



# DEVELOPING LGBT+ INCLUSIVE SUPPORTER GROUPS IN THE BIG BASH LEAGUE

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## STUDY OVERVIEW

This study was formed through a partnership between Western Sydney University and Cricket Victoria, who together commissioned research to better understand how LGBT+ supporter/ coterie groups can be initiated and supported in the Big Bash League. This report provides evidence-based research and practical recommendations to inform the best future policies and actions in the creation of LGBT+ inclusive supports groups. In doing so, this report aims to support the commitment to LGBT+ inclusion of Cricket Australia more broadly, and to encourage the LGBT+ communities to feel welcome and safe at cricket matches. The following key research questions are addressed:

1. What lessons can we learn from previous professional sporting fan/ supporter groups?
2. What support structures are needed in the creation of a LGBT+ supporters group?
3. What are the expectations of cricket fans and supporters in initiating a LGBT+ supporters group?
4. What are the beliefs and attitudes of leadership within cricket surrounding LGBT+ supporter groups?

## THE RESEARCH TEAM

Dr Ryan Storr - As Chief investigator, Dr Storr is based in the School of Science and Health, Western Sydney University. He has years of previous experience researching diversity within sporting culture, and also works as an LGBT+ adviser and consultant to sporting bodies.

Dr Keith D. Parry - Dr Parry is a Senior Lecturer at Winchester University in the UK and adjunct researcher at Western Sydney University. He researches the sociology of sport, with a particular focus on sports fandom, the spectator experience, and the relationship between sporting codes and the community.

Dr Jorge Knijnik - Dr Knijnik is an Associate Professor in the School of Education, Western Sydney University. His extensive past research focuses have included fandom culture and the relationships between gender, culture, and sport in society.

Dr Anneke Collison - A research assistant on the project, Dr Collison has experience in multiple projects researching health and culture, with specific focus on the Australian gender diverse population.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sport is an integral part of both Australian culture and identity. However, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities (LGBT+) face extra barriers and challenges to engagement and participation in sport. This study, formed through a partnership between Western Sydney University and Cricket Victoria, aimed to better understand how LGBT+ supporter/ coterie groups could be initiated and supported in the Big Bash League. Twenty-Four key stakeholders and informants drawn from Australian Football League (AFL) LGBT+ supporter groups, AFL administrators, cricket administrators, and LGBT+ cricket fans were interviewed to collect comprehensive data on the requirements for successful LGBT+ supporter group formation in cricket and the Big Bash League.

Our results reveal a strong desire to include more LGBT+ communities in cricket, with the Big Bash League identified as an ideal opportunity due to its family-oriented nature. However, it was felt by participants that there was a lack of understanding and education of LGBT+-related issues within the cricket community. The experiences of those involved in AFL support groups have been overwhelmingly positive and provide a compelling case for the introduction of LGBT+ supporter groups in cricket, from both a social inclusion and financial management perspective. We conclude that the introduction of LGBT+ supporter groups in cricket has the potential to impact positively the lives of LGBT+ communities, providing a platform for them to engage with sport in a meaningful and positive way.

Three key messages were identified for those wishing to set up LGBT+ supporter groups:

1. Groups should be developed from the bottom up, being driven by LGBT+ fans and members rather than purely from the organisation. A partnership approach between Cricket Victoria/ Big Bash League clubs and local LGBT+ communities also provides an avenue to facilitate training and education on LGBT+-related issues for staff and players.
2. Institutional support is crucial for such an initiative to succeed;
3. Clear policies are needed to support supporter groups and to address any negative responses. This policy should also address behaviour by players and staff to ensure that the institutional commitment to inclusion is not undermined.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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|--|---|
| <b>1</b> SUPPORTER GROUPS TO BE DEVELOPED AS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FANS AND ORGANISATIONS                        | <b>2</b> ADDRESSING AND RESPONDING TO ANTI LGBT+ DISCRIMINATION                         |
| <b>3</b> CLUBS (USING PLAYERS) TO MAKE STATEMENTS AGAINST ANTI-LGBT+ DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTE INCLUSIVE SPACES | <b>4</b> CRICKET VICTORIA TO MARKET BBL GAMES AS AN INCLUSIVE AND SAFE SPACE FOR ALL    |
| <b>5</b> PROVIDE EDUCATION AROUND LGBT+ INCLUSION AND THE IMPACT OF DISCRIMINATION.                              | <b>6</b> THE BUSINESS CASE FOR LGBT+ INCLUSION AND SUPPORTERS' GROUPS TO BE EMPHASISED  |
| <b>7</b> ENGAGE IN COMPLEX ISSUES THROUGH OPEN AND CORRECT COMMUNICATION CHANNELS                                | <b>8</b> WORK WITH TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE (AND ALLIES) ON THE GROUND.          |
| <b>9</b> INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR LGBT+ SUPPORTER GROUPS AND THEIR ALLIES                                       | <b>10</b> VISIBILITY AS KEY FOR INSIDERS (LGBT+ PEOPLE) AND OUTSIDERS (BROAD COMMUNITY) |

