

Safeguarding Children in Sport

A national blueprint to build the capacity of sport to protect children and young people from abuse, harm and exploitation

Joe Tucci and Janise Mitchell
Australian Childhood Foundation

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Australian Childhood Foundation

PO BOX 525 Ringwood VIC 3134

Phone: 03 9874 3922

www.childhood.org.au

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Executive Summary

Organised sport is an integral part of the fabric of childhood in Australia. The protection of children in sport from abuse, exploitation and the resultant harm such experiences cause has emerged as a critical area of focus. At state and national levels, a number of initiatives have focused on educating sporting codes and their constituents to understand and implement strategies which build the capacity to create and maintain child safe cultures. However, like many other institutions with a duty of care to children and young people, sporting organisations have not been immune to the failures of policy, procedures and systems to protect children from abuse and exploitation by coaches, administrators and other participants.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) contracted the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) to undertake a project which aimed to:

- provide the ASC with an insight as to the strategies it could implement in order to deliver increased confidence, awareness and implementation of child protection policies across ASC funded and recognised NSOs;
- provide NSOs and associated groups with the capacity to implement appropriate actions that reflect a very clear understanding of their responsibilities towards the protection of children in sport; and,
- develop education and capability-building strategies that extend the previous work undertaken in this area, in particular the capacity of the sport sector to prevent, and deal confidently with child abuse in sport.

The project involved a review of key messages from the literature that specifically pertain to the protection of children in sport; a stocktake of the initiatives which have been undertaken in sport at national and state levels; and an analysis of feedback from NSOs, State Government Sporting Authorities and other important stakeholders gathered through forums, surveys and interviews. This data was integrated to define the scope of issues which a child protection in sport strategy should address in its development and implementation. Finally, a series of strategic options available to the ASC were examined with the view to proposing achievable recommendations for building the capacity of NSOs and their constituencies to prevent and respond effectively to the abuse, exploitation and harm of children who participate in a sporting activity.

The themes generated by the project first and foremost highlighted that there was a clear agreement across all stakeholder groups that the protection of children from any form of harm arising from abuse and exploitation is an absolute priority. Protecting children is at the core of the value base and mission of Australian sport. It is also perceived to be vital in continuing to grow participation rates at a time when there are other types of activities competing to reduce sport's share of the audience of children and young people.

It was also clear that the national and state leadership of Australian Sport is committed to creating child safe sports.

It also found that the capacity building oriented strategies provided to and for sport has achieved a degree of effectiveness in creating child safe environments. However, it is very clear that there are huge variations in that capacity between sports within individual states and territories and even more variation between sports and systems between individual jurisdictions.

Other critical themes to emerge included:

- The influence of NSO child protection policies decrease as they are rolled out down organisational structures to the club level.
- There is still confusion about how to engage in effective decision making that was in keeping with a sporting code's commitment to prioritising the safety of children. It was consistently expressed that child protection was an area of expertise that was not part of the background of many people involved in sport. This has left a major knowledge gap in those charged with the responsibility to action it at all levels of sport administration, coaching and resourcing.
- Education is the key to building capacity, but not the only answer.
- Consumers of sport have very limited awareness of any child protection initiative that has been implemented and how it applies to them.

These preceding themes pointed directly to a series of issues which needed to be address in to make Australian sport safer for children, including

- The language of child protection in sport needs to be defined and settled.
- A coherent framework in Australian sport needs to be developed that has a central organising narrative.
- The framework needs to be understood as shaping the attitudes, values and behaviour of Australian Sport.
- The framework should integrate education, compliance and consumer oriented initiatives as the basis for building the capacity of Australian Sport to be child safe.
- The framework requires a sound implementation plan and resourcing to maximise its effectiveness.
- The national framework and the outcomes need to be externally validated and evaluated.
- There is a need to establish enduring structures to anchor the national framework.
- There is a need to test an initiative that integrates education and compliance into outcomes.

In the final section of the report, the following four recommendations are made for consideration by the ASC. In combination, the recommendations present a blueprint for Australian Sport to move from where it is to where it needs to be in relation to strengthening its capacity to prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children and young people as a result of their participation in sport.

- Recommendation 1.** The ASC and Play By The Rules to jointly establish and auspice a National Reference Group to support the implementation of a national strategic framework for preventing and protecting children from abuse and exploitation as a result of their participation in sport.
- Recommendation 2.** The National Reference Group to oversee the development, implementation and promotion of a national strategic capacity building framework under the banner of *Safeguarding Children in Sport*.
- Recommendation 3.** The ASC to fund the establishment of a *Safeguarding Children in Sport* Unit to resource and support the implementation of the framework.
- Recommendation 4.** The *Safeguarding Children in Sport* Unit to trial an integrated capacity building and compliance initiative as a key platform for the implementation of the framework.

The conclusion of the report notes that Australian Sport stands at a cross road in relation to preventing and protecting child participants from abuse and exploitation. It has certainly achieved outcomes that put it ahead of many other countries. However, there is still much that needs to be done.

The recommended *Safeguarding Children in Sport* strategic framework will deliver sustainable results over time. Its best practice elements position Australian Sport as a leader in international efforts to protect children from the scourge of abuse and exploitation. Most importantly, it fulfils the ethos and mission of sport itself – to inspire, engage and support the community and ultimately resource the physical, emotional and social development of a nation's children.

1. Introduction

Organised sport is an integral part of the fabric of childhood in Australia. According to the most recent ABS data, in the 12 months prior to April 2012, 1.7 million (60%) of the 2.8 million children aged 5 to 14 years in Australia participated in at least one organised sport outside of school hours. On average, they spent 5 hours a fortnight playing, training or participating in organised sport.

The protection of children in sport from abuse, exploitation and the resultant harm such experiences cause has emerged as a critical area of focus. At state and national levels, a number of initiatives have focused on educating sporting codes and their constituents to understand and implement strategies which build the capacity to create and maintain child safe cultures.

However, like many other institutions with a duty of care to children and young people, sporting organisations have not been immune to the failures of policy, procedures and systems to protect children from abuse and exploitation by coaches, administrators and other participants. The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted the scope of horror that has traumatised the lives of so many children in schools, child care, sporting activities, churches as a result of sexual abuse by adults in positions of trust and authority.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) contracted the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) to undertake a project in response to what it acknowledged is

“...a steadily changing environment and the need to be innovative, up-to-date and practical in the Australian sport sector’s approach to the issue of child safe sporting environments....”

In its brief, the ASC identified that

“...the outcomes of the project will not only help to reinforce existing child protection policies, but perhaps more importantly, will increase the confidence and awareness of those who participate in and deliver Australian sport...”

The origins of this project began in April 2012, when the ASC conducted two forums for National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) and the Play by the Rules (PBTR) National Reference Group. The top priority identified by the PBTR Reference Group and the second top priority from the NSOs was child protection in sport.

The key objectives of the project are to:

- provide the ASC with an insight as to the strategies it could implement in order to deliver increased confidence, awareness and implementation of child protection policies across ASC funded and recognised NSOs;
- provide NSOs and associated groups with the capacity to implement appropriate actions that reflect a very clear understanding of their responsibilities towards the protection of children in sport; and,
- develop education and capability-building strategies that extend the previous work undertaken in this area, in particular the capacity of the sport sector to prevent, and deal confidently with child abuse in sport.

In establishing the project, the ASC recognised

“...that there are a range of agencies across the sector including some NSOs that have made significant progress in creating child safe environments....A major part of this review will provide the ASC with more information on what is actually happening at the grass roots level with regards to child safe environments; where gaps have emerged in sport and how they compare to other sectors; and finally what kind of assistance clubs, associations, state and national bodies may require to continuously improve their child safe environments...”

Structure of the report

The report follows the format in which information was collected and analysed. Where relevant, the methodology used to capture and analyse any data is described at the beginning of the applicable section.

In the second chapter, a brief review of key messages from the literature that specifically pertain to the protection of children in sport is presented.

In the third chapter, a stocktake of the initiatives which have been undertaken in sport at a national and state level in Australia are summarised.

In the fourth chapter, feedback from NSOs, State Government Sporting Authorities and other important stakeholders are analysed in relation to their views about the effectiveness of current approaches to build child safe cultures across sporting codes at the various levels of organisation.

In the fifth chapter, all the preceding data sources are integrated to define the scope of issues which a child protection in sport strategy should address in its development and implementation.

In the final chapter, a series of strategic options available to the ASC are examined with the proposal of achievable recommendations for building the capacity of NSOs and their constituencies to prevent and respond effectively to the abuse, exploitation and harm of children who participate in a sporting activity.

Please note: For ease of reading, the term “child” or children” means any young person aged up to 18 years.

2. Examining the literature

Brackenridge (2015) has pointed out that

“...while safeguarding and child protection are both relative newcomers to the research and policy agenda in sport...there is an emerging international alliance of interests developing evidence based policy to improve safety for athletes...”

Given the infancy of this field, the risks facing children when they are participating in organised sport are not clearly understood. In a recent review of the literature, Vicsport (2014) found that

“...there is only limited research available on the subject and appropriate structures and policies for preventing, reporting and responding appropriately to child protection issues in sport are often lacking...”

Community awareness and concern about the safety of children whilst they are participating in activities or programs run by a range of organisations (including sport) has increased recently as a result of two major inquiries in Australia – the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations in 2013 (Family and Community Development Committee, 2013) and the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2014).

In this section, the available literature on safeguarding children in organisations and in particular sport is reviewed with a view to drawing out the most pertinent themes to support the development of a framework for understanding how the culture that exists in and around sport can be strengthened in order to first prevent, then identify and finally respond to the abuse, exploitation and harm of children.

There is a lack of definitional clarity.

Child abuse is often considered an “umbrella” term, which encompasses a range of different forms with differing consequences for children (Goddard, 1996). Due to the breadth of its possible interpretation, its utility has been questioned. Similarly, the term child protection has meanings that range from a broad community based activity that organises the actions of whole populations to very narrow definitions associated only with forensic procedures necessary to uncover evidence in the decision making of statutory authorities in order to place children in out of home care.

In the literature related to the practices of safeguarding children within organisations, there is a high degree of slippage between terms which are often used interchangeably leading to confusion and an ongoing sense of knowing but not really understanding what is being talked about (Tucci and Mitchell, 2015).

Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have argued that the key conceptual and practice dilemmas about child protection in organisations are reflected in the complexity of the questions summarised below.

- Should definitions only be related to abuse or to forms of misconduct?
- Should definitions include forms of harassment and/or exploitation?
- Should definitions include peer to peer, or child to child, problematic or abusive behaviour?
- What is the difference between prevention and protection?
- What does safeguarding children mean?
- What is a child safe culture?
- Who is responsible for doing what in protecting children? What is the role of the employee/volunteer? What is the role of the organisation?
- Is it within the scope of definitions to include abuse which is perpetrated by an employee or volunteer but not whilst he/she is at work?

- What is the difference in response to child abuse that perpetrated by an employee or volunteer of an organisation compared to child abuse which occurs in a child's family or community and is identified by an employee or volunteer of an organisation?

For sport, the definitional boundaries of key constructs are becoming even more increasingly blurred. Lang and Hartill (2015a) have argued that there are a number of emerging issues related to safeguarding and child protection in sport which

“...receive less media coverage, generate less public concern, remain under researched and ...have been marginalised...”

These include

- exposing children to too much training, pressuring children to take part in inappropriate training regimes and allowing coaches to employ inappropriate training practices (Oliver and Lloyd, 2015);
- supporting beliefs that lead to children being willing to play in pain, return from injury before they are fully recovered and vilify other athletes who do not conform to such expectations (Pike and Scott, 2015); and,
- exposure to repeated emotional abuse, including being belittled individually or as a team, criticism and mockery of the child's performance and overly authoritarian approaches to coaching (Stirling and Kerr, 2015).

There is limited understanding of children's experiences of sport.

It is almost universally recognised that there is very little research which has explored children's experiences of harm during or as a result of their participation in sport. This data is critical in being able to identify the scope of the problem and then develop targeted approaches designed to protect children from these risks.

In the most significant study of its kind, Alexander, Stafford and Lewis (2011) sought and reviewed feedback from 6124 young people aged between 18-22 years through an online survey which examined their experiences and retrospective views of participating in organised sport when they were children up to the age of 16 years.

