

**VICTORIA UNIVERSITY**

# **Evaluation of Gender Inclusion Strategy and Practices**

**Prepared for:  
Wyndham Basketball Association**

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## 1.1 Aims and Scope

Wyndham Basketball Association (WBA) approached Victoria University (VU) in 2019 to seek assistance in improving the participation of girls and women in the Domestic and Representative competitions that it presides over.

The aim of this project was to investigate the current state of play at WBA and to present a summary of the major issues facing continued increases in girls and women's participation and recommend further actions to increase participation for girls and women.

The design of the project was qualitative and grounded in previous research into the social and cultural barriers inhibiting girls and women from full participation in sport.

The methods employed in this project included conducting field work, and critically examining participation and competition data. Engagement with various stake holders was a central focus of the research design and focus groups were conducted with domestic coaches, representative coaches, female representative players and female referees. The aim of these focus groups was to understand stakeholder perspectives on:

- Why there is a gender imbalance in playing, coaching and refereeing at WBA and affiliated clubs
- Potential barriers that exist for continued participation

## 1.2 Key Findings

In our analysis of the current state of play at WBA we note that WBA have made positive efforts to increase the participation of girls and women in basketball, however our analysis reveals several areas for improvement regarding:

- Lack of targets and agenda setting targets for participation of girls and women
- Competition structure
- Pathways
- Coaching

- Normalised hostile and aggressive culture

### 1.3 Recommendations

The proposed recommendations have been developed through thematic analysis of the findings from the commissioned research and have been guided by international literature on gender inclusion on sport.

- Set clear participation targets (ratio) for girls and women by 2025
- Establish that reporting on targets becomes a standing item on the agenda of all WBA meetings
- Develop policies and practices to reduce the levels of hostility and aggression that are apparent at all levels of the game at WBA, including zero tolerance for referee abuse
- Develop competition structures that overcome the talent differentials between purely domestic and representative players
- Provide specific women only coaching courses
- Ensure that the WBA website and social media communicates content that is 50/50
- Build a community of practice model between Domestic clubs to harness collective problem solving and develop an inclusive and supportive sporting culture
- Conduct active research program with Domestic clubs and coaches to enhance their capacity to ensure change occurs and targets are met

## 2. BACKGROUND AND METHODS

### 2.1 The need for change: sport as a gendered institution

Gender inequality and discrimination is not just a problem confined to basketball – these are broader problems that have been well researched in other sporting contexts in Australia and abroad. The relevant literature surrounding gender inequality and discrimination in sport falls into two categories: participation and leadership. This body of literature has informed the research design, analysis of findings, and shaped the recommendations for gender inclusion for WBA. Specifically:

- Numerous studies have identified distinct barriers females face in joining sports clubs. Barriers for girls and young women include: Lack of time, self-efficacy, attitude, enjoyment, concerns about body shape and weight management, and pressure to conform to gendered ideals of beauty (Coakley & White, 1992; Coleman, Cox, & Roker, 2007; Craike et al., 2006; Dwyer et al., 2006; Eime, et al. 2013; James, & Embrey, 2002; Scheerder et al., 2006)
- Organised competitive sport in Australia remains gendered in its structure and culture. Sport competitions are predominantly segregated on the basis of sex, and dominant sports continue to celebrate and actively encourage hyper-masculinity by normalising aggressive practices, and through valuing muscularity (Anderson 2009b; Hickey 2008). Sport is also still male-dominated in its organisation and management.
- Sport exists within a broader socio-cultural context, which values boys and men over girls and women. This gendered structure and culture has significant effects for participation patterns of females. These factors are sometimes obvious, yet are often implicit, subtle and concealed, and therefore are difficult to identify and transform (Elling & Claringbould 2005). Such challenges need to be kept in mind in any research or action plan directed toward growing girls' and women's participation in sport and recreation.

### 2.2 Research methods

A qualitative design was utilised for this project (Bryman, 2012). The research was conducted using three data sources (participation and competition data; observations and focus groups) which produced a rich data-set. This research

design provides deep insights of fewer respondents (compared to say, a survey) which are then analysed to reveal the underlying factors or patterns. Key findings were revealed through thematic analysis. Following this analysis, recommendations were produced after considering the key findings alongside the literature on gender (in)equality and discrimination in sport.

### **Analysis of competition records**

The records for registered domestic junior and senior teams were examined for the period of 2014 – 2019 for both Summer and Winter Seasons. The records of Representative teams from Under 12 to Under 21 were measured across the period of 2017-2020. Referee data drew on the period of 2017 – 2020. In each case the number of female and male teams were compared and used to identify a baseline participation based on gender and also to trace any changes to the ratios of female/male teams.

### **Observations of finals day**

To get a sense of the ‘action’ of competition at Eagle Stadium fieldnotes were compiled during the 2019 Winter domestic Grand Final day. These fieldnotes aimed to capture the general atmosphere of the day and were coded to measure the interactions between players, players and coaches, players and referees, coaches and referees, and spectators in general. A second observation day was planned for the finals of the Summer competition in 2020, however this could not happen due to COVID-19.

### **Focus Groups**

WBA staff recruited female domestic coaches, female referees, female representative players, and male and female representative coaches to be part of focus groups which aimed at gaining insight into reasons for gender imbalances, experiences of playing, coaching or refereeing, and strategies and solutions to potential barriers to female participation that were identified. In total there were two focus groups for both domestic and representative coaches, and 1 each for representative players and referees.

