

**Submission to the Queensland Government Economic and Governance Committee in relation to the proposed Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games Arrangements Act 2021.**



On behalf of the Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association of Queensland, I have pleasure in providing this submission on issues in relation to the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games Arrangements Bill.

Having supported para-athletes at all stages of their journey to elite sports for the past 60 years, we welcome the opportunity to comment. Our submission is focussed on the function of the Committee in relation to para-athletes and is presented to you in terms of:

- The context for the submission and our interest in Brisbane 2032
- Recommendations for adapting the Bill to:
  - o Strengthen commitments to a 2032 legacy and reflect the ideals of accessibility and inclusion in legacy planning
  - o Reduce potential liability by recognising the importance of wellbeing services to support all athletes before, during and after Brisbane 2032
  - o Reduce risk by addressing some areas of unconscious bias
  - o Increase inclusivity by acknowledging the specific issues for high support needs athletes

**The context for our submission and our interest in Brisbane 2032**

The Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association of Queensland has been connecting people with disabilities to sports and physical activity for more than forty years.

We deliver magic moments to Queenslanders with a disability, enabling them to enjoy recreation activities, play sport with their mates or stand on the dais at the Paralympics. In the background, we assist people to walk for the first time or relearn to walk after injury. These individuals often go on to enjoy parasports at all levels and many Sporting Wheelies alumni have gone on to represent Queensland and Australia in elite parasporting events. In 2021, 27 Tokyo Paralympians were alumni of the Association.

Our interest in the Bill and the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Committee that it heralds is to:

- provide knowledge, expertise and facilities with which to support the health and wellbeing of the para athletes on their journey to Brisbane 2032 and beyond;
- support and promote high needs athletes as they prepare for the Paralympics as we see this as a pathway to increase the medal count for Australians
- offer a clubhouse environment and social opportunities to para athletes in training so they have somewhere to be “the same amongst others” as they prepare for Brisbane 2032 and return from the highpoint of Brisbane 2032,

***Our History***

Sporting Wheelies been part of the dynamic evolution of disability inclusion at all levels of sport since the 1960s. We began as a sports club for people with spinal cord injuries following the first Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960. Later, as the ‘Queensland Sports and Social Club for the Disabled’, the Association promoted disability sport and raised funds for Queensland athletes selected for national and international competitions. The Association organised the first multigame junior invitational games for para athletes. We have now evolved to support the wellbeing of grassroots and elite athletes through training, competitions and health and fitness services

Having read the draft bill, we offer four recommendations for your consideration.

### **1. Embed inclusion and accessibility in legacy planning from the start**

Section 10 defines the requirements for performance of functions. We welcome the Government's focus on legacy planning in its previous communications. We consider there is an opportunity for the Section 10 requirements to link to the principles of legacy planning and legislate a focus on inclusion that would align with the integration of Olympic and Paralympic Games and maximise societal benefit of the Games.

- **Recommendation 1.1** : We recommend consideration be given to the addition of a point under Section 10(1)(e) "consider inclusion in matters of legacy planning, infrastructure planning and service delivery. This extends to accessibility of facilities and inclusion in employment opportunities."

### **2: Explicitly recognise the importance of athlete wellbeing as a function of the Committee**

Section 10(1)(c) identifies a requirement for the Committee to "use its best endeavours to avoid creating liabilities that will not be, or are likely not to have been, satisfied before the corporation is dissolved under part 5". Mental health is a significant issue for elite athletes and a significant issue for people with disabilities. Athletes with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, as has been shown by the high incidence of severe mental trauma in past Paralympians.

- **Recommendation 2.1:** We recommend consideration be given to the addition of a point under "Functions", section 9(2) to "support able bodied athletes and athletes with disabilities to access wellbeing services before, during and after the Games" (Note: we are not suggesting these be free, just that they are easily available to the athletes through clearly identified pathways).

### **3: Proactively tackle unconscious bias from the outset.**

Disability inclusion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a far cry from the situation in the 1960s and Sporting Wheelies has adapted accordingly. We believe that all ambitions are equal and valid and support the full variety of active goals people have, from increasing their mobility and independence, improving their health, socialising, participating recreationally, through to representing their State or country. This passion for enabling involvement is shared by many. As advocates of sporting inclusivity, it has been truly wonderful to see the increasing integration of the Paralympic games with the Olympic games. We acknowledge the increasingly integrated scheduling of events, televising and showcasing of para sports, efforts in talent identification and transfer pathways and the honour and pride Australians have in their para athletes.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that the disability community is disadvantaged in many ways that are invisible to the able bodied community. The data on this is shocking. In a recent conversation with one of our members who competed at the Sydney Paralympics, it was clear that even elite para athletes are very vulnerable to these inequalities. Whilst the Bill is clearly written to support and celebrate all athletes, we have some specific recommendations to remove any sense of This brings us to some quite specific recommendations in relation to the Bill, which focus on removing any sense of unconscious bias within the Act, in order to proactively work to limit unconscious bias in the committee:

- **Recommendation 3.1:** That consideration be given to including specific mention of guidance on working with people with disabilities in section 10 "Requirements for performing the function", subsection b which discusses the need to comply with certain documented guidelines

- **Recommendation 3.2:** We understand that the Paralympics are organised as a separate event. We suggest specific reference is made to the Paralympic organising bodies in section 9 (2)(h) and section 9(2)(i) which discuss the support function of the Committee in the areas of marketing and broadcasting.

#### **4: Recognise the varying issues arising from low to high support needs athletes**

Clearly there are many different forms and intensity of disability. With 10 years to go, the Brisbane 2032 Organising Committee has the opportunity to benefit from developments in research to understand the needs of para athletes, the neuroscience behind sports and disability and the technologies and facilities best tailored to provide a great competitive environment. Sporting Wheelies has recently become a signatory to the "*The Brisbane 2032 Paralympic Network for Performance Enhancement and Applied Sports Research*" (The Paralympic Network). This network is coordinated through the Queensland Academy of Sport, Paralympics Australia and the Queensland higher education institutions.

- **Recommendation 4.1:** We suggest consideration could be given to the inclusion of an independent director from a research background such as exercise physiology and/or the neuroscience of exercise.

We hope these observations assist in the development of the Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics Organising Committee and look forward to working with the Committee over the years ahead.

On behalf of the Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association of Queensland



Professor Anna Littleboy

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**President and Chair of the Board**

**Date: 7 November 2021**