

## **VicSport's Women in Sport Leadership Program**

### **Developing our role models of the future**

The recent Senate inquiry into Women in Sport in Australia has once again sparked off interest in the debate around inequity in sport – in fact for many years now we have spent a considerable amount of time debating over the reasons why this imbalance exists and how it has developed.

Without doubt these discussions – like the suffragettes and Germaine Greer – are playing a vital role in airing the issue of inequality and promoting the need for change and while the number of strong and competent females taking on significant leadership roles within the sport and recreation sector is growing, there is little doubt women are still largely under-represented in key administration, governance, coaching, officiating and research roles.

The fact remains however there are women who have and who continue to make it to the top, and the question we should be focusing on is not why not, but rather why, and more importantly what can the women who have made it, do to give the women on the way a helping hand.

Inspired by the comment of a young elite athlete who, having recently attended yet another discussion on how it all went wrong asked “when are we going to stop talking about it and do something” the concept of VicSport's Women in Sport Leadership Program was born. With the assistance of funding support from the Australian Sports Commission, the Women in Sport Leadership Program specifically aims to:

- Help identified women become more effective in their current roles by developing specialist work skills and knowledge
- Help identified women develop their personal leadership skills to assist them in moving on to leadership positions in the future
- Encourage these women to support other women, and the sport and recreation industry as a whole, by instilling in them an understanding of the importance of using their leadership skills to benefit the sport and recreation community as a whole.

In addition to the general skill development aspect of the program are also matched with a suitable mentor who can help their mentee develop general leadership abilities, as well as develop specific skills and knowledge in areas they have personally identified as areas in which they would like to improve.

Engendering in these women a sense of responsibility for the development of the industry as a whole, and encouraging them to always give back to the broader sport and recreation community will ensure as these women develop their roles as leaders they will in turn become the role models who will continue to encourage those who follow in the future. Currently 13 women are involved in this program a limitation drawn not by a lack of interest in being involved, but rather a lack of funding available to expand the programs further. As the following feedback from one participant in the group indicates, the value of this program to the development of not just these individual participants, but to the future growth of women in the sector is invaluable.

*“Thanks for pulling this group together; I can tell already that this will be an invaluable experience for us all. It is the efforts of women who are willing to give, that slowly but surely make the difference others will enjoy in the future.”*

VicSport’s Women in Sport Leadership Program is only one example of many great programs running around Australia that are achieving great success in encouraging the growth and development of females in all aspects of sport. Another more unfortunate commonality seen amongst these programs is the general lack of inadequate funding these important initiatives receive.

The current Senate inquiry has opened the door for thought and further discussion. It is vital we build now on this opportunity and do not allow the feedback and ideas presented go to waste in the form of a shelved report. The lack of women’s access at all levels has been an issue discussed for many years. Now is the time to stop talking and take action by providing some serious support not only for the many successful initiatives already in place, but also to allow for the development of many more.

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CEO

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