All the focus groups were conducted at Eagle stadium and ranged from 60-90 minutes in duration. All followed a similar format, starting with a general question asking for explanations about the gender disparity in participation and building on these responses to investigate participant’s experiences of playing, coaching or refereeing basketball. The final part of the focus group asked for participants to suggest strategies or ideas about how WBA could be more inclusive for women and girls. The focus groups were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were then coded based on the themes that

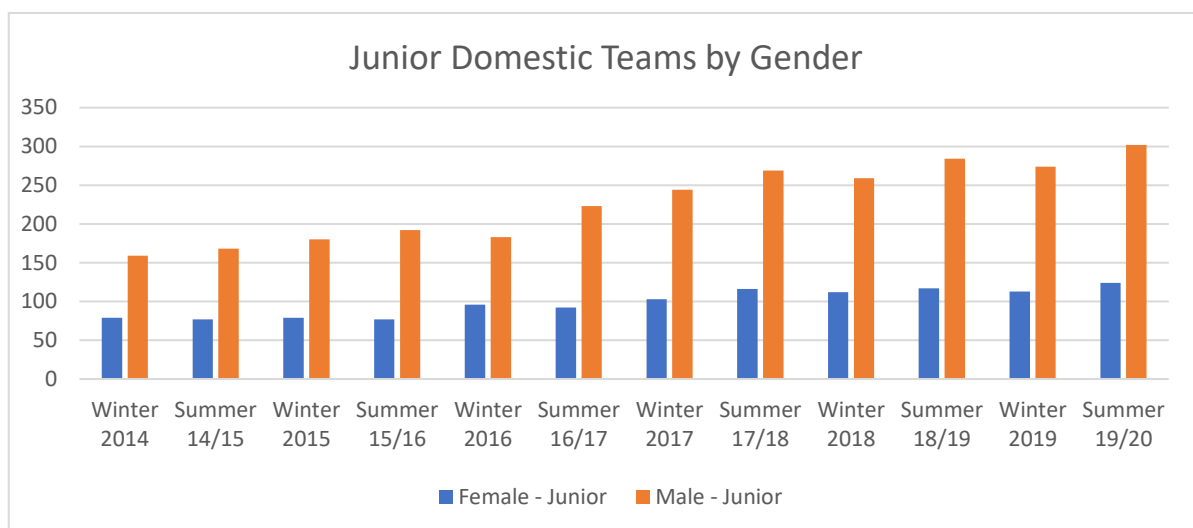
emerged from open ended questions. The focus groups produced just under 15,000 words of transcription data.

## 3. FINDINGS

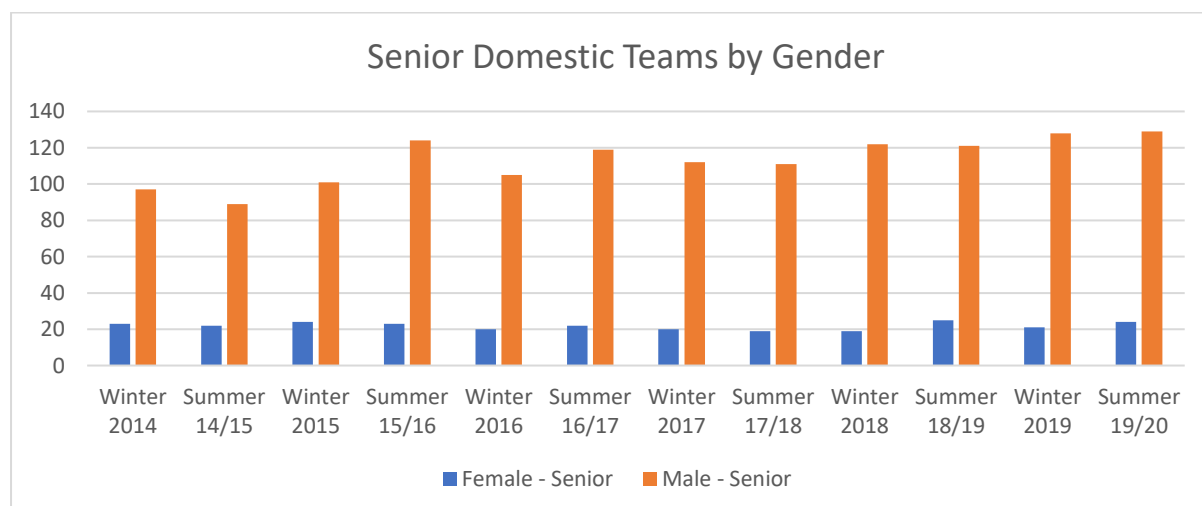
### 3.1 Gender breakdown

#### Domestic Numbers 2014-2020

Although the number of girls' teams has increased over time, as a percentage of the overall number of teams the percentage of girls' teams has decreased from 33% in Winter 2014 to 29% in Summer 2019/2020.

