

Managing sport in drought-new stakeholders and new governance issues: A case study.

Pamm Kellett, Deakin University

Paul Turner, Deakin University

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Globally, almost every nation is facing some form of water crisis (World Commission on Water 2000). In Australia, the sport and recreation industry is one of the highest consumers of water. Other high water consuming industries (such as agriculture and farming) have been forced to adhere to strict managerial and governance reform due to the water crisis, yet in the sport and recreation industry, such changes are yet to be implemented and fully realised across the sector.

This research examines the impacts of drought and sustainable water management for sport and recreation. Specifically, it provides a case study of sport and recreation provision in a municipality that has already undergone considerable reform due to long-term drought. Sport and recreation use water for purposes such as irrigation of playing fields/pitches, filling swimming pools, stadium amenities and facilities, kitchens, maintenance and cleaning, and clubhouse amenities.

For sports that are heavy users of water for the maintenance of playing fields (such as soccer, Australian Rules football, rugby league, rugby union, grass and clay tennis courts to name a few) the impacts of drought and water restrictions have been severe. Some sports have reported an increase in the risk of injury to participants because of the condition of un-watered playing fields (Sport and Recreation Victoria 2007). Others have been forced to delay or shorten their seasons (Sleeman 2007), or worse still, cancel training and organised competition completely (Connolly and Bell 2007). While the impact of water restrictions has been profound on most sports, there are some sports that are not heavy water users and the impact of drought and water restrictions has been minimal. This problem creates issues and apparent inequities raising the need to further examine water consumption in sport and recreation. The potential outcome that arises is that the future of those sports that cannot conduct their competitions may be disadvantaged, while other sports that do not have such problems may be able to flourish.

Water, and those who control the supply of it, then defines which sports are able to flourish and sustain sport development pathways, compared to those whose survival may be in jeopardy. This research explores the stakeholder management and governance issues that have resulted for sport and recreation in the City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) located in Victoria, Australia--a region in long-term water crisis. The supply of sport and recreation facilities in the CoGG (like most municipalities in Australia) is largely the responsibility of the municipal council. The corporation responsible for the supply of water to the municipality is Barwon Water.

Although other sport and recreation facilities exist in the CoGG, the municipal council of CoGG owns and maintains over 120 sporting ovals (including the stadium used by its professional Australian Football League (AFL) team, the Cats), six swimming pools, and three golf courses. The CoGG host their professional AFL team, a range of local, national and international sport events, and provide a wide range of sport and recreation facilities for the community residents.

Eight interviews were conducted in total. Interviews were conducted with representatives from CoGG municipal council (who are responsible for the delivery of sport and recreation services and facilities in Geelong), and representatives from Barwon Water (who are responsible for the ongoing provision and maintenance of sport and recreation services and facilities) through the provision of water. Results show that the ten highest users of water in the municipality are sport and recreation facilities--which between them use almost one-third of the city's total water consumption (City of Greater Geelong 2006).

The municipal council is under considerable pressure to find ways to continue to provide sport and recreation opportunities for community members, as well as professional athletes and teams who use these facilities despite water restrictions. After all, these facilities provide benefit to spectators and participants, as well as businesses that rely on visitors to Geelong for sport and recreation events.

Due to such pressures, from 2007, the CoGG and Barwon Water agreed to provide the sport and recreation sector with water allocations rather than to be denied of all water under the water restriction regimes in place in the municipality. During 2007 summer sport season, this allowed the CoGG to keep 16 of its 120 sporting ovals open for participation through allocating all available water to these fields in order to keep them safe and playable. However, CoGG and Barwon Water were required to devise a rating scale to determine which sports (and sport facilities) were to share the allocated water, and which were not. These decisions also had knock on effects through sports. In order to ensure the safety of the playing surfaces, the CoGG and Barwon Water also restricted use of fields to competition only, therefore sport participants were forced to train on local beaches

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and other parkland areas-transferring issues of safety and public liability to other locations and facilities in the community. Further, it was reported that scheduling of competition seasons and individual matches; as well as the allocation of "home ground" gate receipts and concessions profits were required to be governed by the CoGG and Barwon Water as the competing sports were unable to agree. Perhaps more importantly, the rating scale developed for water allocation also resulted in some sports being rated as ineligible for water and as a result were unable to stage their entire competitions.

Clearly, the water allocation rating scale, and approach taken in this municipality to the continued delivery of sport and recreation has provided a workable solution. However, this study also signals that new stakeholders have entered the arena for the governance of sport. Governance structures in sport and recreation are being impacted as a result of the water crisis.

Those making decisions about which sport and recreation activities and/or facilities will be assisted with water resources are being made by local councils and water corporations. Sport managers are being required to understand existing areas of knowledge (such as turf management) in different ways, to gain knowledge in new areas (such as sustainable water management), and to lobby new stakeholder groups (such as water corporations) in order to secure their futures. The continued existence of some sports is no longer in the hands of governing bodies, but in the hands of local councils, and water corporations.

Clearly, any of the solutions implemented as discussed above, require multiple stakeholders to interact, and to reach agreement in order to assist in sustainable management of water in sport and recreation. In this sense, the management of water in sport (and all other industries) is more than a rational decision about policy, legislation, restrictions and resource allocations. It is a social and political process requiring scholarly attention for practical solutions.