

**Independent Review of
Football Federation Australia Limited (“FFA”)
National Teams’ Management**

October 2019

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The idea that the success of national and professional teams in elite sport is crucial to the wellbeing of a sport overall is not new. The challenge is to constantly produce successful teams and satisfy multiple stakeholders simultaneously. Football in Australia has many of the typical constraints in solving for this challenge. It is evident to the Panel, however, that the views generously expressed by those stakeholders interviewed, and so underpinning this report, have the potential, if addressed, to make a material and positive difference to the governance, and hence the performance, of Football Federation of Australia (FFA) national teams.

The Board of the FFA determined to review the process by which national teams are managed using the termination of former Matildas Head Coach, Alen Stajcic, as a case study to focus the review. The review has resulted in recommendations centring on two key themes:

- Athlete centricity in national teams' management
- Strong governance to support procedural improvements to in turn support this athlete centricity.

The Panel believes the FFA has a unique opportunity to gain a competitive edge in international football by pivoting from a coach-centric to an athlete-centric approach in the management of its national teams. Australia cannot expect to compete with football superpowers on funding, participant numbers and proximity to international competition. This means that Football in Australia must be innovative in order to continue to enjoy success on the world stage. Opportunity for that innovation exists in the athlete welfare and development area.

The voice of the athlete must be central to any high-performance program. A sport that can sustain a rich dialogue with their elite and sub-elite athletes will be the better for it. The Panel has struggled to hear the voice of the athlete as we conducted this review. Athletes were wary to speak to us directly. Evidence is that their voice is not consistently listened to by administrators and those governing the sport.

This is particularly acute in the women's game. The irony of this is that the Matildas may today have the best chance of winning Australia's first ever football World Cup or Olympic medal. A move to an athlete-centric model has the potential to create huge dividends for the FFA. It is clearly an opportunity to build and grow the business in a crowded sports marketplace.

Stakeholders are clamouring for attention and, in endeavouring to gain control of the key decisions that guide the game, have relegated the athletes to the role of bit players. This is a dangerous path for Football in Australia and one which must be arrested as soon as possible. Clear principles combined with strong governance, generosity of approach and selflessness are needed.

Strong governance will be the key. The Board must accept accountability for the conduct and performance of the code of Football in Australia – this naturally includes the national teams.

Irrespective of whether the Board determines to work towards athlete centricity it must address the mismatch that exists between accountability, decision rights and financing/resourcing across Football in Australia. The difficulties of achieving this are acknowledged. The first step must be to address rigorously the basics of governance of national teams – board and committee charters, role descriptions for relevant executives, a comprehensive suite of policies, board processes to report and hindsight national teams. If these things can be made effective and efficient the Board may earn the right to address the mismatch in the sport more broadly.

Key in rigorously addressing these basics of national team governance will be to radically change and improve the flow of information to the Board on the topic.

The Panel has made a very long list of recommendations in an attempt to create a road map to good national teams' governance.

There is one matter from the Terms of Reference the Panel wishes to address directly. The Panel was asked to consider what processes give the Board comfort that Management recommendations are driven by full and frank disclosure of information and are not based on any personal bias or unsubstantiated claims? To consider this question we used the case study and allegations made in the media of a 'lesbian mafia'.

The Panel was unable to uncover any evidence supporting the existence of any formal 'lesbian mafia' or that the decision to terminate the Matildas head coach contract was driven by personal bias against Mr Stajcic or in pursuit of other agendas. Traditional media articles and social media ventilated the notion extensively and the Panel has not been able to find evidence that the FFA took any proportionate action to address the issue nor protect the individuals who were the target of this speculation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. Comments in Support of Recommendations

In the Panel's view the FFA board and senior management are responsible for the environment surrounding the national teams.

The FFA is at an important crossroads in its history. With a new CEO, governance model and Constitution and the impending separation of the Professional Football Leagues, FFA has an opportunity to re-invent itself in the 'post Lowy-era'. There is a need for action now to secure football's future in this country. This should start with a focus on shifting towards an athlete-centric mindset, defining a clear set of strategic priorities for national teams, and developing a clear philosophy and roadmap to empower the Women's game.