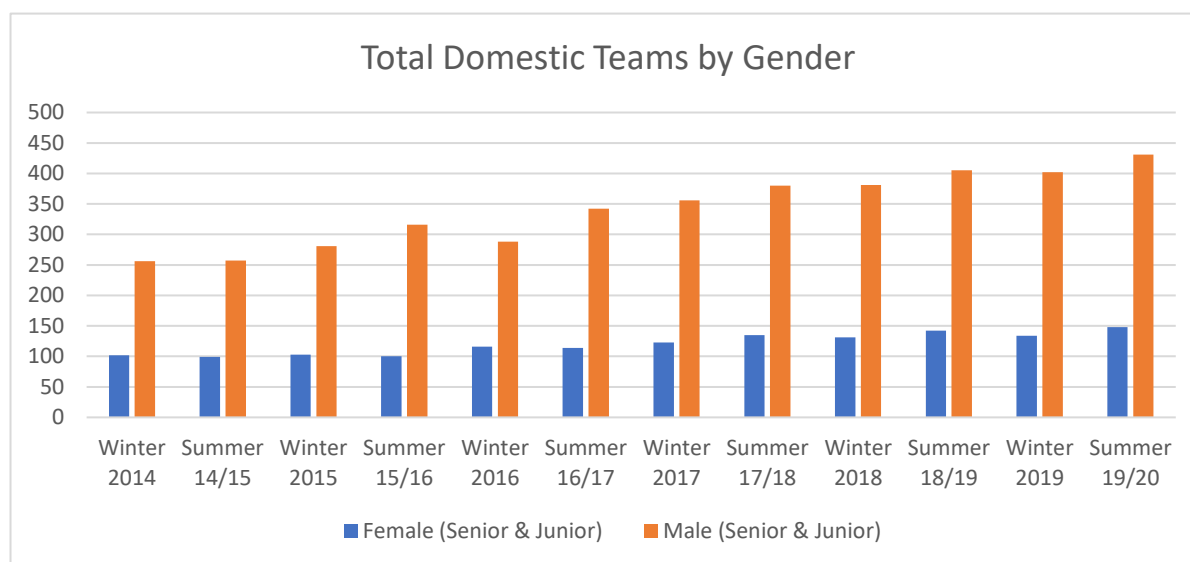


A similar trend is seen with senior domestic teams based on Gender. The percentage of women's teams has dropped from 19% in Winter 2014 to 15.5% in Summer 2019/2020. In this case the number of women's teams remains close to constant, however the number of men's teams increased.





Overall the total number of domestic teams compared between female and male also indicates a decrease in percentages from 28.5% in Winter 2014 to 25.5% in Summer 2019/2020. The highest percentage of female teams peaked at 36.5% in Winter 2016.

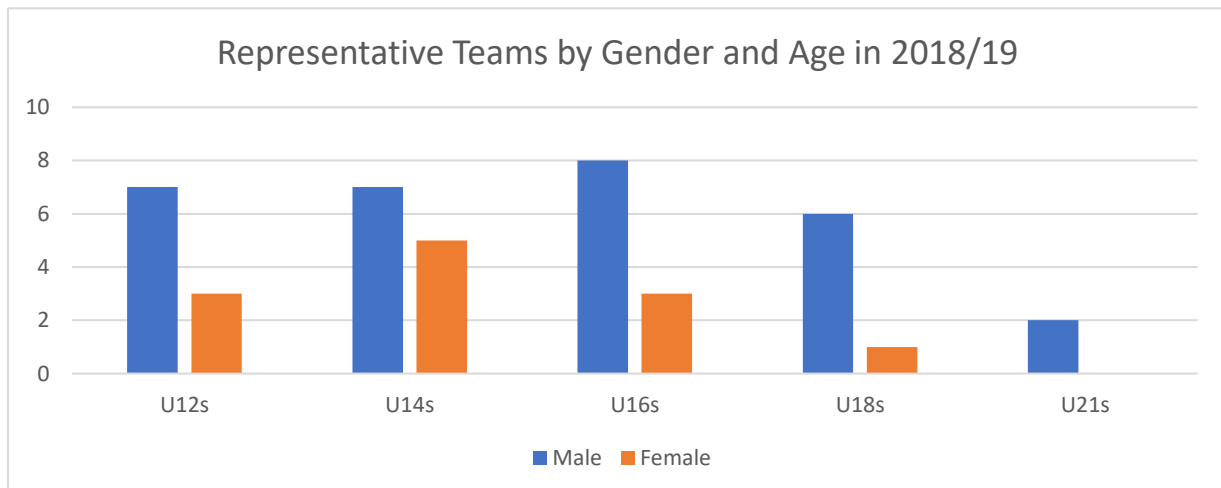
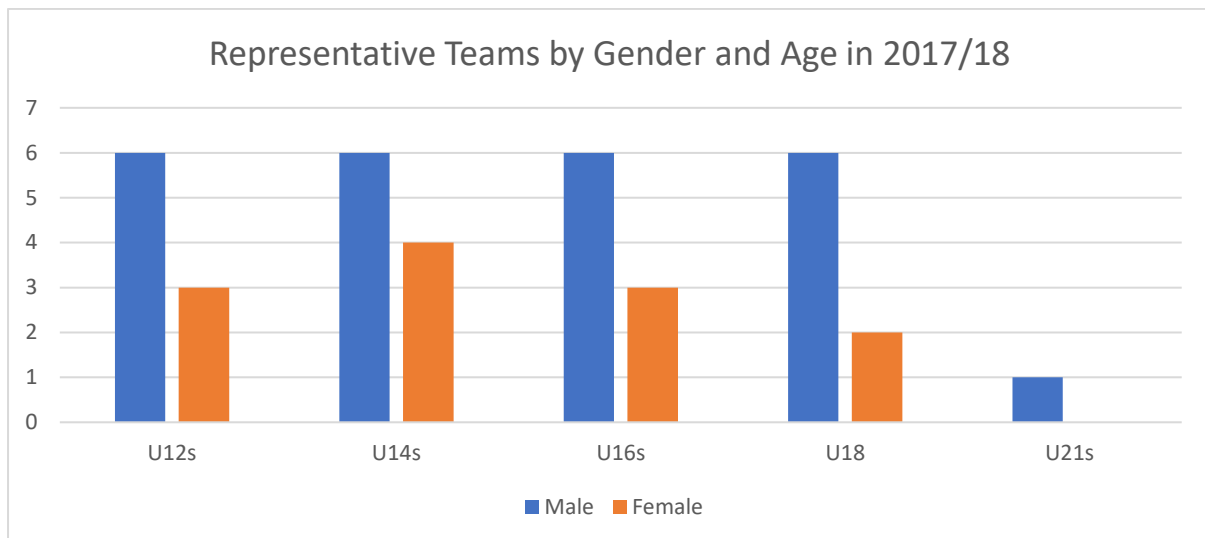