## WHY FORM SUPPORTER GROUPS FOR LGBT+ PEOPLE?

### FOR THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY

Sport is an integral part of both Australian culture and identity (Ward, 2010). However, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities (LGBT+) face extra barriers and challenges to engagement and participation in sport. In a report on homophobia in soccer in the UK by Goldring in 2018, 63% of LGBT+ respondents reported experiencing verbal or physical homophobic or transphobic abuse at both home and away matches, with around 70% of these incidences not being reported to ground staff or club officials.

A VicHealth report on LGBT+ inclusion in the Australian Football League (AFL) in 2017 showed that half of LGBT+ respondents did not view general AFL matches as a safe or welcoming environment, with 3 in 5 respondents who had attended having witnessed homophobia or transphobia in the stadium stands. In comparison, for those who had attended Pride Games, respondents gave an average rating of 9 out of 10 to strongly agree with the statement that “the Pride Game was a safe space for LGBT+ people”. This shows the difference in safety that the LGBT+ community experience when sport organisations actively show their support, and the consequential impact on their attendance at future live events. There has been an increase in engagement between LGBT+ fan and supporter groups in recent years, with the creation of the AFL pride collective in Australian rules football, and numerous new Pride groups in the English Premier League (soccer).

### FOR CRICKET ORGANISATIONS

Diversity and LGBT+ inclusion within Australian sport has begun to attract interest in recent years. Recent research from Spaaij and Storr et al. (2018) into the level of LGBT+ inclusion in Australian cricket also showed that those involved in cricket think that more should be done to include LGBT+ people within cricket.

In addition to cultural shifts, the Pride in Sport Index is a newly launched benchmarking instrument which assesses the inclusivity of LGBT+ individuals within sporting organisations (Pride in Sport, 2016). Cricket Victoria and Cricket Australia submitted applications to the Pride in Sport Index in 2018. The inaugural results of the Pride in Sport Index ranged from three to thirty-six out of 100, showing the need for LGBT+ inclusive initiatives in the sport sector. LGBT+ supporter groups or Pride groups are one such avenue to promote inclusion within sporting environments in Australia. These groups have proven to be effective in Australian rules football.

Every AFL club now has a LGBT+ support group, as a part of the ‘AFL Pride Collective’, such as the Purple Bombers (Essendon) and the Rainbow Swans (Sydney). Increasing participation and acceptance for individuals from same sex attracted and gender diverse backgrounds in sport promotes community and social cohesion, respect and tolerance (Krane & Symons, 2014). It can assist in helping facilitate a culture where all people feel safe and included at Big Bash cricket

matches. Supporter groups provide a direct line of communication between the LGBT+ community and the sporting organisation, allowing ongoing feedback on the development of inclusive policy and practices. In turn, it can result in an increase in membership, and attendance, whereby the business case for LGBT+ diversity has shown to be beneficial to sport organisations (Cunningham, 2011). Annual reports and tangible outcomes from AFL supporter groups highlight the numerous benefits;

- Increased revenue from tailored membership packages
- Hundreds of newly engaged fans within social media groups, leading to more spectators
- Pride rounds and corresponding merchandise sales
- Increased sponsorship opportunities
- Positive case studies and content for social media and marketing purposes
- The opportunity to win community initiative awards, increasing brand awareness (e.g., Sydney Swans and their AFL Pride Match won an Australian LGBT+I award).