The Panel, along with many of those who provided their views, recognises the changes required will take a clear focus, strong leadership and significant time. To be successful, it is critical the stakeholders closest to the national teams are taken along the journey.

This review has been wide ranging and has required careful consideration and balance of different perspectives from those within FFA and external parties. The recommendations put forward are suggested based on the Panel's findings during the review, and should, if adopted fully by FFA Board, positively impact FFA as an organisation and, ultimately, the way Australia embraces football.

It should be noted that some of the recommendations set out in the following pages of this report are stipulated in FFA's recently amended Constitution. However, the Panel is unable to find sufficient evidence to indicate that the FFA has had a clear intention to fully enforce them to date hence addresses them explicitly.

2.2. Specific Recommendations

2.2.1. Philosophy and Roadmap for Women's Football

- Develop, communicate and implement a clear philosophy and pathway to establish equity for the Women's game. Report progress against this to the FFA Board.
- Implement the Congress Review Working Groups (July 2018) (FIFA CRWG) recommendation for "the full participation of women at all levels of football governance", thereby promoting gender balance among national team support staff (including and especially coaching staff) to ensure women are provided the appropriate (and equitable) support they need to progress and succeed in a national team environment.

- Conduct an immediate audit of pay and conditions across all staff of all national teams. Act to rectify any inequity in pay and conditions in roles that are like for like across all national teams.
- Work with the AIS and PFA to develop a holistic wellbeing and engagement framework that ensures the Matildas environment is adequately supported (players, support staff and coaches) in a fashion that is equitable to the Socceroos environment (see 5.2.2). The outcome of this process may include:
 - A clear statement of the value of an Athlete Wellbeing and Engagement (AWE) framework that is understood by FFA, PFA and the AIS
 - Clear reporting lines between the AIS funded AWE role, the FFA senior management team and Board
 - A single national referral network for athletes, support staff and coaches in the women's game.
- Recruit women's national team staff who have experience and understand the differences in the support requirements of female athletes (compared to their male counterparts)⁷. Develop clear guidelines to ensure that they are paid equitably to men's national team staff. Work with the AIS to develop a more comprehensive understanding of these differences as research in this space continues to evolve. Provide ongoing education to existing staff in the same matters to build understanding and capability.
- Make a public commitment to supporting the growth of women's football. If future CEOs are male, they should be strongly encouraged to join the Male Champions of Change and continue to elevate gender equality as an issue of national and international importance. If female, future CEOs should be strongly encouraged to act as a special adviser to the Male Champions of Change.

2.2.2. National Team Management

- Recruit national team coaches and support staff in line with FFA's purpose and values to promote consistency across the corporate and national team environments. For national team coach roles, design a formal recruitment panel process to support this and use it for every role.
- Review the position description for the senior team Men's and Women's Head Coach roles to ensure that there is clear accountability in terms of who they report to for both the technical and non-technical aspects of their roles.
- Design and implement a standardised 'performance support' model, in consultation with players and the PFA, that outlines the mandatory support services available to national teams (Men's, Women's, Youth and Disability). Ensure equity of model across team in terms of number of staff, remuneration relativities and availability of support (e.g. access to services).

⁷ de Haan & Sotiriadou (2016)

- Review the position description for the Head of High Performance (or equivalent) role to:
 - Ensure responsibilities are equally balanced between technical and administrative duties
 - Establish clear accountability for information in relation to national teams to be either acted on, or passed up the line where necessary
 - Establish a reporting mechanism to the Board that ensures the all aspects of the national teams – not just results – are visible to, and regularly considered by the Board.
- Implement a KPI for the FFA CEO and Head of High Performance to reflect a positive working relationship with the PFA and ensure the relationship is managed at an appropriate level of seniority (as well as operationally).
- Work with the AIS to design a wellbeing survey tool for annual administration and benchmarking for national teams, with oversight by the Football Development Committee. Include KPIs related to player welfare in the monthly board report and quarterly detailed board report on national team matters.
- Develop and implement a national teams “Management Manual” with clear guidelines for the players (e.g. player relationships) and support staff; and continuously refine it following tournament reviews. The manual should include:
 - Clear guidelines for support staff managing intra-team/squad player relationships
 - A code of conduct for players and support staff, including guidelines around the consumption of alcohol during assembly
 - Protocols for dealing with emergencies and/or family matters during assembly.