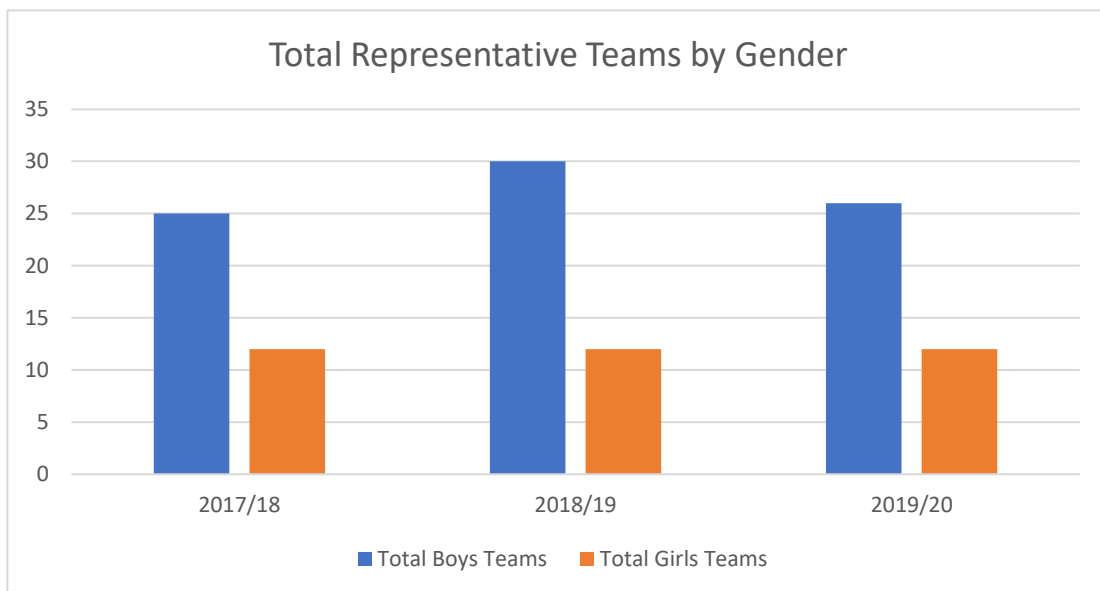
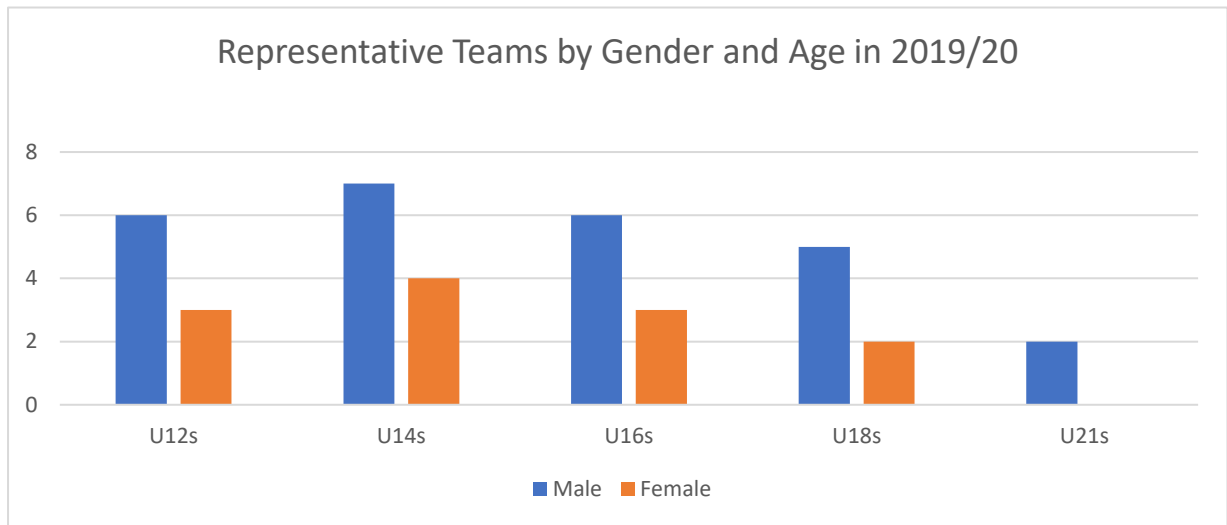
Overall the percentage of female participation at the domestic level has remained constant at between 25% and 30% between 2014 and 2020. A deeper analysis of the number of domestic teams indicates that the highest attrition of teams occurs between the U16 and U18 age groups. However, it is important to recognise that the number of teams does not automatically translate to number of actual players. During observations at Eagle Stadium it was noticeable that some clubs had very similar teams (the same girls) playing in multiple age groups (for example U14 and U16).

