

The National Sport Plan has ambitious ideas, but not enough specifics

Written by Lisa Gowthorp, Assistant Professor of Sport Management, Bond Business School, Bond University

Following 18 months of consultations, the much-anticipated [National Sport Plan](#) was finally unveiled by Sport Minister Bridget McKenzie this week to great fanfare.

Released at the same time was a [review of Australia's sports integrity policies](#) - another major priority of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's government, commissioned in response to concerns over gambling and match-fixing worldwide.

Scrutiny of the National Sport Plan has come quickly in the media, with mixed reviews. The ABC, for instance, [called the plan](#) "light on details" and "heavy on buzzwords", but applauded the ambitious approach to tackle corruption in sports.

So, what will the new plan do in practical terms, and what did the government get right?

A re-branded mission

The first significant change is the re-branding of the [Australian Sports Commission](#) as [Sport Australia](#)

. This body will lead the implementation of the National Sport Plan, with less emphasis on service delivery and more on [system leadership and innovation](#)

The National Sport Plan, referred to as Sport 2030, also sets new goals on reducing inactivity among Australians and supporting elite athletes with better research, testing, training, injury prevention and rehabilitation facilities at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). It reads:

Where once Australia, through the AIS, set a benchmark for other nations on how to deliver high performance outcomes, we are now no longer at the cutting edge of sporting excellence and this is affecting the performance of our athletes.

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The plan also calls for stronger action to tackle match-fixing, with a proposal for an anti-corruption watchdog with considerable powers.

Here are a few of the main objectives outlined in the report:

1. Building a more active Australia

The Sport 2030 plan outlines broad initiatives to get all Australians moving. It also recognises the need to encourage health and sport in early childhood and schools.

In practical terms, this means making sure there are swimming programs available for all children, using digital platforms to promote physical activity and providing grants and vouchers for Australians who can't afford to pay for sport memberships or insurance.

Read more: [**Personal responsibility won't solve Australia's obesity problem**](#)

The plan sets a clear and measurable performance target to reduce inactivity by 15% by 2030. This is an ambitious goal. While other participation policies such as [Play.Sport.Australia](#) and the [Physical Literacy Standard](#) [Ph](#) have been in place for many years, we have yet to see a more active Australia.

2. Achieving sporting excellence

This is the most contentious strategic priority, following on the heels of the poorly executed [Winning Edge](#) plan in 2012.

There's been plenty of debate over the state of AIS lately. Recent decisions by the body to

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slash up to 40 jobs, sell its land and buildings and stop providing residential athlete services has led many to question its strategies. According to [former AIS director Robert de Castella](#) :

What was once great, the envy of the world and the dreams of Aussie sports kids, coaches and support staff, is now gone, never to return.

The new role of the AIS as imagined in Sport 2030 will be to focus on [“being the national high-performance system leader”](#);

. As such, the AIS will no longer support athletes in residential programs or camps, but instead “collaborate to create high-performance strategies that are recognised as world-leading”.

Read more: [**Australia's Olympics medal haul has been in decline: can we do better at Rio?**](#)

To become this high-performance leader, Sport 2030 outlines plans to invest in a more high-tech and innovative AIS facility and work with universities to encourage new research on sport technologies, practices and training mechanisms. Until we see these strategies and innovative partnerships unfold, however, it’s impossible to evaluate what the proposed changes might bring.

Though the plan acknowledges that Australia’s Olympic medal count has been on the decline since 2000, it also says success will no longer be measured in medals, but will include:

the impact of athletes as role models, their engagement with the community, and delivering a respected system.

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While there are few specifics on funding and performance measures in the plan, more details should be released soon. This will no doubt be valuable to the national sporting organisations (NSOs), which continue to rely on government funding to support their elite programs.

3. Safeguarding the integrity of sport

This is perhaps the most ambitious element of the plan, aligned closely with the [Review of Australia's Sports Integrity Report](#)

The plan envisions the establishment of a national sports integrity commission and national sports tribunal with significant powers to tackle match-fixing, betting frauds and other integrity breaches.

While many believe the [changes are long overdue](#), there are some concerns regarding the optional nature of the tribunal. The plan envisions it being an “opt-in” or “opt-out” decision for sporting bodies for anything not related to doping. So the question remains, how many professional sport bodies will opt in to be policed by a national tribunal?

There is also limited clarity around the powers of a proposed integrity commission and tribunal, with some commentators [describing](#) them as a national sport police and national sport court, respectively.

Targets and monitoring

Sport 2030 sets clear targets for measuring success in just one category – sport participation. By 2030, the plan envisions an increase of 15% more Australians participating in at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week.

There are no clear targets or objective performance measures in place for the remaining strategic priorities. These are to be set at a later date.

Hopefully, published goals and objectives will allow the AIS and Sport Australia to measure and

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assess their own performances, and at least allow the public an opportunity to see how they are progressing.

Read more: [Will a UK-style lottery system really take Australia back to its Olympic glory days?](#)

Interestingly, the government says it will evaluate, review and update Sport 2030 every four years going forward, offering the potential for a constantly evolving National Sport Plan. Perhaps more frequent reviews of the plan and evaluation of the managing organisations are required.

One final question hanging over Sport 2030 is whether it will survive the revolving door of Australian sport ministers. To date, there have been an incredible seven sport ministers since the London 2012 Olympics.

This level of political instability [is a cause for concern](#) that will no doubt impact the longevity of this plan.

Lisa Gowthorp does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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