issues within the State, need to be referenced expressly.

The current Victorian Planning Provisions - Public Open Space Provision Objective (56.05-2) state:

- *To provide a variety of open spaces with links to other open spaces and regional parks where possible*
- *To ensure that public open space of appropriate quality and quantity is provided in convenient locations to meet the recreational and social needs of the community*
- *To support active and healthy communities*

These statements are vague in their requirements and history has shown that the S56 Clause relating to open public space saw a proliferation of largely unusable space in new suburban developments (e.g. shallow lakes).

The role of the Planning Act and its associated documentation should be to minimise some of the ambiguity of the Section 56 Clause and provide relatively specific guidelines to the provision of sport and recreation facilities (with room to adapt to the local context).

#### **4c) Planning for the Not-For-Profit Sector**

The Modernising Victoria's Planning Act paper proposes a more streamlined permit process for minor applications. If this process is not approved in the general case, consideration must be given to Not for Profit agencies being able to utilise the streamlined permit application method. If this modified process is approved for Not for Profit organisations, the result would see a saving of already limited funds and time for these groups many of which are voluntarily managed. The exemption of the extended permit process should also be applied to developments that benefit the health and well-being of a community. This exemption will encourage development of the facilities influencing the local population's health and fitness in a positive way.

## **5. Summary**

In consideration of the current Planning Act and its associated documents non prescriptive treatment of structured sport and recreational facilities, this review provides the State Government with the opportunity to ensure that suitable sport and recreational infrastructure is available for the communities needs now and into the future. VicSport appreciates the opportunity for comment on the Planning Act Review and welcomes the opportunity for further consultation if required.

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