The outcomes of the study were revealing. On the whole, sport was viewed positively by the majority of young people. However, they also expressed concerns about some of their experiences. For example,

- 75% of all respondents had experienced at least one occasion where they had been criticised for their performance, had been shouted at or sworn at or been embarrassed or humiliated by a coach, parent, peer or sport administrator;
- a minority of young people reported problems with body image arising from or being given greater expression as a result of some of the requirements of their sport, for example, losing weight to not look fat in swimwear, feeling embarrassed about their body shape - 10% of respondents said they had a special diet plan to reach their perfect weight and 11% had a special exercise plan;
- 10% of respondents reported self harming arising from their experiences of elements of their sport; and,
- 29% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, mainly from peers.

Even more concerning is the reality that these experiences of harm are often accompanied by enforced interpretations that pressure children to explain away, minimise or even ignore the harmful consequences of disrespectful and abusive behaviour.

The authors concluded that the main message arising from the research was

“...a simple one of respecting children and young people and listening carefully to what they say. There is a pressing need to encourage the development of a sporting ethos that is more open; where coaches and other sporting adults are aware of children's sporting and emotional needs as they grow and develop; where young people feel able and are encouraged to share concerns about sport and other issues...at all levels of sport, children's welfare needs should take precedence over the sporting priorities of training and competition...”

Vicsport (2014) highlighted the need to understand children's experiences of harm in sport as a benchmarking exercise for evaluating any initiatives which aim to improve their emotional and physical safety.

There is a lack of evidence about what is effective in protecting children from abuse, exploitation and harm in sport.

Vicsport noted in its recent report that there is recognition from stakeholders that

"...the lack of information about children's experiences in sport, along with an understanding that disclosures of child abuse are often made many years after the abuse occurred, means the sector cannot confirm there is not an issue..."

Hartill and O' Gorman (2014) have argued that

"...there is little evidence that sports organisations or umbrella agencies have attempted to evaluate the efficacy of the policy interventions they have introduced..."

Relating back to the early stage of development of this area of policy, the lack of rigorous and external review of initiatives have led to missed opportunities to

- know what works and why;
- whether any of the actions taken are actually improving the safety of children in sport; and,
- disseminate such knowledge to a wider audience as the basis for continual improvement.

Children with disabilities in sport require a different level of consideration.

Research has demonstrated that children with disabilities are at heightened risk of being abused. Over 15 years ago, in a population based study published in 2000 and still cited today, Sullivan and Knuston estimated that children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled peers.

More recently, a global meta-analysis of 16 studies of prevalence and 11 studies of risk, Jones et al (2012) found

- prevalence estimates of 26.7% for violence in the lives of children with disability; and,
- children with disabilities were at 3.68 greater risk of experiencing a form of violence than their non-disabled peers.

The following characteristics are some of the factors which contribute to the heightened risk of abuse for children with disabilities:

- they are very dependent on carers and others around them for many acts of daily living;
- they experience communications difficulties which can impede them reporting or describing abuse experiences;
- they are often more socially isolated and have less opportunity to receive informal support;
- they may have less capacity to perceive the inappropriateness of behaviour by a perpetrator of abuse; and,
- their evidence can be perceived as less credible due to their cognitive impairments/delays.

Most of the literature suggests quite strongly that the abuse of children with disabilities is under-reported (Robinson 2012; Smith, 2015).

If the research about the abuse of children in sport is minimal, then the research about the abuse of children with disabilities in sport is non-existent. Children with disabilities have special needs in relation to their own safety that should be taken into account when developing any safeguarding initiative.

Child safe standards are becoming more homogenous.

Following a summit in London in 2012 entitled Beyond Sport, a partnership of sport related organisations (including the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit, UK Sport, Swiss Academy for Development, Caribbean Sport and Development Agency, Unicef UK and Right to Play Thailand, Manchester City FC, Coaches Across Continents, Slum Soccer, Soccer without Borders, Special Olympics, USA Swimming, US Olympic Committee) summarized the experiences of children in sport with the following commentary.

“...Over the past 15 years or so, victims of all forms of violence in sport have started to be able to have their voices heard and responded to. Previously, there has been little questioning of the perception that sport is only a force for good for young people. Until the late 1990s/early 2000s very few sports organisations had put in place systems and structures to respond to complaints about the behaviour of adults or other young people.

We now know enough from research and evidence to be clear that sport does not always take place with a focus on children’s rights at its centre, or sometimes fails to fully consider the risks to children, leading to organizational cultures that don’t allow for the discussion of harm and abuse (Brackenridge, Kay and Rind, 2012).

There are also some risks to children and young people which are unique to sport such as the increased risk of all forms of abuse to elite young athletes. Many sport for development programs are provided to extremely vulnerable children who may be affected by violence and abuse in their daily lives and for whom sport should be a safe haven. We should all seek to ensure that sports provision to these young people takes place in safe environments.....(International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, 2014)”.

As a resource to support sport, the Working Group then published a set of guiding principles (called Safeguards) which ambitiously aimed to

“...lay the foundations for a holistic approach to ensuring children’s safety and protection in all sport contexts internationally...(International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, 2014)”.

These eight safeguards are comprised of the following initiatives and/or systems.

Developing a child safeguarding policy – The safeguarding policy creates a safe and positive environment for children and demonstrates that the organisation is serious about its duty of care. It includes a statement of commitment from the organisation as well as required endorsement by the highest level structure of the organisation.

Developing a system to respond to safeguarding concerns – These set of procedures describe the steps for individuals within an organisation to take in different circumstances when there is a concern, complaint or allegation made in relation the safety of a child or young person.

Advice and support – These arrangements provide essential information and support to individuals within organisations, especially those with specified roles for safeguarding children. It should resource responses for children with additional vulnerabilities (for example, disabilities).

Minimising risks to children – A broad sets of procedures for undertaking risk assessments to children and implementing strategies to address those risks in a proactive way.

Guidelines on behaviour – All organisations should have a Code of Conduct that describes clearly and in an understandable form what is an acceptable standard of behaviour for all those adults and other young people who are involved in the sporting activity.

Recruiting, training and communicating – A system for the effective screening, induction and training of adults with a role in administering, supporting or coaching junior sport. It also includes the involvement of young people and families as stakeholders to these processes.

Working with partners – This safeguard is a strategy for promoting collaborative systems for ensuring the protection of children whilst engaged in sport. It includes the promotion and communication of policies and other resources to the community in which the sport takes place.

Monitoring and evaluation – The enactment of an embedded organisational commitment to monitoring of the degree of compliance achieved and the effectiveness of the approach undertaken by the sport to achieve a safeguarding children culture.

The *International Safeguards for Children in Sport* reflect a growing trend towards a greater degree of homogenisation of what are commonly referred to as “standards” as defined within typical regulatory frameworks that govern the safety of organisation their delivery of activities or services.

In Australia, there are three clear examples of standards related to child protection with organisations.

In Queensland, under the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000, organisations and self-employed persons who fall within the scope of the Blue Card system are legislatively required to develop, implement and maintain child and youth focused risk management strategies. In the guide to resource organisations to meet their obligations (Queensland Public Safety Business Agency, 2014), a child and youth risk management strategy is defined as

“...the combination of an organisation’s aims, values, protocols, policies and procedures to foster a safe and supportive service environment for children and young people. The purpose of a child and youth risk management strategy is to help to identify potential risks of harm to children and young people and to implement strategies to minimise this risk...”

In order to comply with the legislative framework, a child and youth risk management strategy must include the following eight minimum requirements:

- A statement of commitment to the principles of safe and supportive service environments;
- A code of conduct;
- Recruitment, selection, training and management strategies that encourage best practice and enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people;
- Policies and procedures for handling disclosures and suspicions of harm;
- Policies and procedures for the occasions where there might be a breach of the organisation’s child and youth risk management strategy;
- A planning process for high risk activities and special events;
- Policies and procedures for compliance with legislation; and,
- Strategies for communication and support for all stakeholders including children and young people.

Under the South Australian Children’s Protection Act 1993, all organisations which provide health, welfare, education, sporting or recreational, religious or spiritual, child-care or residential services to children are required to lodge an annual compliance statement outlining their child safe environment policies and procedures with the Department for Education and Child Development. The annual statement includes agreement from an organisation that they meet the following criteria.

- My organisation has a documented risk management plan that identifies, assesses and takes steps to minimise and prevent risk of harm to children because of the action of an employee, volunteer or another child.
- My organisation has a documented child safe environment policy that outlines our commitment to children’s well-being and safety.
- My organisation’s child safe environment policy is supported by guidelines and procedures that are relevant to our specific business and activities.
- My organisation communicates our child safe policy and procedures to all relevant persons (such as staff, volunteers, members, families and children).
- My organisation has a code (or codes) of conduct for adults and children.

- My organisation knows its obligation to conduct criminal history assessments on staff and volunteers who are working with children in prescribed positions, as required by the Children's Protection Act 1993.
- My organisation has a policy and/or procedures for assessing and dealing with criminal history information where this information is required by law.
- My organisation has systems for actively supporting and supervising staff and volunteers.
- My organisation provides training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers to maintain their knowledge of child protection and child safe environments.
- My organisation actively encourages the participation and involvement of children and young people (where appropriate).
- My organisation educates its staff and volunteers about their role and responsibilities to report and respond appropriately to suspected abuse and neglect.

In April 2012, the Victorian Government initiated a landmark inquiry into the handling of child abuse allegations within religious and other non-government organisations. The inquiry's final report, *Betrayal of Trust* was tabled in Parliament on 13 November 2013 and contained 15 recommendations. The Victorian Government and the Opposition at the time have committed to support all of the recommendations.

The Victorian Government has introduced three new criminal offences to further protect children from abuse. The three new offences are:

- a grooming offence which targets communication, including online communication, with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse;
- a failure to disclose offence that requires adults to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child (unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so); and,
- a failure to protect offence that applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.

It has also funded a strategy to improve the capacity of organisations to prevent and respond to child abuse, including:

- introducing minimum child safe standards for organisations engaged in child-related work, and providing support for organisations to meet the new standards (to be overseen by the Commission for Children and Young People);
- requiring all Victorian government and non-government schools to have consistent policies in place for responding to child abuse allegations; and,
- establishing a 'reportable conduct' scheme requiring certain organisations with a very high degree of responsibility for children to report allegations of abuse to the Commission for Children and Young People.

Recently, the Commission for Children and Young People released for consultation a draft set of child safe standards (October, 2014). To be compliant, an organisation will need to have in place the following minimum requirements:

- a child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety;
- a code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for behaviour;
- human resources practices that reduce the risk of harm to children by new and existing personnel;
- processes for responding to and reporting harm to children;
- a risk management approach;

- mechanisms to promote the participation and empowerment of children; and,
- strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety.

All three of these examples and the preceding international analysis demonstrate that child safe standards are becoming more and more similar.

In summary, best practice is considered to include the development and implementation of a clear and meaningful child protection policy with reference to a code of conduct for its personnel and systems for safe recruitment, training and induction of personnel, child abuse reporting and response procedures, the involvement of children and families in decision making and an ongoing quality improvement cycle involving regular monitoring and review.

Enduring structures in sport help to build capacity over time.

In what has been now called the child safe movement (Budiselik, 2010), Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have identified that a critical element to achieving the up-take of child safe frameworks by organisations is the creation of enduring structures of expertise that support capacity building in sectors over time. They pointed to a number of examples of which the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit is the most relevant.

Lang and Hartill (2014) track the development of safeguarding children initiatives in sport in England to the conviction of British Olympic swimming coach Paul Hickson in 1995 of the rape and sexual assault of young athletes under his care. In their commentary, they reported that at the time

“...the Amateur Swimming Association, like most other English sports organisations, had no strategy for safeguarding and protecting athletes from abuse...The Hickson case was a wake up call for sport. The case cost the Amateur Swimming Association around 1 million pounds in lost sponsorship and prompted a moral panic around child sexual abuse in sport that drove national governing bodies and external sport agencies to act. There was considerable resistance from inside sport, however, with NGBs initially denying abuse in sport was a significant issue...”

In 2000, Sport England (the equivalent of the Australian Sports Commission) partnered with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to convene a Child Protection in Sport Task Force which created a national action plan and the establishment of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU). The CPSU has introduced a set of standards for child protection that has been made part of the conditions of funding between Sport England and the National Governing Bodies. It has also continued to provide ongoing training and other resources for sport to use in relation to risk assessment protocols and other child protection practices (Boocock, 2012a; Lang and Hartrill, 2014).

Lang and Hartill (2015a) reported that according to the CPSU, 85 of 95 publicly funded sport agencies have achieved the Advanced Level of the Standards.

Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have argued that these results are in stark contrast to the lack of tangible achievements in safeguarding children in sport made in most of the other developed countries, including Australia. In over a decade of activity, the work of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit has been an instrumental driver of reform and change.

Safeguarding children needs to be interwoven into the culture of sport.