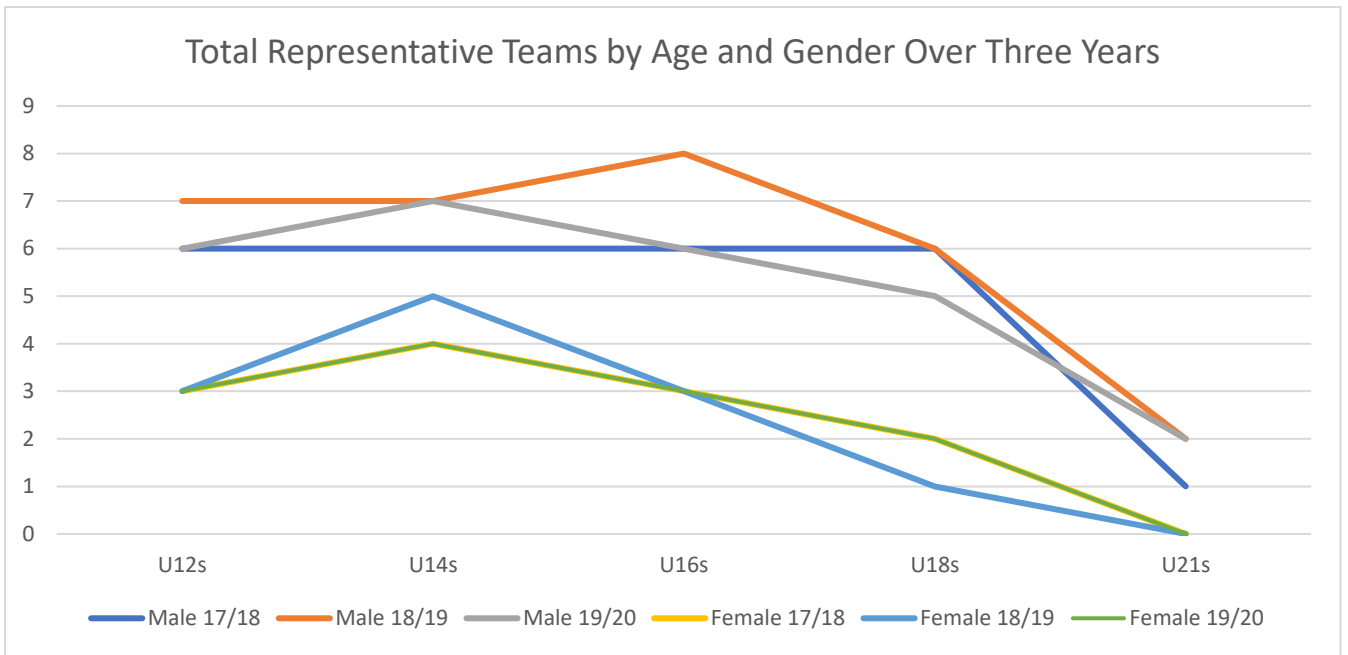
The process of 'double-dipping', that is playing talented girls in their own and the older age group, may contribute to the issue of attrition in teams between U16 and U18. In the domestic context double dipping would result in talented players developing at a far faster rate (because they are playing more and in the higher age group) than their same age peers who only play in one age group. When all players do get to the U16 age group the gap in ability becomes more pronounced - score blow outs, big differences in skill levels, feelings of inadequacy. As a result, the non-double dippers may drop out (because of not being up to standard) whilst some of the double dippers get burnt out or focus more on rep teams instead of domestic.

## Representative Numbers 2017-2020

Representative teams were assessed for the period of 2017-2020 or three seasons. The number of representative teams for girls remained constant at 12 in each of the three years which equates to approximately 30% of all rep teams. In keeping with the domestic data above, the peak participation in the rep program for girls was in the U14 age group where the girls made up between 36% to 40% of the teams. Noticeably this decreases from U16 upwards to the point where across the three years 100% of the U21 teams were male.

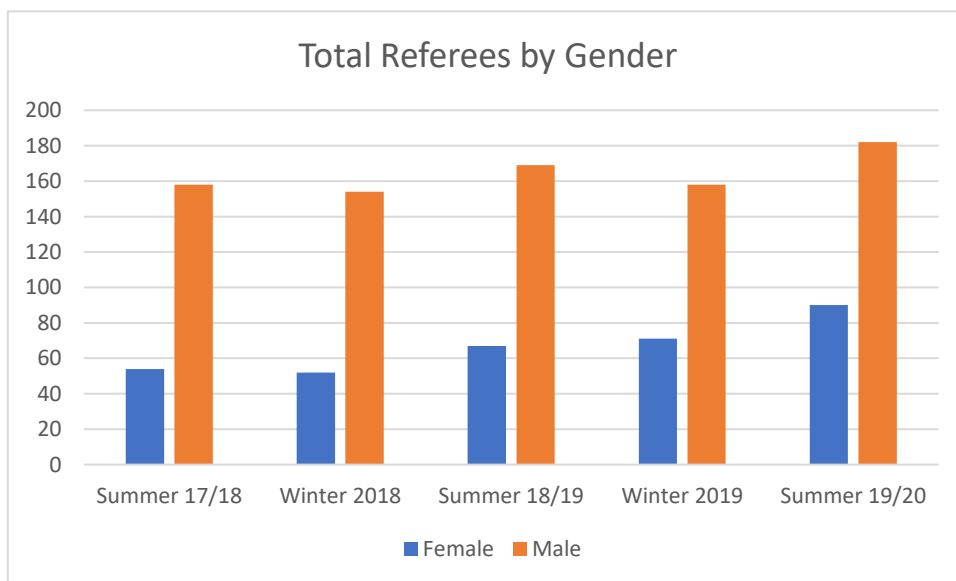






### Referees 2017 - 2020

Referees are obviously central to the operations of WBA and they provide a space where players can diversify their involvement in the game, gain employment, and develop ways of staying connected to basketball. Across the three year/five season period the percentage of female referees increased from 25% in Summer 2017/2018 to 33% in Summer 2019/2020.