2.2.3 National Team Leadership

- Implement Player Leadership Groups (PLG) for all national teams (where they don’t exist today), in consultation with the Head Coach and Head of High Performance and develop uniform procedures for establishing, developing the capabilities of and reviewing the performance of the PLGs. Involve Football Coaches Australia in the process to reinforce leading practice in this area. The PLG should be tasked with (as a starting point):
 - Developing expected team behaviours and appropriate accountabilities
 - Supporting and inducting junior players as part of the national team set up
 - Escalating issues / concerns to the Head Coach and above if necessary
 - Enforcing the protocols outlined in the National Team Management Manual
 - Resolving issues in the team environment, where appropriate, within the duty of care of FFA
 - Working with the Head Coach to establish appropriate team policy around rooming, especially with regard to intra-team relationships.
- Mandate the FFA Board to ratify the formal leadership selections within national teams (e.g. Captain/Vice Captain, PLG).
- Develop and implement a ‘future leaders’ strategy, where players who display leadership qualities are identified at the sub-elite level. Ensure these players undertake formal leadership training in

parallel to their football training / skill development to adequately prepare them to take on leadership positions in the national teams. (The Panel notes a pilot is currently underway with the Junior Socceroos aligned to this recommendation).

- Capture longitudinal data to highlight progress against KPIs over time (e.g. performance results, wellbeing survey results) and use these tools as input to endorse appointments within the playing group (e.g. Captain/Vice Captain, PLG).

2.2.4. Feedback Mechanisms

- Develop, implement and communicate an easily understood and robust player complaints procedure, leveraging the results of Sport Integrity Australia’s review of the National Member Protection Policy (NMPP). The design should be completed in consultation with the players and the Professional Footballers Australia (PFA) and should allow for concerns and complaints of a serious nature to be raised and dealt with before they cause harm.
- Develop and implement a Whistleblower Policy with particular emphasis on national teams’ staff and players.⁸
- Develop and implement clear multi-channel feedback (informal and formal) pathways to ensure players, support staff and coaches are able to raise concerns. The Head of National Performance should be accountable to address any issues that arise.
- Educate players on the options available to them to provide feedback and escalate issues, in consultation with the AIS and PFA. The Panel notes the ‘inflight safety video’ currently in development and recommends consideration of the wider implementation of this initiative once tested.

2.2.5. FFA Board Composition

- Implement the Congress Review Working Groups (July 2018) recommendation for a 40/40/20 (40% women, 40% men and 20% discretionary) split in Board membership to promote equity for the Women’s game.
- Increase FFA Board membership to the maximum allowable nine people, and actively seek to maintain the number of members at nine to ensure full represented democracy.

⁸ Refer to Recommendation 3.3 of the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations for suggestions for content to include in a whistleblowers policy: <https://www.asx.com.au/documents/asx-compliance/cgc-principles-and-recommendations-fourth-edn.pdf>

- Ensure Board Members have Australian Institute of Company Directors (or similar) qualifications and:
 - Always represent a diverse set of stakeholders
 - Include persons familiar with high performance sport environments.
- Engage Sport Australia to review the FFA Constitution as it relates to the appointment of interim directors. Implement constitutional changes that allow interim directors to be appointed to ensure full represented democracy can take place when directors stand down or are absent for an extended period.