In the recent Vicsport report (2014), it was identified that approaches to protecting children should not be seen as less significant element of its operations than running the sport. In the view of its membership,

“...a standalone approach across each member protection issue would also likely result in a more pronounced compliance based approach, drawing attention away from a proactive and participatory approach...”

It should be core to its commitment to run sport in such a way that it is safe, fair and inclusive of everyone.

This is a point echoed by Tucci et al (in press) when they make the following observation:

“...An organisational child protection policy should speak in the language of the organisation and reflect its values. The wording of the policy plays an important role in generating commitment to its implementation. It is a mirror to the organisation’s mission and identity. It will be real when it is experienced as a genuine feature of the organisation’s character instead of an “add on” to it...”

The Vicsport report however sounds a note of caution against a totally integrated orientation. It concluded that

“...Victorian sport stakeholders do need to be cognizant that interlinking safeguarding and child protection with broader member protection issues has led to a predominantly uniform and reactive approach...{such that} general member protection and complaints based responses may not be wholly fit for purpose to safeguard and protect children...”

In essence, safeguarding children initiatives should be experienced as an everyday part of being involved in junior sport without fading altogether from view.

External evaluation and rigour is essential.

A number of authors have argued that achieving change in this area of organisational behaviour will not be achieved without meaningful compliance (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2007; Budiselik, 2010; Tucci et al, In Press).

In the early implementation stages, external review can ensure that an organisation’s child protection policy is as clear and comprehensive as it can be. After its implementation, the organisation must ensure that a child protection policy is kept alive and constantly improving to adjust to the needs and changing context in which it is applied.

Tucci et al (In Press) have recommended that the Board of the organisation will review its policy annually (or earlier as required). The responsibility for evaluating the organisation’s compliance with this policy should be delegated formally to the CEO. The CEO is then responsible for undertaking to collect, analyse and report on relevant data from the organisation that provides an assessment of

- the degree of compliance;
- new or additional risks identified for children and young people and how those risks were addressed;
- critical incidents that have resulted in children and young people experiencing harm, abuse or exploitation arising from their involvement with the organisation; and,
- areas for improvement.

The Board should produce as part of its annual reporting a summary of the outcomes of the information collected in relation to its Child Protection Policy and make it available to parents, staff and volunteers of the organisation and the broader community it serves.

On a regular basis, at least every three years, it is critical that the effectiveness of the child protection system be reviewed by an external authority with expertise in the area of child protection. It is a significant risk for any organisation to believe that it is being effective but be doing so only because the right questions have not been asked or answered.

The Vicsport report (2014) highlighted that at a state and regional level, sporting organisations do not have any mechanism to check the compliance of child protection initiatives. Without such monitoring of the rigour of its systems, sport is vulnerable to a degree of over confidence and as such heightened risk to children.

Australian sport is not doing all it can to safeguard children in comparison to other developed countries.

In Table 1, a comparison is made between eight developed countries in relation to a number of benchmarks that support the development of effective child protection practice in sport (Duncan, 2012; Raakman, 2012; de Lench, 2012; Zubrack and Kirby, 2012; Boocock, 2012a, 2012b; Simms, 2012; Kirby, 2012; Stirling and Kerr, 2012; Fasting, K.; Leahy, 2012; Toftegaard-Stoeckel, 2012; Lang and Hartill, 2015b; Toftegaard-Stockel, 2015; Vertommen, et al, 2015; Lopiano and Zotos, 2015; Parent, 2015; Martin, 2015; Russell, 2015). England is clearly most advanced having begun to implement a range of initiatives in 2001. It is testament to the fact that change in the field of child protection in sport takes a long time, requiring steady progress and needs to be resourced by leadership at a national level that co-ordinates activities centrally. It is also facilitated by enduring structures that provide an ongoing impetus for change and advancement. It also needs to be informed by research that can help build a contemporary knowledge base and a relevant public policy climate.

In comparison to other countries, Australia has partially achieved a number of benchmarks. However, it is clearly well behind the achievements currently being made by England.

Table 1. Comparison of eight developed countries in relation to child protection in sport

Key Benchmarks of Development	GBR	USA	DEN	BEL	CAN	ESP	JPN	AUS
Long term approach	✓ ✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
A coherent and articulated framework	✓ ✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Co-ordinated strategy	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Safeguarding children standards	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Funding of sport is contingent on compliance to standards	✓ ✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Enduring structures	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Collaborations are embedded	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Capacity building initiatives	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓
Working with Children Checks	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓ ✓
Research is undertaken	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗

Legend:

- ✗ No evidence of meeting the benchmark
- ✓ Some evidence of meeting the benchmark
- ✓ ✓ Ample evidence of meeting the benchmark

3. A snapshot of Australian approaches

In this section, a summary of the safeguarding children in sport activities at a state and national level is presented. It is beyond the scope of this project to analyse the various Working with Children Check systems operating in each jurisdiction. However, it is an important theme to note that in general the introduction of Working with Children Check legislation has been a major catalyst for the evolution of broader strategies aimed at developing and maintaining child safe organisations.

Australian Capital Territory

The Working with Vulnerable People Act (Background Checking) 2011 commenced requiring individuals to undergo a pre-employment background check undertaken by the Office of Regulatory Services in October 2012. The ACT uses and promotes the training and resources offered by Play by the Rules to sporting clubs and organisations.

New South Wales

The Office of the Children's Guardian is

"...an independent statutory authority that works to improve the protection of children in NSW by helping organisations, employers and individuals understand the meaning, importance and benefits of being child-safe...(2014)".

It is responsible for the implementation of the Working with Children Check system in the jurisdiction. It offers a range of resources and training to a number of sectors that provide a program or service to children and young people. It encourages organisations to be child safe, which it defines as those which

- develop Child Safe policies;
- have a Child Safe code of conduct;
- provide effective staff recruitment and training;
- understand and promote privacy considerations;
- have a plan for managing risk to children and young people;
- encourages children and young people to participate in the organisation itself;
- effectively deals with concerns or complaints about behaviour towards a child; and,
- ensures that its personnel undergo Child Safe Organisation training.

Specifically in relation to sport, the NSW Children's Guardian has recently released a Child Safe Sport strategy which includes a brochure and specific training aimed at sporting clubs. Its primary aim is to inform individuals who volunteer or work in sport understand that they are required to undertake a Working with Children Check following legislative changes which phase in after 1 April 2015.

It offers Child Safe Check Training that facilitates any organisation to undertake a self evaluation against its principles of a child safe organisation.

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory has implemented its Working with Children Check (Ochre Card) since 1 September 2010. Like all other jurisdictions, it requires individuals who volunteer or work with children in the context of sport to have clearance to do so. It uses and promotes the training and resources offered by Play by the Rules to sporting clubs and organisations. It has had a focus on umpire safety as a means for building a culture in sport that reflects a commitment to respecting all those involved in sport.

Queensland

Queensland has a Working with Children Check (Blue Card) administered since 1 July 2014 by the Public Safety Business Agency having recently transitioned from the Commission for Children and Young People which ceased operations at that time. The Working with Children Check System is made up of three components defined by legislation:

- Blue Card screening;
- ongoing monitoring of Blue Card holders; and,
- risk management strategies.

Under the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 and the accompanying Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2001, organisations and self-employed persons who fall within the scope of the Blue Card system are legislatively required to develop, implement and maintain child and youth focused risk management strategies. A child and youth risk management strategy is the combination of an organisation's aims, values, protocols, policies and procedures to foster a safe and supportive service environment for children and young people. The purpose of a child and youth risk management strategy is to help to identify potential risks of harm to children and young people and to implement strategies to minimise this risk. A risk is anything that can threaten the safety and well being of children and young people.

A compliant child and youth risk management strategy has the following eight minimum requirements:

- a statement of commitment to the principles of safe and supportive service environments;
- a code of conduct;
- recruitment, selection, training and management strategies that encourage best practice and enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people;
- policies and procedures for handling disclosures and suspicions of harm;
- policies and procedures for the occasions where there might be a breach of the organisation's child and youth risk management strategy;
- a planning process for high risk activities and special events;
- policies and procedures for compliance with the blue card system; and,
- strategies for communication and support for all stakeholders including children and young people.

The Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (DNPRSR) provides funds to approximately 80 sports at a community level and 30 high performance sports through the Queensland Academy of Sport. As a funding body, DNPRSR has a compliance framework that requires each of these sporting codes at a state level to have in place Member Protection Policies that cover child protection. They heavily promote the resources available through Play by the Rules and have offered face to face training at different times.

South Australia

South Australia has a long standing commitment to promoting child safe cultures in sport. Much of the framework that sits behind the current National Play by the Rules strategy and resources has its roots in the leadership of the South Australian Office of Recreation and Sport (ORS) in this area.

As noted earlier in this report, the Children's Protection Act (1993) in South Australia forms the basis of one of two legislatively oriented systems in Australia that enforces child safety in organisations with a role in supporting or providing a program or activity for children and young people. It requires specified categories of organisations to have in place the following:

- a risk management plan addressing the safety of children;
- a child safe policy or a member protection policy which addresses the child safe obligations;
- a child safe officer;
- guidelines and procedures that support a child safe policy;
- codes of conduct with respect to children;
- clear recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers;
- provision of information, training and support about creating and maintaining child safe environments to staff and volunteers;
- ways for encouraging the participation of children in decision making; and,
- procedures that ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of and meet their mandated notification obligations.

Each year, State Sporting Organisations (SSOs) are required to lodge a compliance statement to FamiliesSA in order to be eligible for state government funding. Since, 2011, the SA ORS has supported SSO's to be compliant. It provides resources and training to SSO's about child safety and mandatory reporting requirements. The ORS also undertakes governance reviews of SSOs on a regular basis.

Through OSR registered Star Club network, over 2500 sporting clubs receive opportunities for ongoing training and support in relation to child safety.

Resources offered by ORS include:

- Codes of Conduct for players, parents, coaches and administrators;
- Guides and Booklets about Child Safety;
- Guidelines for mandated notifiers;
- Guidelines for managing allegations of child abuse in sport and recreation; and,
- Powerpoint presentations to be used to train individuals at a club level.

For example, the training provided by ORS to sporting organisations assists nominated Child Safe Officers to:

- understand the importance for organisations to adopt appropriate screening processes for members working with children and young people and the requirement for criminal history assessments;
- understand the definitions and indicators of child abuse and neglect;
- learn about the requirements under the Children's Protection Act 1993 of the legal responsibilities of staff and volunteers working with children; and,
- develop a broad knowledge of the SA Child Abuse Report Line processes and procedures.

The training provided by ORS to Child Safe Officers is considered to be at a more advanced level to that delivered by the online training offered on Play by the Rules.

Importantly, new regulations to come into force in April 2015 will ensure that child safety compliance will also be applied to individual business that run sporting activities but which are not affiliated to any SSO.

Tasmania

Tasmania is the only jurisdiction that until recently (1 July 2014) has not had a Working with Children Check system.. The phased roll out requires all individuals who work or volunteer in a sporting club to have a Working with Children Check no later than 1 April 2015. There are no specific resources or training offered to sport or any kind of organisation through the State Government aimed at promoting child safety.

Victoria

The Working with Children Check was introduced in 2006 and covers individuals who volunteer and work with children, including as part of any form of organised sport. In 2008, Sport and Recreation Victoria published a widely disseminated guide for *Keeping Junior Sport Safe*. It includes a step by step process that supports clubs to evaluate its current approach to child protection and then move to formulate policies, procedures and systems that build and maintain a child safe culture at a club level. The list of *top tips* (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2008) that clubs can implement to build a child safe culture are listed as:

- Everyone in your club should be involved in keeping junior sport safe.
- Understand what child protection and safe junior sport means and what steps your club can take to keep juniors under the age of 18 safe from harm and minimise risk.
- Communicate and raise awareness of what is appropriate behaviour throughout your club. This could be done through codes of conduct, regular items in newsletters, or agenda items at coach or committee meetings.
- Talk to the juniors at your club so that you understand their needs and views.
- Understand your club's legal responsibilities, including the Working with Children Check, the reporting of child abuse or neglect, duty of care obligations, child care at clubs and the responsible serving of alcohol.
- Ensure that you have policies and procedures in place to deal with complaints, allegations or the reporting of incidents, and treat these seriously, sensitively and swiftly.
- Identify the sport specific screening or Working with Children Check requirements for your club and maintain relevant records.
- Clearly define roles and communicate these to the rest of your club, so that members know who to speak to if they have any questions or concerns, or wish to report incidents.
- Appoint appropriate volunteers, coaches and officials.
- Make it easy for your club's volunteers by having clear job descriptions and providing support and training.
- Look at other things your club should be aware of, such as change rooms, use of images of young people, or bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Regularly review policies and procedures as part of creating a culture of safe junior sport.
- Spread the word about your club's policies and procedures for keeping keep junior sport safe.