Active Referees	Summer 17/18	Winter 2018	Summer 18/19	Winter 2019	Summer 19/20
Female	54	52	67	71	90
Male	158	154	169	158	182
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>272</b>

## 3.2 Issues

As the focus groups were framed around the perception of understanding and solving a problem (gender imbalance) responses would be expected that might represent negative experiences or ideas that are critical of current practices and organisation at WBA. Nevertheless, participants did mention several positive aspects possibly captured best by the following statement from a representative player:

*Recently it's a lot better since I've been here. Well I was here four years ago, terrible culture and I left and I came back and it's so much better.*

The key themes that emerged relating to reasons for imbalance in participation fell into the following themes:

- Gender norms
- Competition structures
- Pathways
- Coaching
- Hostile cultures

These themes are presented below and individual quotes that are indicative of the general consensus of the focus groups are included to bring out the 'voice' of the focus group participants.

### Gender Norms

Most participants drew on explanations for lower numbers of girls and women playing basketball, and especially in relation to drop out from U14 onward, that resonate with what would be considered gender stereotypes. These included conflicting priorities between playing basketball and employment, study, social life, cost, level of commitment, self-consciousness, and competition. For example:

- *I think most of the girls left then because the focus at the time was to actually go get a job.*
- *we were playing in the basketball six or seven days a week.*
- *I've had two drop out because school has to take priority.*

- *one that I had drop out was due to financial commitment.*
- *especially with squad basketball, is there's too much travelling VJBL basketball.*
- *the things that they find embarrassing or uncomfortable are more towards like the body image or the you know being like aggressive.*
- *You see like the younger boys giving it more of a go whereas the girls are like, oh, and it kind of goes through the whole program, I feel. It's like from Under 12's, Under 18's, the girls are like, oh I don't want to look silly, or I don't want to look like I'm trying too hard, or I don't want to look, like step on anyone's toes. Whereas the boys are like, whatever I'm just going to and shoot basketball because I play NBA.*

## Competition Structure

This theme produced the greatest diversity in responses particularly in relation to what the focus of competition should be. It identifies the tension between playing for fun versus playing to be the best, or in other words too competitive versus too social. The result of this tension means that some girls find themselves in the wrong structure to meet their needs. This seems to be particularly apparent from U12 up and provides more validity to the findings from the competition data in section 4.2 and 4.3. Once winning becomes more important and the differences in skill level between 'double dippers' and domestic only players becomes apparent the following issues arise:

- *Every second week, you're versing the same team. It kind of doesn't get fun anymore because either you get smashed by them, or you smash them. (Referee)*
- *Where all your high level basketball starts from, those kids are sitting on the bench doing nothing. So, why would they want to sit on the bench doing nothing in a basketball game when they could go and play netball or go and play footy or something like that. (Rep Coach)*
- *The biggest contributor for girls especially dropping out of the, of the under sixteen age group, is that if girls aren't exposed to the benefit of competing, and the joys of working hard and finding success in that and the focus is more on purely the relationship base, you know, the ability to go and have social interactions and stuff, (Rep coach)*
- *I think basketball is their social outlet. And they actually come here to socialise rather than play sometimes. (Rep Coach)*
- *There's not as many teams on offer (as you get older). (Rep Player)*

## Pathways

Related to competition structure is the theme of pathways. Participants noted that they felt there was either a lack of pathways for players to follow as they moved through WBA or that these pathways and possibilities were not

communicated effectively. Pathways also included the opportunity for coaches to be better able to prepare their players for the 'step up' to higher levels.

- *It's top down and I think there's a very poor system because again, like, if you have a player that's, you know, good enough to, you know, play at high levels, we hold them back, like, we don't go and say, like, that's awesome, do as much of the high level stuff that you can and then we'll make adjustments in the lower levels to go and figure it out. (Rep Coach)*
- *the girls see no pathway and I think that's a thing that we're lacking here as an association ever since I was here, a pathway. (Rep Coach)*
- *our domestic level, the girls, you know, the girls sort of play to a certain level and then, I think, they get into the rep side of it themselves and they sort of get a little bit overwhelmed if it's their first time in rep, I just think that the coaching pathways need to improve for the girls. (Rep Coach)*

## Coaching

Coaching is a complex practice that requires knowledge of the game, an understanding of youth, and an ability to manage parents' expectations. There was a general consensus that: coaching girls was different to coaching boys, some coaches were ill-equipped to coach children, and developing clear and effective communication with parents was essential. For example:

- *I believe, the game is coached differently between guys and girls. The thing is that, girls' basketball, due to the fact that a lot of coaches have traditionally not seen it without the level of athleticism, means that the level of, that the players are developed to, is a lot less than their male counterparts. (Rep Coach)*
- *I don't think you can say as a coach that you can learn how to deal with the children. You can't. You have to learn about that child through experience and with the parent and communication and relationships (Dom Coach)*
- *I have a meeting with my team before we even step on the floor playing, at the beginning of every season. And I bring the parents in because like I said, we have new teams all the time and the girls and families change. (Dom coach)*

## Hostile Cultures

The final theme that came out of the focus groups was by far the most significant area. Almost every participant recounted stories of hostility in relation to girls' basketball and toward female referees. This hostility in many cases took the form

of verbal abuse or threat of physical violence. Due to the nature of Eagle stadium one doesn't have to be the direct target of hostility in order to experience it. What became clear from these responses is that a hostile culture directly impacts decisions to quit playing, coaching, and refereeing. The consistency of these responses also indicates that to some extent these aggressive behaviours are normalised in WBA competitions. Multiple examples have been included to capture the range of experiences that our participants had experienced.

- *Then he came, ran into my face, screamed at me again and I just walked away and I started crying... But like, that was like one of those moments where I was like, I froze and I just had no idea what to do. I was just scared. I've never had someone scream in my face like that before. (Referee)*
- *And then eventually, when half time came, from the sideline, he kept on screaming and screaming. That scared me, because he was tall, big. (Referee)*
- *I have seen kids drop out because, and coaches just drop out, saying I'm done with the drama, I can't handle it anymore. (Rep Coach)*
- *parents thought their kids was the best thing and just wanted to bully other kids. (Rep Coach)*
- *Like I've seen a rep coach continually over seasons treat his players in a way that's not acceptable and I think because he's a rep coach and he's kind of got that authority, all the parents sit by and let it happen but then you know, later on, they'll say, don't – god, you know my daughter is not playing if they get him again or my daughter's not doing this. So they're not strong enough to do anything about it then but that girl doesn't come back. You know, I've had three different parents from three different teams of girls say if my daughter got in that team again, she's not playing. (Rep Coach)*
- *I've never seen more bullying, more isolation, more comparison between, "I'm better than you and you're crap", in the girls. (Dom Coach)*
- *I had a mother slap me because her daughter didn't get enough court time. (Dom Coach)*
- *I think there's nothing worse than walking around on a Saturday and watching a male coach absolutely rip shreds off their team. (Rep Coach)*
- *Even me as a coach. I don't feel, as a coach who coaches at this level in domestic with girls, that it's a safe enough mental, emotional environment for them to want to stay here. (Dom Coach)*
- *I'm saying, he just sort of shook her, screaming at her. And I remember her coming off, "What the heck was that?" And parents see that and younger kids see it. If I had a little daughter and she saw that, "I'm not playing basketball". (Dom Coach)*
- *Unfortunately, sometimes it seems there's more negative with the competition than positive. (Dom Coach)*
- *I was taken out onto a court and had a hand put around my throat and all that I got was an apology and that was it. (Rep player)*



- *He's told it to my face and I was like 13 years old and he told me, that was a boring game, that was shit. I was like oh thanks, okay thanks for telling me. (Rep Player)*
- *I guess if you have like a soft skin I guess or don't take that well it could definitely affect you. Like you're called sluts, I've been called a slut, I was Under 14's. (Rep Player)*
- *there was this one coach who like abused them and made them lose their love for the game, would like call them fat. (Rep Player)*

### 3.3 Solutions

The focus groups' solutions reflected the themes of: Coach development, role modelling/mentors, recognition, and pathways/competition structures. Participants believed that WBA had already started moving in a positive direction regarding fixing some of the problems noted above. In particular the appointment of women into the positions of Coaching and Programs Coordinator and Basketball Development Officer were regarded positively. However, the general feeling was that WBA could do more to help improve the recruitment and retention of girls and women as players, coaches and referees.

#### Coach development

This theme revolved mostly around coach education and also included a need to have specific opportunities to develop female coaches more through the club. Most of the responses for this theme came from the various coaching focus groups, and there were noticeable differences in the perceived needs of representative coaches compared to domestic coaches.

- *as a male coach it would be nice if there was a programme or something that helped, you know, helped the male coach that is coaching girls, sort of, deal with that part for a better understanding of girls and that might actually help us a little bit with retention down the long run. (Rep coach)*
- *I also think that if we can generate that structure for female coaches that they've got something to lead to and inspire to as well. And look into manage and promote and support within, you'll then see player retention come of that as well. (Rep Coach)*
- *coaching boys for me is equally important that young men have a strong female role model other than just their mothers or their teachers that is in a different capacity. (rep Coach)*
- *but what'd be great is having maybe a handbook for new coaches that come in on things that might help you at a start-up coach. (Dom Coach)*
- *I suggested if you helped the coaches out with like a coach's bag and all the equipment and all that kind of stuff to make training better and to make the game better. Instead of like, it's not all about money, then*

*that's probably more accessible for them and to help them be better coaches and stuff too, you know. (Dom coach)*

### **Role Modelling/Mentors**

Building connections between older/more experienced players, coaches and referees and younger/inexperienced ones was consistently seen as something that was happening but that could be improved to ensure support and also give girls someone to look up to.

