

Session: **Open session III.**

Abstract nr: **EASM-0037**

Do we really care? An examination of public debate surrounding the Crawford report's findings on the future of Australian sport

*S. Quick*¹

¹*Bond University, Faculty of Health Science & Medicine, Queensland, Australia*

squick@bond.edu.au

In late 2007 the newly elected Australian Government argued that reform of the Australian sport system was long overdue. It subsequently established an independent sport panel, led by Foster's Chairman David Crawford, to undertake a review of the Australian sport system and make recommendations in two key areas; the appropriate level support for elite sport and the use of sport and physical activity to build national health.

When finally released in November 2009 the report proved at the very least to be controversial. The major recommendations of the report resulted in considerable disquiet from those who believed they had been adversely affected by the report's findings. John Coates, president of the Australian Olympic Committee believed that it was "an insult to everyone who worked to get Australia on the Olympic stage." Yet conversely there was a quiet groundswell of positive opinion related to the report, including non scientific poll in the Sydney Morning Herald, which suggested that the "Crawford Report" had tapped into a previously unheard view related to Australian sporting success.

This study examined and analysed public comment, as presented in the media, of the "Crawford Report". Moreover it did so on three separate occasions over the six month period from November 2009 until May 2010. The first data collection was undertaken during late November 2009 following the Australian government's release of the report into the public domain. The second data collection period was in the days following Australia's involvement in the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. The third data collection period was during May 2010 following the release by the Minister of Sport of the Federal Government's response to the report.

The data collection for the research is somewhat limited due to the contemporary nature of the issue. Newspaper articles by sport and similar journalists provided one source of evidence. In addition public comment on such articles was also analysed to examine themes and the degree of repetition of such. Finally sporting blogs were accessed to discern the level of agreement or lack thereof with traditional sports writers. However while the sources at this stage were limited they were important as the discussion of the report was most discernible in the media. Parenthetically it has long been argued that mass media is a primary conduit between the public and policy makers. Consequently an analysis of media commentary in this instance, especially given the nascent stage of the debate was appropriate.

While this issue polarised sport journalists it appeared that the Australia public was generally far more positive about the report's contents. Ensuing international success by Australian individuals and teams post November 2009 continued to re-ignite debate around the report's

recommendations however commentary was most prolific during the three periods of data collection. Initial angst on the part of organisations such as the Australian Olympic Committee was alleviated when the government's response was released. However by dismissing a number of the reports key recommendations, and thereby placating the AOC, the government were at odds with public opinion and even state ministers' of sport.

These results, albeit somewhat limited, are important as they set the agenda for an informed debate fuelled by evidence rather than rhetoric. It is concluded that it is now time for a more in-depth assessment of Australian attitude toward elite sport success and the tax dollars dedicated towards such achievements. Indeed it may now be plausibly and dispassionately argued that the cost of such international success may be too high. While the key recommendations of the Crawford Report may not have been supported by the Minister of Sport and the Government, the accompanying debate, and a review of the process has clear implications for sport policy makers and sport managers.