Since the introduction of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005), the Commission for Children and Young People has had a role in promoting child-friendly and child safe practices in the Victorian community. It produced and disseminated a *Guide for Creating a Child-safe Organisation* (2006) which resources organisations to consider the layers of actions that any organisations need to take in order to build and maintain a child safe culture.

Recently, in response to the findings of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Sexual abuse in Institutions and Religious Organisations - the Betrayal of Trust Report (2013) – the Victorian Government has committed to introducing a number of measures including the introduction of Child Safe Organisation Standards into legislation. As noted earlier, in its Consultation Paper on the topic released in October 2014, a list of initial standards have been proposed and circulated for comment.

After a period of consultation, these draft standards are planned to be included in legislation following the same approach that has occurred in South Australia and Queensland. It is also likely the newly merged Departments of Health, Department of Human Services and Sport and Recreation Victoria into a single Department of Health and Human Services will facilitate more integrated ways of joining up child safety across the relevant sectors that support the health and well being of children and young people.

Recently, Vicsport have undertaken a project aimed at building the capacity of state based sporting association membership to implement a more effective child safe culture. It has completed a research phase that sought feedback from its members and tested its conclusions with an expert reference group. It has now contracted the Australian Childhood Foundation to run a series of forums with a small group of sports over a six month period to work specifically on undertaking a risk assessment process and putting in place an effective safeguarding children framework which may be externally reviewed at the end of the project.

Western Australia

The WA Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) has a four pillar *Fair Safe Sport Strategy* to resource sporting organisations and clubs develop and maintain a positive culture, of which child safety is both an element and an outcome.

Pillar 1. Collaborate with the Working with Children Screening Unit to support the implementation of the Working with Children Check across all sport as required by legislation.

Pillar 2. Promote cyber safety actions which help to protect children when they are involved in any form of electronic communication.

Pillar 3. Build and support a state based Member Protection Information Officer (MPIO) network.

Pillar 4. Develop and support for an effective complaint management system across sport for responding to allegations of child abuse.

The WA DSR has contracted WA Sports Federation (WASF) to run training in regard to each of these pillars on a regular basis. The WASF also disseminates an information kit about Working with Children Checks to sporting clubs and the broader recreation industry.

The WA DSR has also developed a *Safe Clubs 4 Kids* education project in partnership with WA Sports Federation, Working with Children Screening Unit, Surf Life Saving WA and the WA Police - Child Abuse Squad. Through this project, WASF disseminates an information kit and poster to clubs that encourages them to create safe environments for children. In addition to clarifying the recruitment process for staff and volunteers and ensuring that clubs have a working knowledge of any policies and procedures that their sport has for protecting children, it has established the following list of simple guidelines to be included in Codes of Conduct, Child Protection and/or Member Protection Policies:

- Foster an environment of friendship, fun, co-operation and good sportsmanship.
- Identify and manage risks and dangers for children.
- Ensure that all physical contact with a child is appropriate to the situation and the skill being taught.
- Ensure adequate support and supervision of staff and volunteers.
- When you meet with a child make sure that you are both in view of others and avoid being alone with a child.
- Never enter a change room without first knocking or loudly announcing that you are entering.
- Males should only enter male change rooms and females should only enter female change rooms.

- Adults should sleep separately to children on overnight camps.
- Adults of both genders should attend overnight camps.
- Ensure a cyber safe (online) environment for all members by providing guidelines and education.

These actions are supported by quarterly meetings of a reference group involving WA Police, the WA Equal Opportunity Commission, Working with Children Screening Unit, WA Sports Federation, and the WA Department of Children and Families.

The WA DSR has also implemented into all of its funding contracts a Key Performance Indicator that requires funded sporting organisations to ensure that Working with Children Policies are current and in place according to all relevant legislation. This includes ensuring that

- clear Child Safe Policies are in place, easily accessible and communicated to members; and,
- Member Protection Information Officers are trained and operating.

National resources for safeguarding children in sport

The Australian Sports Commission has defined child safety as one of the critical areas of risk that all sports must address. On its website, the ASC states that

“...as in a range of other social environments, the issue of child abuse is a complex problem that affects everyone, including those who participate in sporting and recreational activities. Children and young people have a right to be safe from abuse. All people looking after children and young people have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for them - including those in the sport and recreation industry...”

It has supported sport through a number of strategies that have as its main focus education and resource provision within a framework that seeks to improve the governance capacity of all NSOs.

These strategies are summarised below:

Play by the Rules

Play by the Rules (PBTR) was developed in 2001 by the South Australian Department for Sport and Recreation. It provides information, resources and education on discrimination, harassment and child protection in sport. It has grown into a collaboration between the ASC, Australian Human Rights Commission, State and Territory Departments of Sport and Recreation, anti-discrimination and rights based agencies, and other stakeholders. The PBTR website provides information, resources, tools and online training to increase the capacity of sport and recreation organisations to adequately address issues of discrimination, harassment and child safety.

In relation to child safety specifically, PBTR website makes information available in four different ways:

- Resources

It includes fact sheets on Working with Children Checks for each state and procedures for reporting child abuse in each jurisdiction.

- Toolkits

There is no specific toolkit for child safety, unlike toolkits which are available for ground marshals, social media, racism and homophobia. It does include Member Protection Policy templates, a link back to fact sheets and guidelines for working with children screening, the role of chaperones, code of behaviour, complaints management flowchart, and child abuse reporting instructions.

- Legal Information

In this section, there is a definition of child abuse; an explanation about child abuse laws in each jurisdiction; information sheets with strategies for how clubs, coaches and parents can help support a child safe culture; and, guidelines for taking and using images of children in sport.

- Online training

The online training for Member Protection Information Officers about child protection is the most frequently viewed training available on the website. The basic training provides a general understanding of the issues associated with child protection. It uses case scenarios relevant to sport that enables the learner to consider their values and assumptions.

A recent review of Play by the Rules undertaken by Synergistiq (April, 2014) found that on average the website was effectively meeting its objective in increasing the understanding, confidence and capacity of organisations and individuals who accessed its online resources to promote a safe, fair and inclusive sport environment for all people. It had achieved more limited success in actually changing the decision-making and/or behaviour of individuals or clubs.

“...approximately 40% of respondents either could not agree, or actually disagreed with the concept that, as a result of PBTR, their club / organisation had taken steps to make it more safe, fair and inclusive for all people. When reviewed and discussed with focus groups, it was sometimes the case that respondents could not attribute change directly to PBTR, as opposed to broader changes occurring society. However, it was also clear from respondents that some clubs and organisations are yet to gain an appetite for positive change...”

Information available on ASC Website

The ASC Website provides links to the Working with Children Check systems for each jurisdiction, and has two information sheets on *The Law and Sport* and *Guidelines for the Use of Photographs and Images of Children*.

Governance

The ASC has also made child protection a requirement within its funding agreements with National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) to ensure that each NSO has a current set of policies and procedures for creating and maintaining a child safe culture in sport.

In 2001, the ASC introduced a Member Protection Policy template to assist National Sporting Organisations to develop their own sport specific framework of policies that support effective governance and management of sport. All publically funded sports are required to have an updated Member Protection Policy to receive Government funding. It has been updated on a regular basis to reflect changing legislative requirements and emerging issues in sport and is now up to seventh iteration.

In the introduction to the template, it defines the purpose of the Member Protection Policy for sport as follows:

“...National sporting organisations have a responsibility to make sure that their sports are safe, fair and inclusive for everyone involved. They also have legal obligations to prevent and address discrimination and harassment and to protect children from harm and abuse. A Member Protection Policy is an essential tool that outlines how a sporting organisation will meet these obligations and maintain responsible behaviour and fair decision-making... the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) requires national sporting organisations to develop, implement and regularly update their Member Protection Policy so they comply with the law and provide a safe and positive environment for all those involved in their sport and activities...”

The template itself in relation to child protection meets many of the standards that have already been identified in this report. In Table 2, the Member Protection Policy elements are mapped against example child safe organisation standards.

Table 2. Mapping of the content of the Member Protection Policy Template against example child safe standards.

Example child safe standards	Language of the Member Protection Policy Template
There is an organisation commitment to child safe culture.	The NSO is committed to the safety and well-being of all children and young people who participate in our sport or access our services. We support the rights of the child and will act at all times to ensure that a child-safe environment is maintained. We acknowledge the valuable contribution made by our staff, members and volunteers and we encourage their active participation in providing a safe, fair and inclusive environment for all participants.
There is a code of conduct for personnel and participants.	We will develop and promote a code of behaviour that sets out the conduct we expect of adults when they deal and interact with children involved in our sport, especially those in our care. We will also implement a code of behaviour to promote appropriate conduct between children. These codes will clearly describe professional boundaries, ethical behaviour and unacceptable behaviour.
There is an effective and safe recruitment system for all personnel.	<p>We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that our organisation engages suitable and appropriate people to work with children, especially those in positions that involve regular unsupervised contact with children. This will include using a range of screening measures.</p> <p>We will ensure that Working with Children Checks are conducted for all employees and volunteers who work with children, where an assessment is required by law. If a criminal history report is obtained as part of their screening process, we will handle this information confidentially and in accordance with the relevant legal requirements</p>
There is support and supervision system implemented for all personnel.	We will ensure that all our employees and volunteers who work with children have ongoing supervision, support and training. Our goal is develop their skills and capacity and to enhance their performance so we can maintain a child-safe environment.
There is a risk management approach integrated into the management of the sport.	We will develop and implement a risk management strategy, including a review of our existing child protection practices, to determine how child-safe our organisation is and to identify any additional steps we can take to minimise and prevent the risk of harm to children because of the actions of an employee, volunteer or another person.
There is a way that children's involvement in decision making is promoted.	We will encourage children and young people to be involved in developing and maintaining a child-safe environment for our sport.
There is a child abuse reporting and response system.	<p>We will ensure that all our employees and volunteers are able to identify and respond appropriately to children at risk of harm and that they are aware of their responsibilities under state laws to make a report if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child has been, or is being, abused or neglected.</p> <p>Further, if any person believes that another person or organisation bound by this policy is acting inappropriately towards a child, or is in breach of this policy, he or she may make an internal complaint.</p> <p>The NSO aims to provide a simple, confidential and trustworthy procedure for resolving complaints based on the principles of natural justice.</p> <p>Any person (a complainant) may report a complaint about a person, people or organisation bound by this policy (respondent) if they feel they have been harassed, bullied or discriminated against or there has been a breach of this policy.</p>

<p>There is a cycle of review and quality improvement.</p>	<p>Ensure the policy is formally incorporated into your organisation's By-laws, Memorandum and Articles of Association and annual membership application/ agreement or as is required by your Constitution.</p> <p>You should make sure that everyone associated with your sport, including member and affiliated associations and clubs, is aware of the national policy and what it sets out. Display it prominently on your website and look for other ways to promote it to your members.</p> <p>Legal requirements change regularly so it is important that you establish a process to review and update the policy. This should happen at least every year.</p>
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More broadly, the Sports Governance Principles (Australian Sports Commission, 2012) defines at least two elements which are also relevant to enhancing a child safe culture within sport. The first relates to ensuring an effective risk management process that is overseen by the Board.

Principle 3.4 The Board should have in place an effective risk management strategy and process. This will require the Board to take actions to identify key risks facing the organisation and ensure that risk management strategies are developed and actioned. The risk management system should comply with the Australian Risk Management Standard HB246:2010.

The second element charges the Board with the responsibility to ensure that all decisions are made using an ethical and responsible framework and that are assessed against the organisation's risk management protocol.

Principle 6.2 The Board ensure key decisions and actions are based on a thorough review of all available information and are assessed against the organisation's risk management framework and strategic objectives and that these are documented.

Finally, it is important to note that whilst there are regular audits of NSO governance performance in relation to finance and integrity, child safety compliance is not included currently as a major feature of such reviews.

5. Feedback from stakeholders

NSO Forums

Two NSO forums were held in Melbourne and Sydney and were attended by 78 people representing 47 sports. In addition, there were two teleconference forums attended by 14 people representing 11 sports. The feedback provided by participants has been aggregated and analysed thematically and are presented below.

What are the strengths and limitations of current approaches to child protection being implemented across sport?