- *I think it has got to have that community feel and I think what you're were saying before is getting them around senior teams and making them feel a part of it. You know, having your 12 girls on the sideline high fiving the senior women as they go out and really that big community and then they can see I might be able to be her one day, you know? She's strong and when she's diving on that ball, they're watching her be strong and fight for that ball and it is okay for me to do that in my game. (Rep Coach)*
- *So like there's not much I guess exposure to the women's side in terms of like the professionalism in order for you to look up to someone. (Rep Player)*
- *We look up to the senior refs like Alison and Michelle and Chantelle and all that, because they've helped us deal with situations. So, we've learnt from them how to deal with the senior men, grumpy, annoying, mean people. (Referee)*
- *I feel like we just need that support between senior and junior referees. It's there, but it's not as strong as what it should be, compared to, like I think we have, I think it's 40% female referees. (Referee)*

### **Pathways/Recruitment**

The theme of pathways incorporated the promotion and retention of current domestic and representative players, and also the recruitment of new players. This included the recruitment of girls from culturally diverse backgrounds. A finding from other research into female participation in sport (and was also present in the focus groups) indicates that multiple sports are trying to attract the same talented athlete. What this means is that the same girls might be playing multiple sports and at some point chooses which sport to continue with. Research shows that girls and women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are underrepresented in sport participation numbers.

- *One of the things that I think the WBA were good at towards the end of last championship season was having the younger girls involved with the*

*youth development team and the championship women and that gave the girls in the rep the pathway ambition. (Rep Coach)*

- *WBA could market those games to the domestic girls' clubs and actually have, you know, some sort of relationship with them. (Rep Coach)*
- *Need to recruit from a broader cross-section of athletes (Rep Coach)*
- *Currently, our young girls, our under twelve girls who start when they're ten, they use the exact same basketball as our Olympians. It is ridiculous. (Rep Coach)*
- *where each player would be able to bring a friend to training and there'd be like a barbeque and all that type of stuff. (Rep Coach)*
- *I think you've got to look at the diversity as well. Our community. Lots of different cultures. So if we want girls in those cultures to play basketball, we have to show them role models of you know – so not just your standard Aussie girl playing, you know? (Rep Coach)*

## Recognition

The final set of suggestions involved better recognition of girls and women in the context of WBA and domestic clubs. This might involve advertising and marketing, financial remuneration, or simply forms of positive feedback. For example:

- *having a fives team and having our photo plastered up on the screen when we walk in the entryway, they were like what? They couldn't believe it. We're a fives team and it has a photo of us? That's – it is such a small thing but for them, it was like oh, wow. We actually matter. (Domestic Coach)*
- *I think for boys in Senior basketball there's a lot more money to be given to someone to say, hey okay we're going to pay you \$2 grand this season if you want to come and play for us. Which obviously depends on the player or whatever but then I might take a few night shifts off to play the game. Does that make sense? Whereas girls are like okay I'm not going to get any money why would I commit to this team (Rep Player)*
- *I can just tell you what I'm doing at the moment and the positive feedback that I've had from parents. Yes I keep it positive, I keep it fun, I change things up every week. Yes try not to keep it too competitive, try and work as a team and bonding and all that kind of stuff. (Dom Coach)*

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that a large proportion of the transcribed data revolved around hostile cultures, there were few recommendations regarding solutions to this issue. With the exception of some referees who thought that there should be tougher sanctions for players who 'cross the line' the absence of participant driven solutions is reflective of the normalisation of aggression and hostility at WBA and domestic clubs. It is undoubtedly impossible to improve retention of girls in the higher age groups if they experience forms of abuse, end in tears during games, or develop feelings of inferiority.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed recommendations have been developed through thematic analysis of the findings from the commissioned research and have been guided by international literature on gender inclusion on sport. Furthermore, in 2017, the Victorian State Government launched the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation to actively address gender inequality at every level of sport and recreation – including in organisations and clubs. The Office for Women in Sport and the accompanying strategy ‘Change our Game’ has been developed as a result of the Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation (2015). The 2015 inquiry sought to establish recommendations to boost female participation and leadership opportunities. Four themes emerged from this inquiry:

- Leadership, clear goals and measurement are the first necessary ingredients to create and support change
- Changes to traditional structures and ways of working are essential to developing new participation and leadership opportunities
- New ways of ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ need to be nurtured through education and training
- Visibility is important. Promotion of female sport and active recreation opportunities, pathways and role models – whether they focus on participation or leadership – provide an opportunity for inspiring and engaging more women and girls

The recommendations for WBA that have arisen through this research and which are presented below, are explicitly linked to, and build from, the themes from the 2015 Inquiry listed above.

We summarise the recommendations to WBA in three broad areas: **targets; competitions; culture.**

The following quote above is from a Domestic coach in a focus group and captures the essence of the recommendations to increase the participation of girls and women across all aspects of WBA:

*A lot of where the girls stay or not has to do with, one, the competition, two, the culture. So, they're not even competing against which sport is better, they're competing against which culture is better and where am I feeling best.*

Specifically it is recommended that WBA:

- Set clear participation targets (ratio) for girls and women by 2025
- Establish that reporting on targets becomes a standing item on the agenda of all WBA meetings
- Develop policies and practices to reduce the levels of hostility and aggression that are apparent at all levels of the game at WBA, including zero tolerance for referee abuse
- Develop competition structures that overcome the talent differentials between purely domestic and representative players
- Provide specific women only coaching courses
- Ensure that the WBA website and social media communicates content that is 50/50
- Build a community of practice model between Domestic clubs to harness collective problem solving and develop an inclusive and supportive sporting culture
- Conduct active research program with Domestic clubs and coaches to enhance their capacity to ensure change occurs and targets are met

## 5. REFERENCES

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