

ACC Drugs Report needs support - Drugs in Sport - a real wake up call for Australia

Drug Free Australia (DFA) applauds the Australian Crime Commission in its proactive approach to exposing the reality of drugs in Australian sport. In their recent report they have shown that the same organized criminals traffic both performance enhancing drugs for sport, and also illicit street drugs. It has also revealed that drugs in sport leave athletes particularly vulnerable to exploitation for other crimes including match fixing, fraud and insider information for betting. Illicit drugs have an estimated social cost of over \$8000 million every year in Australia according to the Commission.

'It's a real wake up call for Australia', says Jo Baxter, DFA's Executive Officer. 'If we don't take early action to prevent doping our young men and women, we are doing a great disservice to them and the future of our sporting culture. We, in Australia, should be reassured to know that these matters are taken seriously by the ACC'.

Drug Free Australia wants the Crime Commission report to be supported, and not denigrated. 'While normal legal processes will take time, there is no reason to delay sporting groups putting in urgent precautions in the short term. The matter is far too important to risk the health, safety and future of our young athletes', says Ms Baxter. 'Sporting groups need to be guided, not castigated, as they take stock and move forward from here – so that early, sustainable recovery can be achieved'.

Drug Free Australia is particularly concerned that, in Australia, there is a concerted effort on the part of an active, well-funded pro-drug lobby, to 'normalise' illicit drug use. For almost 30 years, Australia has endured a policy of Harm Minimisation rather than Harm Prevention to stop early drug use. There are vested interests, within our society, who want to reap financial benefit by increasing our pharmaceutical sector and legalise illicit drugs such as cannabis, amphetamines, 'ice' and ecstasy – all of which are included in WADA's prohibited list. Predictably, these same groups are very critical of the approach taken by the Crime Commission – when in fact, those who truly care for the wellbeing of our young athletes, such as parents, are appalled at this concept.

Instead of being critical and trying to discredit the report, we should see it as an opportunity for creating a benchmark for other countries to emulate, so that, globally we can join together take action against such devastating practices.

Drug Free Australia commends the stand taken by WADA President, John Fahey this week: "When you consider the hundreds of billions of dollars generated globally by sport every year, and the importance sport plays in our lives, it continues to surprise me why there is a reluctance to properly invest in protecting it."

We call on all sporting codes to combine their effort and build consistent preventative policy, in a show of strength to push back against this spiraling trend – which, if not checked, will not only destroy our athletes, but will decimate our sport and most of what Australians truly stand for.