There was general consensus in the forums that the current approach to protecting children is based on the following elements:

- Screening of adults who have specified roles in sport with children and young people based on jurisdiction determined Working with Children Check systems;
- Member Protection Policies that NSOs have implemented down through different levels of their sport;
- Training about child protection in Play by the Rules and/or offered by human rights agencies at a state or territory level;
- Codes of conduct are in place for coaches, officials, parents and participants;
- Coach registration requires mandatory training about child protection; and,
- Member Protection Information Officers in place in a growing number of clubs and associations to act as a support role to the club in relation to child protection.

In identifying these separate elements, the participants almost unanimously recognised that there was no cohesive framework that could readily be pointed to so that internal and external stakeholders could understand how child protection was being addressed by Australian sport and whether it was effective

Forum participants identified strengths and limitations to the current approach. The strengths were:

- A high degree of compliance has been achieved with the take up of formal Member Protection Policies across all levels of sport;
- Awareness about the issue of child abuse and exploitation has increased over the past decade, in particular as a result of high profile cases which have been subject of the Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse;
- The implementation of Working with Children Checks are being effectively managed within jurisdictions;
- The resources provided by different Children's Commissions were perceived to be positive; and
- Training offered by Play by the Rules and other organisations is popular and provides a solid foundation for understanding the roles of adults in sport in understanding the topic of child protection.

The limitations identified in the forums were numerous, far outweighing the perceived strengths. These were:

- There is an over reliance on Working with Children Checks as the primary means for achieving child safety, despite it not screening out individuals who pose a risk and who do not have a previous record;
- Variations in state based legislation with regard to Working with Children Checks and child protection legislation posed significant challenges for NSO's in keeping up to date with their varying obligations and responsibilities, subsequent changes to legislation at the state and territory level and the resulting implications for their organisation;

- The child protection component of policies are generic and not really tailored to be implemented at a local level;
- The training provided through Play by the Rules is effective in raising awareness but not in equipping participants with skills or a framework to help guide their decision making;
- Reliance on volunteers at a club level to implement Working with Children Checks which opens it to the possibility of human error and with only limited oversight to pick up problems;
- Codes of conducts across sports are different and they vary considerably in relation to how much they include on child protection;
- There is no easy access to a source of expert advice to support decision making at a national or state level and even less so at or club level;
- The management of allegations and complaints by children, parents and others was not viewed as strong for child protection issues as it was for other types of complaints, due in large part to the complexity of scenarios that arose and the limited level of expertise to deal with it;
- There is no clear definition of what constitutes child abuse or exploitation, how it is relevant in the context of sport and how to frame what child protection practice in the context of sport;
- Almost no sports had a system of monitoring the effectiveness of their child protection framework and as a result collected little data that enabled them to understand their risks and capacities.

The majority of participants (90%) did not rate their sport highly in relation to the extent to which their child protection approach was robust and effective.

What is the current capacity to build a more effective response?

All the participants were committed to improving their sport so that it was more responsive and oriented to preventing harm to children from abuse and exploitation. They believed that they had a realistic base upon which to enhance their child protection systems.

However, there were the following barriers that needed to be addressed.

- All levels of sport, but in particular, clubs and grass roots sports needed to view child protection as a key governance responsibility that is part of the fabric of sport.
- All levels of sport needed to become more proactive to child abuse concerns and treat child protection as a strategic priority that supported safe sport as an incentive to encourage children's participation.
- All levels of sport needed to see child protection as more than an area of compliance.
- Any initiative needed to come with resources that could be used to fully implement them and not totally rely on the clubs to fund and support.
- Any initiative needs to ensure that it does not reduce the likelihood of volunteers becoming involved to support junior sport.
- MPIOs are not adequately supported or trained to fulfill the role of a contact point for child protection within clubs, needing access to content expertise in order to understand and be able to evaluate and address the risks in clubs.

Over half of the participants expressed the view that achieving an outcome of a child safe culture requires a rigorous quality improvement cycle that has at its core an external review of the implementation of child protection system across all levels of a specific sport.

What specific issues are yet to be addressed?

The participants raised a number of specific issues that need to be addressed in developing a cohesive child protection strategy for sport.

- There needs to be consideration given to the issue of peer to peer harm.
- There needs to be a framework of guidelines for visiting international teams when there is an international event in Australia.
- There needs to be consideration given to officials and administrators who attend a national event in different states on a regular basis.
- There needs to be a distinct element of any strategy that responds to the specific needs and risks of children with disabilities who participate in junior sport.
- There needs to be consideration given to the fact that some sports do not have children involved in them at all. In those low risk sports, a differentiated approach needs to be defined so as to not unnecessarily burden administrators with processes that are not relevant.

Stakeholder interviews

A series of interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders representing the following groups/ organisations:

- State Departments of Sport and Recreation;
- State Human Rights Agencies;
- State Sporting Associations/Peak Bodies;
- MPIOs with extensive experience in child protection and sport; and,
- Key personnel from the Australian Sports Commission.

The majority of issues raised in these interviews mirrored the points made by other respondents. In this section, the aggregated themes from these stakeholders are summarised.

Training and capacity building tools are not enough.

Many of the stakeholders commented that the educative resources that were either available at a state level or at a national level through Play by the Rules were positively received by different audiences. However, there was little conceptualisation of what the learning needs of the users were and what the aims of the training actually were.

For example, one representative from a state Department of Sport and Recreation made the following observation:

“...to say the training is available is only part of the story. It doesn't really tell you what anyone is taking from the training. It doesn't tell you if the individuals who are the audience have a better knowledge or have improved their skills. Training is offered because in the absence of nothing else, it is the one thing that sport can do and then hope for the best...”

Another stakeholder, with extensive experience in the area of child protection, observed

“...online training is not really training, it is awareness raising. That is what this field has done for years, raised awareness. It may be that face to face training gives a different dimension to people's knowledge and confidence. But really we treat training as if it is the panacea to change in organisational culture, when it can only ever be just one part...”

There was little monitoring of what the impact of training was on individuals who undertook it. It appears assumed that training always led to better outcomes. One informant commented that

“...no one really knows what the training does. All I know is that even with all the training that has been offered to MPIOs and others at different levels of sport, there are still examples of children who are being harmed where the initial response was not helpful to the child and probably let the perpetrator go free...”

Similarly, there was a consistent view that the tools offered to clubs that were aimed at improving good governance were not specific enough in the area of child protection. One of the staff from a state Department of Sport and Recreation stated

“...the tools are just too generic. Saying you have to sign off a declaration that you are child safe in order to receive government funding is not really using a tool, it is expediting a process...”

Others believed that the ability of the individuals using the tools shaped the outcome more than the tool itself. For example, one respondent commented

“...it is always hit and miss. Governance, risk assessment and quality improvement are important for all sports. But it depends on the skill level and content knowledge of those using these tools as to whether they are used effectively. Most clubs are interested in facilities, coaching and playing the sport, there is very little focus on issues that take them away from that...”

Others also cast doubt as to the extent to which these tools, especially risk assessment and internal review procedures, were being used at all at a club or even state level for many sports.

“...really, it is unlikely that tools that are offered up as resources are being applied consistently across states, across sports and across grass roots clubs. There may be pockets of really good application, but when you look at Australia as a whole, there is no uniform use of the tools...it is very patchy...”

Training needs to be tailored for specific roles.

It was clear that many of the stakeholders believed that the training provided to date needs to be reviewed. There is the need to make it more tailored to the different roles that exist within club and sport structures, for example committee, administrator, MPIO, parent and coaches.

The training also needs to be integrated more closely with the code of conduct and child protection policies of sport. For some of the respondents, this is a fundamental flaw of the training offered to date – the lack of integration of the training with an objective to reinforce policies, procedures and codes of conduct.

One stakeholder reflected in his comments the sentiment of many others:

“...it seems to me that there is little point in offering general training to people who need help with decision-making. The training should be offered by sport themselves to those involved in their own sport. It should reflect the policies and systems that the code is trying to implement and make real. The training should reinforce the policies and the policies should reinforce the training. Nothing like that is in place now...”

Information about child safe cultures have not reached parents and children.

The stakeholders were unanimous that very little information about child safe culture/child protection is distributed to parents and children. This is problematic for a number of reasons:

- Parents need to understand how they can play a role in the protection of children.
- Parents can inform other parents about taking collective action that will protect all children in the club.
- Children and young people will feel safe to approach anyone in the club if they have a problem or issue or would like to give feedback about their experiences.
- Sports that are inclusive of families demonstrate their commitment to respect which can cross over to other issues of discrimination.

There are isolated examples of exceptional practice in safeguarding children in sport.

There are isolated examples of exceptional and effective child protection practice in sport. In all of the interviews, one example of an individual who has helped her sport to develop an enhanced child safe culture stood out. Michelle Hanley, who is the Risk Manager and State Member Protection Officer of Football NSW has worked in her role for approximately 15 years. She has been effective for the following reasons:

- She has provided face to face training to a range of stakeholders in that time both as induction to the topic and as ongoing professional development;
- She has nurtured and developed the skill set of a small but emerging network of individual MPIOs within clubs which are now embedding effective decision-making at a local level;
- She has become known for her expertise and clarity in the advice she has offered;
- She has developed relationships with key stakeholders in child protection, police and other associated authorities;
- She has developed and used a set of principles that are based on children's rights to help her determine the best decisions that she and her sport should make in relation to allegations of abuse or breaches of policy or codes of conduct;
- Over time, she has also developed relationships with other sporting codes and has become a defacto resource for other sports to be able to seek advice as required;
- She has been in the role and developed her expertise over a substantial period of time;
- She has been supported in her role by the code itself;
- Her position with the state structure has enabled her to carry a degree of authority that supports critical decision making in a timely way; and,
- She has shown and continues to show a high level of commitment to the protection of children from any form of harm.

Some of these qualities are available individually as components of other sports and jurisdictional systems. However, it is the combination of all these elements that have highlighted the strength of what has been achieved in Football NSW by this one individual over a period of time.

In commenting about Football NSW, one stakeholder with considerable knowledge and experience of sport administration in that jurisdiction stated

"...you can see what happens when expertise is allowed to develop over time. This is not a quick fix. It takes time and experience to build the kind of wisdom that is needed to make good decisions that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children when they take part in sport. Michelle is so respected that even other sports now approach her for support and advice..."

A state and national level partnership is essential for success.

In almost all the interviews, the respondents believed that safeguarding in children in sport was an issue that crossed jurisdictional borders and needed a strong and deliberate national and state partnership to be forged. It is clear from the interviews with the State Departments of Sport and Recreation (or their equivalent) that jurisdictional strategies, legislation and public policy are in place that need to be respected and integrated into a national approach.

One stakeholder argued that there was no choice other than to ensure that there was collaboration between state and commonwealth on this issue.

"...it can't be that any single level of government can own the strategy. Children deserve national and state government to work together. There is no choice. There needs to be a national approach that can be tailored to integrate what is happening within state jurisdictions..."

The role of the Australian Sports Commission was debated by the respondents. A minority of stakeholders stated the view that the ASC should not have any role and that the whole area was best left to state and territory governments to continue with their current approaches. The majority however wanted the certainty of a national strategy to be developed and co-ordinated by the Australian Sports Commission. It is exemplified in the comment made by one of the stakeholders.

“...everything is changing so quickly in the field of child protection. The Royal Commission is showing up what needs to be developed, the scope of the problem that needs to be addressed. There are laws being proposed, changes to Working with Children Checks all the time in different states. This is why the ASC has to own a national approach that can fit in with what is happening at a state level...”

Finally, one of the interviewees argued strongly for the ASC to assert itself and establish a framework for the sporting community that is resourced by expertise and can build capacity over the next decade.

“...the ASC needs to take the leadership role and create a framework that will build the capacity of all sport over the long term. Sport in Australia needs a national strategy just like in the UK spearheaded by the Safeguarding Children in Sport Unit run by the NSPCC. All sport must know where they are going, they need to know what is coming and what they need to do. Otherwise, there is only confusion and everyone doing their own thing...”

Survey data

Two separate surveys were undertaken. The first sought feedback via an email invitation to the Member Protection Information Officers at club and state association level. The second survey sought feedback from CEO's of the National Sporting Organisations who were invited to participate through a special email from the ASC. The results of each are presented in turn.

Feedback from NSO Leadership

A total of 22 CEOs or individuals in senior roles participated in the survey. 82% were male and 185 were female. They represented a range of team and individual sports. The average period of time that the CEO or senior managers was 3.4 years with the range being 6 months to 7 years.

What is the perceived importance of child abuse and exploitation as a concern?

9 out of 10 respondents rated child protection as very or extremely important. One CEO's comments reflect the significance of the issues facing sport in relation to child protection when he stated:

“...it is such a critical area of interest for sport in Australia...in a recent risk matrix conducted for our sport, we identified child protection as one of the top seven risks alongside other more well known risks such as security, drugs and gambling...”

