BACKGROUND: FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME – INDIGENOUS CRICKET IN AUSTRALIA

The Indigenous cricket study For the Love of the Game is the result of a research partnership between Cricket Australia and the Australian National University (ANU). As well as providing a comprehensive history of the involvement of Indigenous Australians in cricket, the study presents a series of recommendations for Australian cricket to help guide its ongoing work with Indigenous communities.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was a review of historical and current research literature and findings on the subject of Indigenous Cricket in Australia and the role of racism in sport.

In the second phase interviews were conducted with both present and past Indigenous players, cricket administrators, umpires, historians, volunteers and parents, teachers and community members with interests in cricket. This approach amounted to 93 interviewees, seven focus groups and 58 formal interviews in 12 different locations, resulting in 77 audio hours.

The study has informed the development of Australian cricket’s strategies to increase female and male Indigenous participation at the grassroots and produce greater representation in state and national sides.

With the release of the Australian National University report For the Love of the Game, it is timely for Cricket Australia (CA) to provide an overview of Indigenous cricket programs and the Strategies that drive them.

CA acknowledges the recommendations of the report and complements its findings by outlining the current status, goals and areas of continued focus for growing the engagement of Australia’s first people in cricket.

OVERVIEW

Australian cricket understands that social exclusion and historical Government policy has contributed to the disengagement and under-representation in cricket of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

In recognising this, Australian cricket has made a concerted effort to address this legacy and increase the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Islander communities in cricket.

These strategic efforts span all areas of Australian cricket and spread across the country through the work of state and territory cricket associations and community partners. A summary of key progress and outcomes is provided below.

STRATEGY & STAFFING

Cricket Australia appointed a Senior Manager for Community Engagement and an Indigenous Cricket Officer to oversee the development and implementation of a revised National Indigenous Cricket Strategy in 2013.

The National Indigenous Cricket Strategy was developed in consultation with the National Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committee, state and territory cricket associations and other key stakeholders. The strategy was evaluated by a third party to verify that it was in line with industry best practice.

The establishment of this clear strategic plan has enabled Australian cricket to make substantial progress in terms of growing grassroots participation in the game and engaging Indigenous Australians.

The development of an inaugural Australian Cricket Reconciliation Action Plan reflects further affirmative strategic action.
FUNDING

Cricket Australia has invested more funds to increase the involvement of Indigenous Australians in cricket, including:

- Funding of the National Indigenous Cricket Championships, Imparja Cup and participation programs nationwide.
- The funding of the aforementioned Senior Manager for Community Engagement and Indigenous Cricket Officer at Cricket Australia.
- Commissioning the project with The Australian National University to undertake research into Indigenous Cricket.
- Cricket Australia’s partnership with the Clontarf Foundation, which uses sport as a vehicle to deliver health, education, training and employment opportunities for indigenous Australians.

To further support Australian Cricket’s growth aspirations and strategic initiatives, Cricket Australia has recently developed a financial model and strategic funding pool that supports initiatives of strategic importance, such as Indigenous cricket programs.

The recent Board support for strategic funding of the Clontarf Partnership is a good example of how the strategic funding pool is being and will continue to be used to support initiatives in this space.

Further, under Australian Cricket’s minimum guarantee each state and territory will receive funding to help support local Indigenous cricket initiatives and produce teams to compete in National Indigenous Cricket Championships.

Cricket Australia is also exploring interest from Government and corporate partners who equally share our vision of making cricket a sport for all Australians. The establishment of a foundation or fund to support grassroots participation and support Indigenous cricket scholarships is also being explored.

HIGH PERFORMANCE

An Indigenous cricket high performance program has been established which is aligned with Australian Cricket’s national player and coaching pathways and integrated with Cricket Australia’s high performance program, personnel and facilities.

Elements of the high performance program include:

- The establishment of National Indigenous Cricket Championships to facilitate interstate competition between State and Territory men’s and women’s high performance teams.
- The selection of a National Indigenous squad providing increased access to elite coaching, training and playing opportunities. For example the 2015 National Indigenous Squad spent two weeks training and playing at the Bupa National Cricket Centre. Coached by Jeff Cook, Greg Shipperd and James Hopes, the squad played matches against the Commonwealth Bank Southern Stars and the National Performance Squad (NPS);
- Previous National Indigenous Squads have toured India and have played in a quad-series against ICC affiliate member national teams.