2.2.6. FFA Board Charter and Reporting

- Define the respective roles, responsibilities and authorities of the Board and senior management team (both individually and collectively) in setting the direction for national teams and coaches. This should include clarifying who reports to the Board on national team matters.
- Consider formalising a single point of accountability to the CEO for national team conduct and performance (i.e. a new role). This role would be accountable for liaising with the Head of High Performance, National Technical Director and Head Coach to aggregate all football matters and feed information directly to the CEO and Board.
- Develop a standardised reporting template and process that provides the Board with relevant information to make decisions and ensures issues and risks can be monitored over time. This should also include an evaluation of the proposed policies, practices or recommendations in line with FFA's purpose and values, and assessment of how key stakeholders are likely to be affected.
- Task senior management to report on national team matters and progress against National Team KPIs each month. The specific matters included in the monthly report should be developed in line with national teams' strategic planning cycles (e.g. FIFA World Cups, Olympics).
- Provide a detailed National Teams Report to the Board each quarter that includes a breakdown of national team performance (encompassing coach, player and support staff performance and feedback), together with assessments of team environments and player wellbeing. This report should be presented in person by the aforementioned role responsible for reporting on national team matters.

2.2.7. FFA Board Performance

- Define and implement a transparent onboarding process for new Directors that ensures they are given the appropriate support to “get up to speed” quickly on relevant governance procedures and protocols (e.g. communication within and external to the Board).
- Define a clear code of conduct for the Board and senior management team that is cross-referenced with FFA’s declared purpose and values. Any clear, material breaches of this code of conduct should result in the immediate standing down of the Director or senior management team member, prior to a formal investigation.⁹
- Conduct an independent review of Board performance every three years and share the results of that review with all relevant stakeholders.
- Deliver a ‘refresher course’ to incumbent Directors to ensure they are ‘up-to-date’ on key governance procedures / protocols.¹⁰

2.2.8. Transitioning More Effectively into the New System

- Review the plan for how FFA will transition to the new system of governance mandated by the FIFA CRWG. Consider the need for flexibility in how FFA operates within this new system over the interim period and, where possible, rationalise the system once the new FFA organisational structure is in place.
- Review the overall remit of the Board and rationalise the number of committees, where possible. Reconstitute the remaining committees as Advisory Committees to be managed outside the FFA structure.
- Constitute a Football Development Committee, chaired by a suitably qualified FFA Board Member, or potentially co-opted external member (at Board discretion) with a remit to make decisions relating to national team matters and football development.
- Leverage Sport Australia’s experience and seek its guidance on the following:
 - Ensuring FFA’s governance structure considers the additional complexities associated with sports environments (as opposed to a corporate environment)
 - Establishing an effective operating model
 - Identifying operational improvements and efficiencies.

⁹ Refer to Recommendation 3.2 of the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations for suggestions for content to include in a code of conduct: (<https://www.asx.com.au/documents/asx-compliance/cgc-principles-and-recommendations-fourth-edn.pdf>)

¹⁰ This is in accordance with Recommendation 1.6 in the ASX Corporate Governance Council's Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations: (<https://www.asx.com.au/documents/asx-compliance/cgc-principles-and-recommendations-fourth-edn.pdf>)

2.2.9. Risk and Performance

- Define the FFA Board’s risk appetite against national team conduct and performance objectives.
- Develop a set of National Team KPIs and leading indicators to enable the Board to assess delivery of outcomes in line with the risk appetite. Note: KPIs for each national team may be different depending on the current standing and maturity of the Team (e.g. ranking, athlete development pathways). It is recommended that there is a zero-tolerance policy for repeated incidents of poor conduct across national teams – for players, coaches and support staff.
- Implement a holistic performance management framework in the form of a ‘Balanced Scorecard’ approach.
- Conduct an internal national team performance review after every tour and an independent high-performance review after every major tournament.
- Implement new methods for gathering national team performance data that enable coaches, players and support staff to conveniently provide their input on positives and areas of improvement for national teams.

2.2.10. Communication

- Develop internal and external communications strategies that detail a clear and robust plan for engaging FFA staff, the media and other key stakeholders in both ‘business as usual’ circumstances and in times of crisis.
- Assign a single point of accountability for public relations matters.
- Review FFA employment contracts and consider whether specific clauses (e.g. mutual non-disparagement), by exception or otherwise, are in the best interests of the FFA moving forward. Consider the potential implications for internal and external communication strategies.