What are the risks facing children in relation to abuse and exploitation?

In the main, the respondents were able to identify a range of critical and relevant risks associated with child abuse and exploitation. They most frequently cited the exposure of large numbers of children to paid and volunteer adults with little regulation other than Working with Children Checks. Some also identified the additional vulnerabilities of children with special needs and disabilities.

How effective is the child safe culture that has developed across sport?

The respondents referred to the strength of their policy development, their screening systems and the education offered across their sport as key components of a child safe culture at all levels. The major strengths of their approach was a uniform system across their code, widespread knowledge of the Membership Protection Policy, a zero tolerance to abuse and exploitation of children, accreditation of coaches, and an inherent culture of responsibility.

They also identified the following limitations:

- confusion and complexity arising from different Working with Children requirements in each jurisdiction;
- limited resources;

- difficulty with implementing effective controls from NSOs down to the club level; and,
- limited capacity to review the effectiveness of any initiative system at grass roots level.

One CEO made the following comment in evaluating his sport's effectiveness in maintaining a child safe culture:

"...the current approach is premised on the fact that it will identify and exclude those individuals who have been convicted and precluded from any activity that involves children and young people. However, as with all screening practices it may not identify individuals who are intent on doing harm but have not been convicted of an offence. Therefore at times child protection represents the absolute minimum approach but is not by any means foolproof...improvements can be made as at the moment there is a dependency on volunteers registering the information...volunteer churn may impact on the quality of the information that is captured about individuals..."

Another made the following observation

"...there is a national policy in place. But there is no implementation or compliance strategy. The policy is used only when there is a problem. There is insufficient focus on prevention in our sport..."

One of the areas that was exposed as a weakness was the confusing and contradictory nature of advice provided by different organisations and individuals. One CEO explained it succinctly with an example:

"...our sport does not require our coaches to hold a WWC as a requirement of their accreditation. We have been advised by child protection authorities that to do so may place the NSO in a position of employer in relation to the work the coach conducts. In this instance, we have been advised then that the actual employer of the coach should have carriage of that requirement..."

What should be the role of Australian Sports Commission in safeguarding children in sport?

The majority of CEO's and senior managers who responded wanted the Australian Sports Commission to show national leadership to ensure that the issue of child protection is addressed effectively. They sought access to clear, relevant and up to date advice provided to NSOs in order to ensure they have implemented best practice in child safety. In particular, they believed that the ASC, in consultation with the NSOs, should develop a national strategy with a long term vision that will resource sport in a coherent and consistent way over the next ten years with regard to child protection.

They made the following suggestions as a way of strengthening the capacity of Australian sport to ensure that children are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- create a network of professional MPIOs that can support people in sport who have concerns and need advice about how to act to respond to issues;
- develop clear resources and guidelines that are easy to follow and be implemented at the grass roots level; and,
- advocate for a national uniform Working with Children Check and other regulations.

A number of CEO's believed that there needed to be a framework that enabled best practice approaches to be maintained as part of a child safe culture. For example, one CEO's comments exemplified what some others also described.

"...We need an audit type approach much like the Annual Sports Performance Review wagon wheel in relation to governance to identify the important elements of what a child safe sport looks like and then assess each sport oh how well it meets these requirements..."

In developing any initiative, the respondents encouraged the ASC to

- co-design the elements through open dialogue and collaborative practice;
- take into consideration the resources that are required for its implementation;
- ensure that it is achievable given the nature of the organisational structures that are in place across sport; and,
- build a truly national approach that can be adapted in specific jurisdictions but are able to carry consistent themes.

Feedback from MPIOs

A total of 80 MPIOs participated in the survey. Just over half (58%) were female. They represented a range of sports with Netball, Basketball, Swimming and Football providing the most significant proportion. The average period of time that the MPIO had held this role was 13 months with the range being one to 84 months. In comparison, the average period of time that the respondents had been involved in their club was 8 years, with the range being 3 months to 26 years.

What is the current involvement of MPIOs in child protection?

The major interface that MPIOs have with child protection issues is presented in Table 3. The most frequently cited role for MPIOs is ensuring that all individuals who require a Working with Children Check have applied, have received their clearance and have been recorded properly with their sporting association. They also identified themselves as the contact point for any concerns about the safety of children or any inappropriate behavior by adults.

Role	Percentage
Ensure that WWC system for the club is managed effectively	34%
Central contact point for club or association about issues associated with children	11%
Developing and clarifying policies for club	8%
Distributing information and educating members	8%
Minimal or no role	32%
Other	7%

What are the risks facing children in relation to abuse and exploitation?

One in three (34%) were not able to identify any risks associated with abuse and exploitation for children in their club. When they did perceive a risk, a further 15% of MPIOs identified issues which are peripheral to the issues of child protection. Even with the question attempting to focus an assessment of risk on the experiences of children when they participated in sport at the club level, 22% identified that the most significant risk of abuse for children was their home environment and not anything to with their sport. The remaining 29% identified a number of significant concerns related to coach and other adult behaviour (sexual, emotional and physical abuse), the possible threat by young people to their peers and environmental dangers associated with the supervision of children and young people.

How confident are MPIOs to provide information about child protection?

The majority (83%) of MPIOs felt confident, very confident or extremely confident in their capacity to provide relevant information in relation to child protection issues at their clubs. One in 6 MPIOs (17%) felt only a little or not confident to do so.

How effective is the current child protection training offered to MPIOs?

63% of MPIOs had completed the training on child protection provided by the Play by the Rules and 37% had not completed it. Of those that had completed it, 47% described that their knowledge base about child protection only increased a little, compared with 53% who described it as adding a great deal to their knowledge base.

69% of MPIOs believed that the training they received in their role had equipped them fairly well to understand the standards of behavior of people in their club in relation to children.

The majority of MPIOs who had completed their training were pleased and believed it was necessary for the topic of child protection to be included in it formally.

Three out of 10 respondents did not feel that there was adequate time spent on child protection in the MPIO training. 69% believed that the time spent in the training was sufficient.

What is the scope of child protection concerns in sport?

Table 4. Proportion of MPIOs who have held child protection concerns as a result of a child participating in sport	
MPIOs who have held concerns	28%
MPIOs who have not held concerns	72%

This is an important finding. Almost 3 in 10 MPIOs have held a concern about a child who may have been abused or exploited as a result of participating in sport. These incidents included sexual abuse by both peers and adults over a period of time, emotional abuse of children due to decision making that undermined the self confidence of children, verbal abuse of children, and physical abuse of children by coaches.

What is the effectiveness of child protection policies across sport?

17% of MPIOs were not aware whether their club had a child protection policy. Of the 83% that knew that their club had a formal policy, a significant proportion (39%) were not clear exactly what was contained in it. Another 42% knew that their policy was a standard policy that was provided to the club either through their NSO or Play by the Rules. Many of those who knew that there was a formal policy (36%) believed that its focus was on ensuring that staff and volunteers had a current Working with Children Check.

30% of MPIOs held the view that their formal child protection policy was either not implemented or only implemented a little at their club.

15% of MPIOs who answered this question did not know whether there was a Code of Conduct that was used at their club. A further 28% believed that the Code of Conduct was either not implemented or only implemented a little at their club.

There was wide variation in the approach that would be taken in response to a concern that a child was being abused or exploited as a result of participating in sport. The variation is described in Table 5. It highlights that there has been inadequate focus on training MPIOs about how to understand their role in protecting children. The majority believed that children's safety always came first. However, how this commitment was enacted was interpreted very differently.

Table 5. Response that MPIOs would provide to children who they held concerns about as a result of the actions or behaviours of someone in their club	
Report the matter to authorities	17%
Interview children	15%
Observe children	14%
Discuss matter with President/Committee member	12%
Discuss matter with SSO	10%
Discuss the concerns with responsible adult showing the concerning behaviour	9%
Discuss the matter with children's parents	9%
Not report	8%
Other	6%

What support do MPIOs want to undertake their role in responding to child protection?

In the main, over 90% of MPIOs wanted access to expertise about child protection to consult with when they need it. 72% believed that a central phone number would be helpful to their role. 24% believed that a consultant role should be available through the affiliated NSO.

6. Analysis

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first, the data from preceding chapters is considered and organised into a series of key themes which summarise the findings of the research phase of the project. In the second section, there is an examination of the critical issues which need to be addressed in order to design a strategy that will build on the established outcomes achieved by Australian sport already and strengthen its capacity to more effectively prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children as a result of their participation in sport.

Summarising the key findings

The safety of children from any form of abuse or harm in sport is considered paramount by all stakeholders.

There was no disagreement across all stakeholders that the protection of children from any form of harm arising from abuse and exploitation is an absolute priority. It is at the core of the value base and mission of Australian sport. It is also perceived to be vital in continuing to grow participation rates at a time when there are other types of activities competing to reduce sport's share of the audience of children and young people.

The national and state leadership of Australian Sport is committed to creating child safe sports.

The national and state leadership of Australian Sport who took part in this project described a strong commitment to implementing strategies that would continue to make their sports safe for children and young people. There was a significant recognition that the current Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse had forever changed the landscape of the broader Australian community. They understood and accepted their responsibility to provide children with experiences of sport that were safe, fair and inclusive.

The capacity to implement effective child protection strategies is far from uniform within a jurisdiction and even less so across jurisdictions.

The capacity building oriented strategies provided to and for sport has achieved a degree of effectiveness in creating child safe environments. However, it is very clear that there are huge variations in that capacity between sports within individual states and territories and even more variation between sports and systems between individual jurisdictions. Compliance with legislative requirements associated with the introduction of Working with Children Checks in state systems has, in the main part, been the driver for the provision of education, resources and other obligations (such as annual organizational child safe organisation compliance declaration in South Australia). Such inconsistency of capacity was identified as major threat to the safety of sport for children and young people.

There is limited evidence that describes the outcomes achieved by the Australian sporting community.

It is clear that there is no outcomes framework that underpins any of the strategies that have been implemented to date to build the capacity of Australian sport to be child safe. In this area, activity and/or demand for activity (training, resource download, compliance rates for Working with Children Checks and other requirements) are interpreted as outcomes. In all of the consultation and interviews, not one respondent was able to identify how Australian Sport was safer for children as a result of the activities it has undertaken to date.

As a result, there are no signposts for determining the extent to which any of the capacity building strategies have been effective across state and national levels. There are also no goals that are actively being measured into the future.

Many of the respondents believed that this lack of understanding of what has been achieved or should be achieved is linked to the perception that child protection remains predominantly a response to an adverse event rather than a proactive strategy aimed at strengthening the culture of sport.

The influence of NSO child protection policies decrease as they are rolled out down organisational structures to the club level.

It is clear that Member Protection Policies have been developed and produced by all NSOs which receive public funding. As highlighted in an earlier section, compliant Member Protection Policies cover off on child protection.

Yet, there is doubt as to how influential such national policies are at the grass roots level where junior sport is played and administered. Many of the stakeholders raised concerns about how effective these policy templates are in resetting the culture of sport at a club level. In addition, a significant proportion of MPIOs were not clear whether their club had a member Protection Policy or how adequately it had been rolled out. For example, 29% of MPIOs believed that their child protection policy at a club level is inadequately implemented and 27% of MPIOs say that code of conduct is inadequately implemented.

This is an issue that Tucci et al (In Press) have cautioned organisations about, especially those with federated structures.

“...there are inherent dangers for organisations to develop child protection policies that use a “cookie-cutter” template. Too often, these versions of policies dilute their intent as they are cloned further and further away from the original source...”

In a follow up article, Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have argued that the further into the operational level an organisational child protection policy reaches, the more there needs to be an understanding as to the rationale for each element, what the objective of the policy element is and why it is important for it be adhered to.

“...the support structures around the policy – training, written guides, supervision, operational procedures – are inherently critical in explaining the need for it and generating a commitment to it. Without a meaningful understanding of the assumptions behind the policy and what it is trying to achieve, all you have is people following the rules as they are written, not embodying them...”

There is still confusion about how to engage in effective decision making.

A major theme arising from the consultations and forums was the lack of confidence of many individuals about how to make decisions that were in keeping with a sporting code’s commitment to prioritising the safety of children. Firstly, it was consistently expressed that child protection was an area of expertise that was not part of the background of many people involved in sport. This has left a major knowledge gap in those charged with the responsibility to action it at all levels of sport administration, coaching and resourcing.

Secondly, individuals, if they felt equipped with the knowledge and skills, had either the capacity to understand organisational risk and how to address it **or** the knowledge about how to understand and assess the risk that other individuals pose to children through their behaviour and act on their concern. There were very limited examples of individuals who could do both within Sport.