Other highlights include:

- Ten KFC T20 BBL rookie contracts in the past two seasons.
- Josh Lalor (NSW), Dan Christian (VIC) and Ryan Lees (TAS) selected for their respective states for the Matador BBQ One-Day Cup 2015
- Jonte Pattison (NSW) selected in the National Performance Squad and Australian under-19s.
- Ashleigh Gardner (NSW) selected as a member of the Commonwealth Bank Shooting Stars.
- Nathan Price (ACT/NSW) and Michael Bailey (WA) playing Futures League.
- Brendan Smith (NSW) and Ayden McGregor-Baptista (SA) captaining their states at the national under-17s championships.
HIGH PERFORMANCE (CONTINUED)

- Two annual scholarships for female Indigenous cricketers, providing the opportunity to train at the BUPA National Cricket Centre under the guidance of Cricket Australia’s high performance staff and national coaches.
- Expansion to four state and territory women’s teams competing at the National Indigenous Cricket Championships (formerly the state and territory division of the Imparja Cup), with the aim to grow this to six teams and create a National Female Indigenous Squad by 2017.

PARTICIPATION

Increasing participation — players, administrators, coaches and volunteers — at the grassroots is the foundation of increasing Indigenous engagement in cricket.

Indigenous Australian participation reached 26,472 in 2014-15 — 2.25% of overall cricket participation and a 300% increase year on year.

This figure is the result of targeted programs delivered by state and territory cricket associations across Australia.

The 2015 participation figures include a record 520 participants at the 2015 Imparja Cup and 3000 Indigenous boys playing cricket via Cricket Australia’s partnership with the Clontarf Foundation.

Cricket Australia is also in the process of finalising a parallel partnership with the STARS Foundation, which will see cricket played in the organisation’s Secondary Girls Academies in the Northern Territory. 850 students will be involved in the program initially, with an expected increase once STARS expands within the NT and across Australia.

GOVERNANCE

The direction of Indigenous Cricket has been guided by the National Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committee (NICAC) and State and Territory Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committees (ICAC).

Australian Cricket recognises the significant contribution that National Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committee and Indigenous Cricket Advisory Committee members have made, and continue to make, to Indigenous Cricket. The work of these bodies has strengthened relationships with Indigenous communities and contributed meaningfully to the growth of Indigenous cricket.

Further, Cricket Australia views the presence of a Cricket Australia Director as NICAC Co-chair as a contributor to the advancement of Indigenous engagement and ensured it of a presence in Board-level discussion, including the establishment of the National Indigenous Cricket Strategy and Australian Cricket Reconciliation Action Plan.

A NICAC endorsed governance review of Indigenous cricket was instigated and a number of recommendations are currently being considered by NICAC.

MEDIA

Indigenous cricket has the specialised support of Cricket Australia’s Communications team and a dedicated media strategy.

This support includes a dedicated media unit at the Imparja Cup, which comprises two videographers, a Getty photographer and two communications staff members.

In 2015, media coverage promoting the Imparja Cup was independently valued at $4.2 million, up from $733,000 in 2013.

Increased share of voice and media coverage across, Koori Mail, NITV, CA Digital and mainstream media outlets provides year-round support for Indigenous cricket programs.
HISTORICAL RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS CRICKET

As well as its ongoing work to engage Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, CA is focused on maintaining the deep history that Indigenous Australians share with cricket.

In particular, the All-Aboriginal cricket team that toured the UK in 1868 – and played at the MCG before their departure – holds a significant place in cricket’s history.

More than ten years ago CA formally recognised the 1868 All-aboriginal team at the MCG, and the team has subsequently been recognised by The Australian Sports Hall of Fame.

The impending 150th anniversary of the 1868 tour is a significant milestone and one that CA will mark fittingly as part of its ongoing Indigenous cricket programs.

The fact that the first Australian sports team to tour outside Australia’s borders was an All-Aboriginal cricket team is remarkable and it is a legacy that Australian cricket has a duty to maintain.

CONCLUSION

While Indigenous cricket has progressed considerably in recent times, Australian cricket recognises that significant work needs to be done to grow participation substantially and ensure the ongoing engagement of Indigenous Australians. This will require a continued investment in people and programs, and refinement of our strategic plans to ensure Australian cricket meets the needs of Indigenous Australians.

To do this, Australian cricket must continue to consult and collaborate with Indigenous communities and stakeholders at a local and national level. The For the Love of The Game report provides a comprehensive assessment of the thoughts and attitudes of Indigenous Australians involved in the game at all levels.

Once again Cricket Australia would like to thank the Australian National University, Professor Mick Dodson and Dr Bill Fogarty, and all other people and parties that contributed to this Indigenous cricket study.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and all of our stakeholders and partners to achieve our vision of being Australia’s favourite sport and a sport for all Australians.

Yours Sincerely,

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