Thirdly, it became obvious through the feedback from respondents that there is inadequate distinction, at a policy and operational level, made between abuse that is perpetrated by employees and volunteers involved in sport and abuse that occurs by others in the community and is identified by employees and volunteers involved in sport.

As Tucci et al have noted (In press),

“...many organisations have child protection policies that conflate the issue of child abuse perpetrated within organisations by staff or volunteers with the suspected abuse of a child or young person by his/her parents or someone else in the community....”

It is important to recognise that there are very different decisions which flow from the abuse or exploitation of a child or young person by the staff and volunteers involved in sport (organisational child abuse) and the abuse or exploitation perpetrated against children by parents or others in the community (community child abuse) and may be identified by staff or volunteers involved in sport.

In the context of organisational child abuse, the sport itself is a focus of the investigation. It must proceed with transparency and a commitment to ensuring that its staff or volunteers who are alleged to be, or are responsible for the abuse or exploitation are held accountable for their behaviour. The organisation's management must act lawfully and ethically at all times. It must co-operate with any external investigation of the incident and should undertake an internal review of the circumstances that led to the situation occurring. It must also provide resources for supporting children, young people and their families who are in any way affected by the abuse or exploitation. The focus of the efforts of the Sport is on achieving justice, protection and support for the children and young people affected by the abuse and exploitation. Sport also has a responsibility to other staff or volunteers who may be adversely impacted by the allegations about, or incidence of abuse or exploitation of a child or young person by a colleague.

In the context of community child abuse, the Sport is not an implicated party in the abuse or exploitation of the child or young person. If staff or volunteers become concerned that a child or young person participating in the sport has been or is a risk of abuse or exploitation by a family or community member, the role of the Sport is to act to ensure that relevant information about the risks to the child or young person is reported to the appropriate authorities in a timely way. Its staff and volunteers need to be supported through any difficulties in managing the reporting process, as well as involvement in subsequent actions that may be taken by relevant child protection authorities or police. The primary responsibility of the Sport is to be an active member of the protective network around the child or young person.

Fourthly, whilst individuals felt confident to know how to report child abuse if there was a disclosure or very clear indicators of it, they felt far less confident about how to respond to breaches of policy, in particular if they appeared to be trivial or insignificant. The early response to breaches in Child Protection or associated policies and/or Code of Conduct is consistently identified within the literature as the key to building what Tucci and Mitchell (2015) call a "safeguarding perimeter" or what Smallbone, Marshall and Wortley (2014) define as "extended guardianship". A framework that supports effective decision making in these circumstances which is more frequently the reality and more frequently the cause of much angst for individuals at the operational level in sport is missing.

Finally, the communication protocols within a Club and/or State Sporting Organisation and between the varying sporting structures and authorities is complicated and the source of tension for individuals within Sport. There are numerous questions that an individual must find answers to in this process. If and when do I contact the police, child protection authorities, Children's Rights Agencies? At what point are parents involved? What do I communicate to the child? When do I inform the Club Committee and/or any other part of my sporting organisation? How do I manage the scenario with the alleged perpetrator? Is this a significant enough breach of policy that it warrants action and communication to the right people? What will happen if I make a mistake? All of this can be stressful even for seasoned child protection practitioners in the field. It can be overwhelming for individuals who only have to deal with these issues and systems on an occasional basis and in scenarios where the outcomes can be the driver of whether a child is or is not effectively protected.

These issues or barriers in the protection of children mirror those experienced by the general community with regard to taking action in regard to child abuse. Community attitude tracking research in Australia (Tucci et al, 2010) and England (Penn, 2008, NSPCC, 2009) found the following that uncertainty, disbelief, shock and distress, and a lack of confidence can lead to inaction or delayed action in the protection of children..

Education is the key to building capacity, but not the only answer.

The educational resources offered by Play by the Rules and state based agencies have to date focused largely on awareness raising about the issue of child abuse within the community and within organisations. Substantial numbers of individuals associated with the administration of sport have undertaken this training. Whilst important and extremely positively received, it is not comprehensive enough to build the skills and confidence of those who need to make decisions about children.

The majority of training offered to date has lacked a model for learning transfer, i.e. a conceptualisation of how a trainee integrates what they learn and then applies it in the context of their role. Broad (2000) noted that transfer of learning is maximised when the following elements are in place:

- there is a supportive management culture that values training;
- the training program is mandatory;
- there is preparation of the trainee by their manager;
- any barriers to work performance in their role are eliminated;

- pre and post discussions about the content of the training and its application occur between the trainee and supervisor;
- the provision of training-related work assignments and frequent practice opportunities by the supervisor;
- ongoing coaching and support of the trainee by a trainer is available to apply new learning;
- the provision of refresher and problem solving sessions by the trainer; and,
- trainers formally evaluate the transfer of learning to the workplace.

Others have argued that the transfer of learning is most effective when it is supported by an organisational culture in which

- the training is connected and relevant to the organisation's philosophy, policy and practice;
- there is opportunity for rehearsal of and high-quality feedback on new skills or strategies learned;
- there is ongoing processes through which reflection occurs between the learner and the organisation (Morrison, 1997; Collins et al, 2007; Mitchell and Tucci, 2012).

Mitchell and Tucci (2012) recently concluded in their review of child protection training in the Northern Territory that there were six key elements that should form the core of the design and content of any child protection curriculum.

- Child protection training must move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to a differentiated framework that can more effectively meet the diversity of needs, skills, knowledge, and roles of learners.
- A comprehensive child protection training framework includes a tiered approach including pre-service, in-service and advanced or continuing education.
- Training will be most effective when it is based around a central theme that forms a through-line that connects principles, skills, values and behaviour.
- The effectiveness of training will be maximised within a broader organizational learning culture.
- Training must be soundly embedded in adult learning principles.
- Technology-based training is most effective in the delivery of content in the 'effective' domain such as foundational skills, policies, procedures and processes but cannot adequately address content in the 'affective' domain that has a strong behavioural component such as collaboration and engagement.

Finally, training is not the magic bullet of organisational capacity building and organisational change management. It plays an important role. However, it is only one of a number of strategies that need to be integrated together by management as part of change management process. These include: the availability of operational manual/guides to aid decision-making, clear and effective policies that have been and continue to be communicated across an organisation, access to expert content knowledge when it is required, external validation and review of the quality of the systems that are in place to protect children and young people, and risk assessment approaches (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2007; Budiselik, 2010; Erooga, Allnock and Telfor, 2011; Tucci et al, In Press).

Consumers of sport have very limited awareness of any child protection initiative that has been implemented and how it applies to them.

All the data highlights that children, young people and the adults who care for them have little awareness of the

- possible risks of abuse and exploitation of children that arise as a result of their participation in sport;
- expectations about their own behaviour towards and with children and young people with whom they interact as part of their involvement in sport;

- obligations they have to take action if they become aware of any allegations of abuse and/or exploitation;
- procedures to follow if an adult or other young person breaches a policy or the Code of Conduct of the Sport; and,
- the ways they can participate in making their Club and their Sport safer for children and young people.

According to Tucci and Mitchell (2015), parents and families are an early warning system for protecting children in organisations like sporting codes. They are the eyes and ears of children's environments. They need to be supported to understand how they can help in a realistic way and be supported when they come across information that may be of concern or even unusual in nature. It is often by piecing such intelligence together that a true and accurate assessment of risk of an individual can be completed and resultant action be taken.

What needs to be addressed to make Australian sport safer for children and young people?

The language of child protection in sport needs to be defined and settled.

In the feedback from the consultations and surveys, a variety of words with relevance to child protection were treated as if they were interchangeable. For example, the following terms have been used synonymously: child protection, safeguarding children, child safe organisations, child safe culture in organisations. Similarly, the terms: child abuse, exploitation and harm have been used to describe both actions and outcomes. As noted earlier, a distinct lack of definitional rigour is part of the problem that faces Sport and indeed many other organisations which run an activity, service or program for children, young people and/or their families.

It is critical then that the conceptual landscape surrounding child protection be defined as the starting point for unifying the collective commitment of Australian Sport to implementing policies, systems and practices that will prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children as a result of their participation in sport.

A coherent framework in Australian sport needs to be developed that has a central organising narrative.

There is currently no robust national strategy to support child protection in sport. To date, each of the jurisdictions have been left to develop their own approaches based on the prominent political and community context in each state and territory. Much has been made of education as the basis for building the capacity of Sport in this area. Yet, there is wide variability in the understanding, confidence and behaviour of those involved in sport to create and ensure child safe environments at a local level where the sport is actually played and administered.

The Australian Sports Commission has used its authority as a funder and regulator of sport to implement a Member Protection Policy which has served to embed a movement towards child safety into the fabric of the way junior sport is run and experienced. Clearly, this compliance oriented strategy has achieved results with all publicly funded sports having in place at a national level some form of child protection policies through the broader Member Protection Policy framework. However, there is little evidence as to how influential and well known these policies are. The exception is the wholesale uptake of the Working with Children Checks as required through legislation in almost all jurisdictions as of 2014 with Tasmania being the last state to introduce mandatory background screening as a prerequisite for working with children and vulnerable people.

A strategic framework for protecting children is needed that is nationally defined and locally embedded with due reference to state and territory legislation and regulations. The national framework requires a cohesive narrative that can be communicated clearly to a range of audience groups ranging from the leadership of NSOs all the way to the participants of junior sport itself.

The framework should direct effort into outcomes and away from a reliance on activity as the basis for evaluating the impact of all initiatives to create and maintain child safe environments at a local level.

The framework needs to be understood as shaping the attitudes, values and behaviour of Australian Sport.

The national strategic framework represents an organizational change management action plan. This has been missing from the approach adopted by Australian Sport so far. It has had no clear and identifiable goals. It has lacked a deliberate plan that will support organisations to change. It has lacked an evaluation framework. There have been no timelines.

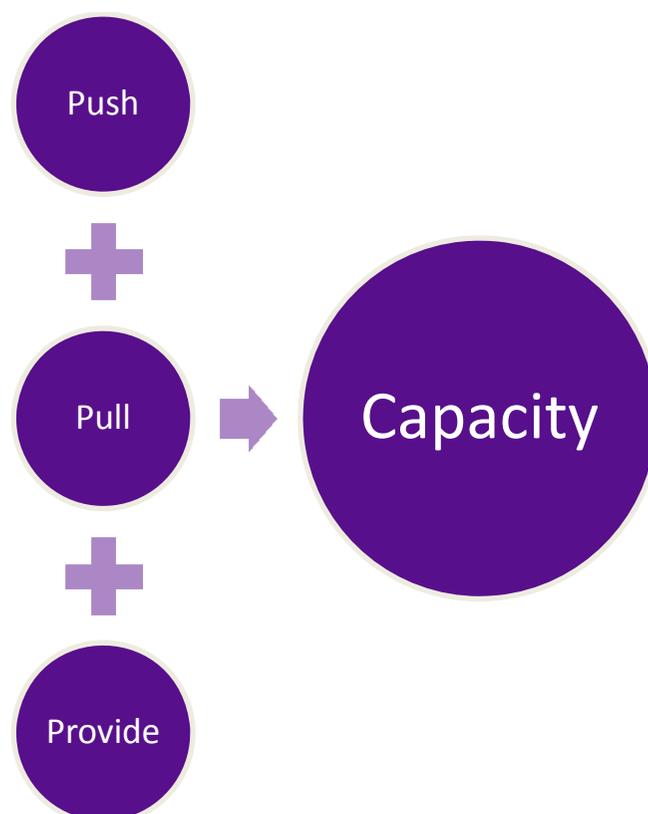
Change management applies a systematic approach to transitioning organisations from where they are to where they need to be in order to more effectively addressing an issue or problem or meet a need. It resources individuals within organisations to operate according to the desired changed parameters. An effective management strategy builds commitment, minimises resistance and helps individuals/teams to develop the required knowledge and ability to implement the change.

As a change management plan, the national framework must be sustainable over time and be anchored to structures and processes that are independent of the people who are the decision makers over today. It cannot be person contingent. It will set the direction for change to occur over 10 year time frame and deliver annual outcomes integrated to the long term vision.

The framework should integrate education, compliance and consumer oriented initiatives as the basis for building the capacity of Australian Sport to be child safe.

To date, the capacity of Australian Sport to effectively prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children involved in its activities has evolved through two main groups of initiatives that have focused on

- the provision of child protection training to a range of individuals who are involved in running and administering junior sport; and,
- regulatory compliance based on obligations in funding agreements between government bodies and sporting organisations and requirements imposed through legislation in a minority of jurisdictions.
- There has been very little offered to children or parents through any of these activities.
- Building on the work undertaken to date and addressing the gaps that have been identified, the framework will be most effective if it is based on the three key elements illustrated below.



Push strategies are regulatory in nature and shape change by setting standards and gradually encouraging compliance over time. In this way, benchmarks can be evaluated and monitored. Push strategies are driven by funding bodies, legislation and the sport themselves. They offer external review mechanisms that are independent of the sport/club itself to ensure that improvements are real and sustainable.

Provide strategies are educational and aim to build capacity in organisations through enhancing the knowledge, skills and confidence of individuals who are responsible for preventing and responding to the abuse and exploitation of children as a result of their participation in sport.

Pull strategies aim to empower consumers (children, parents and supporters) to understand the need for child protection initiatives in their club/sport, become actively involved in them and finally begin to request that their club/sport introduces them. **Pull** strategies represent a groundswell of support for an initiative that aims to overcome any resistance/concerns in the club/sport. Pull strategies are effective when they create a movement for change that moves the motivation to achieve improvement and change from external to internal drivers that are more salient and meaningful to everyone involved in the club/sport. These initiatives typically involve direct information provision and “campaign” champions endorsing the need and direction for change.

These three different strategic elements, in combination, build and integrate what is working now at state and national levels but extend it further offering the basis for a coherent framework that clarifies the need for collaborative effort to achieve meaningful and sustained enhancements of a safeguarding children in sport culture in Australia.

The framework requires a sound implementation plan and resourcing to maximise its effectiveness.

Whilst there is unanimous agreement that the issue of child protection in sport is important, there are varying levels of engagement within individual sports with regard to the extent to which it is a critical of issue of concern for their particular sport. Existing resourcing strategies have relied heavily on training and template development with varied results. The implementation of a national framework across sport will benefit significantly from:

- using a change management paradigm to ensure that a multi-level strategy is developed that addresses overarching cultural and leadership issues as well as building the capacity of staff and volunteers at the operational level;
- building on the best of what is available in every jurisdiction and integrate the educational resources so that children are not made vulnerable because of where they live. These resources need to evolve so that they convey a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of child safe organisations as the basis for generating commitment to them from all those involved in the running and support of junior sport, including the participants and their families; and,
- the provision of access to expertise to support and resource sporting bodies to develop the confidence and competence to operationalise the knowledge they acquire through training initiatives.

The national framework and the outcomes need to be externally validated and evaluated.

All of the current approaches to building capacity in sport to enact child safe practices have not been validated or evaluated. The recent Vicsport project and this current ASC project are the only two projects of their kind to have been undertaken in sport in Australia over the past decade.

They are both overdue.

External validation, in particular by an agency with content knowledge, is required because there is no way to know whether the initiatives implemented by Australian sport are in line with best practice or are evidence based.

Equally, the lack of evaluation or research represents another systemic risk factor.

There is a need to establish enduring structures to anchor the national framework.

It has been already demonstrated in the case example of sport in England that the creation of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit has been a major driver of policy reform and educational resources. In the comparison of child safe benchmarks, England is clearly the international leader in the field of child protection in sport mainly because of a long term commitment to this Unit.

The success of the national framework will depend heavily on a similar structure being created and supported to serve as a focal point for Australian Sport. It should be part of the organising narrative and also form the central point for advice and advocacy for sport. It should be established as a partnership between the ASC and agency or agencies with child safe expertise.

There is a need to test an initiative that integrates education and compliance into outcomes.

The national framework needs to integrate more formally and deliberately a capacity building approach through education with a more sophisticated compliance based strategy. Both strategies working in parallel have been found to be the most effective in other sectors who have attempted to strengthen organisational capacity to safeguard children and young people (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2007; Budiselik, 2010; Tucci and Mitchell, 2013; Tucci and Mitchell 2015). It should be piloted and evaluated in order to ensure that the implementation at full scale are understood and considered prior to a more comprehensive roll out.

7. The way forward

In this final section, a series of recommendations are made for consideration by the ASC. They follow directly from the issues and needs identified in the earlier chapters. In combination, the recommendations present a blueprint for Australian Sport to move from where it is to where it needs to be in relation to strengthening its capacity to prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children and young people as a result of their participation in sport.

Recommendation 1. The ASC and Play By The Rules to jointly establish and auspice a National Reference Group to support the implementation of a national strategic framework for preventing and protecting children from abuse and exploitation as a result of their participation in sport.

The integration of the ASC and PBTR is critical in achieving state and national representation of important stakeholders to the change management process for Australian Sport. It will broaden the base of interest and facilitate partnership at all levels of sport.

Recommendation 2. The National Reference Group to oversee the development, implementation and promotion of a national strategic capacity building framework under the banner of *Safeguarding Children in Sport*.

As noted previously, language is important in shaping the parameters of any field of endeavor. Critically, in sport to date, there has been a distinct lack of a cohesive through-line which is able to integrate and communicate the suits of actions undertaken to build the capacity of sporting organisations to be more protective of children.

Safeguarding Children in Sport is the recommended option because it helps to delineate the language and conceptual scope of the task facing Australian Sport in its effort to evolve its decision-making and other organizational practices associated with children. The term *safeguarding* has the definitional value to encompass both

- the actions required to reduce the risks of abuse and exploitation (**prevention**), and
- the actions required to respond effectively to children who are as having been or are believed to be likely to be abused or exploited (**protection**).

In addition, the term *safeguarding* is a verb which suggests a process of continual evolution and development, contrasting with *child safe* which implies a state that is achieved at a moment in time.

Other critical terms should be defined within the framework as follows (drawn from Tucci et al, In Press):

Table 6. Definitions of critical terms

Term	Definition
Abuse	<i>Abuse is the collective term used to incorporate emotional/psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, grooming, being forced to live with family violence, and bullying. Each of these terms are defined in this table.</i>
Protection	<i>Acts of identifying, reporting and responding to children who have been identified as being abused or are suspected of being abused.</i>
Safeguarding Children Organisation	<i>An organisation that meets relevant standards that implement an effective framework of policies, procedures and systems that reduce the risk of children being abused and exploited and respond effectively to children who are as having been or are believed to be likely to be abused or exploited.</i>
Emotional or psychological abuse	<i>Emotional or psychological abuse occurs when a child or young person does not receive the love, affection or attention they need for healthy emotional, psychological and social development. Such abuse may involve repeated rejection or threats to a child or young person. Constant criticism, teasing, ignoring, threatening, yelling, scapegoating, ridicule and rejection or continual coldness are all examples of emotional abuse. These behaviors continue to an extent that results in significant damage to the child or young person's physical, intellectual or emotional wellbeing and development.</i>

Physical abuse	<i>Physical abuse occurs when a person subjects a child or young person to non-accidental physically aggressive acts. The perpetrator may inflict an injury intentionally, or inadvertently as a result of physical punishment or the aggressive treatment of a child. Physically abusive behavior includes (but is not limited to) shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning and kicking. It also includes giving children or young people harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol or poison. Certain types of punishment, whilst not causing injury can also be considered physical abuse if they place a child or young person are risk of being hurt.</i>
Sexual abuse	<i>Sexual abuse occurs when an adult involves a child or young person in any sexual activity. Sexual abuse can also occur by a child or young person to another child or young person. Perpetrators of sexual abuse take advantage of their power, authority or position over the child or young person for their own benefit. It can include making sexual comments to a child or young person, engaging children or young people to participate in sexual conversations over the internet or on social media, kissing, touching a child or young person's genitals or breasts, oral sex or intercourse. Encouraging a child or young person to view pornographic magazines, websites and videos is also sexual abuse. Engaging children or young people to participate in sexual conversations over the internet or social media is also considered sexual abuse.</i>
Grooming	<i>Grooming is a term used to describe what happens when a perpetrator builds a relationship with a child or young person with a view to sexually abusing them at some stage. There is no set pattern in relation to the grooming of children. For some perpetrators, there will be a lengthy period of time before the abuse begins. Other perpetrators may draw a child in and abuse them relatively quickly. Some abusers do not groom children but abuse them without forming a relationship at all. Grooming can take place in any setting where a relationship is formed, such as leisure, music, sports and religious activities, or through electronic forms of communication including social media.</i>
Forced to live with Family Violence	<i>Being forced to live with family violence is a specific form of emotional and psychological abuse. It occurs when children or young people are exposed, witness or experience the aftermath of violence between adults in their home. It is harmful to children and young people. Family violence is defined as violence between members of a family or extended family or those fulfilling the role of family in a child or young person's life. Being forced to live with family violence places children and young people at increased risk of physical injury and harm and has a significant impact on their wellbeing and development.</i>
Exploitation	<i>Exploitation occurs when children or young people are forced into sexual activities for the benefit of an adult or a group of adults, including commercial profit. It can include a child or young person being forced into sexual activity that is then recorded in some way and/or used to produce pornography. Such pornography can be in the form of actual photos or videos or published on the internet. Exploitation can also involve children or young people who are forced into prostitution.</i>
Harm	<i>Harm, to a child or young person, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child or young person's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused. Harm can be caused by</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or</i> • <i>sexual abuse or exploitation;</i> • <i>a single act, omission or circumstance; or</i> • <i>a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.</i>
Bullying	<i>Bullying involves the inappropriate use of power by one or more persons over another less powerful person or group and is generally an act that is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms which are often interrelated and include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Verbal (name calling, put downs, threats)</i> • <i>Physical (hitting, punching, kicking, scratching, tripping, spitting)</i> • <i>Social (ignoring, excluding, ostracising, alienating)</i> • <i>Psychological (spreading rumours, stalking, dirty looks, hiding or damaging possessions).</i>

The ***Safeguarding Children in Sport*** framework is a change management action plan that will deliver the leadership and the certainty for Australian Sport to create its stated vision of “safe, fair and inclusive” sporting experiences for everyone. In order to do so, it needs to incorporate the following key elements:

- a ten year vision for the direction of Australian Sport in achieving improved outcomes for junior sport in this area;
- identifiable outcomes of the framework that can be used to evaluate progress on an annual basis;
- a suite of strategic initiatives that will integrate the best of what has been offered to date and build in additional elements such that the twin foundations of capacity building and compliance run in parallel and support each other;
- a partnership approach that brings together NSOs, State Governments, Play by the Rules and the Australian Sports Commission in a collective effort;
- access to expertise in the field of child protection and safeguarding children organisations;
- a commitment to establishing processes for external validation and review of the initiatives at all levels of sport.

Recommendation 3. The ASC to fund the establishment of a *Safeguarding Children in Sport* Unit to resource and support the implementation of the framework.

It is recommended that the ASC follows the lead from Sport England and establishes A ***Safeguarding Children in Sport Unit*** as a partnership between the ASC, the Australian Childhood Foundation and a relevant University to become the visible driver of policy reform, change management, resource development and training into Australian Sport.

The ***Safeguarding Children in Sport Unit*** will work collaboratively with the ASC and Play by the Rules Reference Group and implement the elements of the strategic framework using where possible existing channels for communication and engagement such as the MPIO network and Play by the Rules website.

Recommendation 4. The *Safeguarding Children in Sport* Unit to trial an integrated capacity building and compliance initiative as a key platform for the implementation of the framework.

It is recommended that the ASC and Play by the Rules supports the development and trial of an integrated model of capacity building and compliance with different sports representing different organizational structures, sizes and activity. This trial should form part of the external validation process and provide the platform for rolling it out across all sports over the next ten years.

8. Conclusion

Australian Sport stands at a cross road in relation to preventing and protecting child participants from abuse and exploitation. It has certainly achieved outcomes that put it ahead of many other countries. However, there are major inconsistencies within and across jurisdictions and sporting codes. In the main, initiatives have been judged to be successful on the basis of activities which have been undertaken rather than on any evaluations about the effectiveness of these activities in producing safer cultures and organisational systems for children as a result of their involvement in sport.

The basic foundations for a revitalised, nationally co-ordinated, coherent and validated approach exist.

There are emerging groups of informed stakeholders who can champion safeguarding initiatives, including a national network of MPIOs. There is an effective dissemination platform for training and information in Play by the Rules.

Above all, there is a clear and strong commitment from the leadership level of National Sporting Organisations, the Australian Sports Commission and the individual State Departments of Sport and Recreation. It is a tangible motivation driven by an inherent belief in the value of “fair, safe and inclusive” sport to children and the broader community.

Safeguarding Children in Sport will deliver sustainable results over time. Its best practice elements position Australian Sport as a leader in international efforts to protect children from the scourge of abuse and exploitation. Most importantly, it fulfils the ethos and mission of sport itself – to inspire, engage and support the community and ultimately resource the physical, emotional and social development of a nation’s children.

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