## METHOD AND PARTICIPANT GROUPS

This project was co-funded through Western Sydney University and Cricket Victoria and ran for four months in 2018. Twenty-Four different key stakeholders and informants were contacted and involved in the study, from a range of organisations, to collect comprehensive data on the requirements for successful LGBT+ supporter group formation in cricket and the Big Bash League.

### PARTICIPANT GROUPS

#### AFL LGBT+ Supporter Group Presidents & Members

Eight participants shared their experience of establishing and running LGBT+ supporter groups within the AFL. They provided detailed insights on how the group was initiated, how they are structured financially and their use of volunteers, and their relationship and interactions with their affiliated club.

#### AFL Administrators

Three participants were AFL administrators who were the main staff contact within the club for the LGBT+ supporter group. For example, they were Fan Engagement Officers, or Diversity and Inclusion Officers in AFL clubs. These participants offered their understanding in establishing LGBT+ supporter groups, from the perspective of the club.

#### Cricket Administrators Representative

Five participants were cricket administrators related to the formation of potential support groups, with job titles such as Fan Engagement Officers. They provided their insight on the current culture within cricket clubs and at organisational levels regarding diversity and inclusion. The additional cricket media representative held knowledge and experience in analysing the culture of cricket, and therefore was able to provide insight into how an LGBT+ supporter group may be received in the cricket community, portrayed in the media, and the potential benefits of greater inclusion to the image of the sport.

### LGBT+ Cricket Fans & Rainbow Parents

Seven participants were LGBT+-identified cricket fans, and some had children. These participants outlined their experiences of attending cricket, and the improvements on their feeling of safety and inclusion that could be made.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE AND ANALYSIS

Participants were initially approached by the researchers or related organisations via email, direct mail or phone call. If interested in participating, they were provided with an information sheet and then signed consent forms. Data collection took the form of one hour, in-depth interviews that were audio-recorded. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face, with some conducted by phone, at the convenience of the participant. Each interview was transcribed before being coded within Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis program to identify initial themes arising in the data. Data was then analysed by the researchers to formulate the answers to the research questions (see 'Overview' above). Particular focus was placed on the recommendations for successful supporter group formation and greater LGBT+ inclusion within club culture. All research procedures were approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee.

## KEY FINDINGS

The key findings below are separated into three parts:

1. A summary of the experiences and perspective of each participant group;
2. A general summary of key messages in establishing LGBT+ supporter groups;
3. Ten key recommendations when considering how to establish supporter groups, and for approaching LGBT+ inclusion as a whole within the Big Bash organisations.

### 1. SUMMARY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPANTS

#### AFL LGBT+ Support Group Presidents & Members:

Generally, volunteers who initiated the supporter groups were motivated by a desire to make a positive contribution to their clubs, the sport, and the LGBT+ community. The overwhelming majority of these participants spoke positively about their experiences in the group, although often they had witnessed or experienced anti LGBT+ discrimination in some form during attendance at a live AFL match. All participants spoke positively about the impact of the groups on them at an individual level. There was much positive and encouraging evidence to suggest LGBT+ supporter groups positively influencing members through increased social support and networks, and a positive influence on mental health. Often several spoke about trying to find 'buy in' and support from the institutional level with the club, but once on board they had positive experiences working with the clubs and administrators.

#### AFL Administrators:

Many AFL administrators spoke of the positive contributions the LGBT+ supporter groups had made to the clubs. Each club's journey was different with the creation and progression of the group dependent on different factors (for example an incident around homophobia at a match, a champion within the organisation, or participation in a pride game). The creation of the groups was initiated

and started by key champions and volunteers driving efforts within the clubs. All administrators spoke of their journeys of LGBT+ inclusion and that much of the work was very new, and often they had little support networks bar some organisations and advocates working in the space who they could speak to for support. Resistance was a key theme however, and navigating strategies and a minority fan base that resisted LGBT+ inclusion efforts was often challenging. However, this was also seen as an enlightening and encouraging experience, as it opened up the club's eyes to what type of online hatred and discrimination is directed towards LGBT+ people on a daily basis. Ongoing education and knowledge sharing was seen as an important factor, and that key supporter group members were seen as important source of knowledge and information, for example, when an event or controversy happened around LGBT+ discrimination.

## CRICKET ADMINISTRATORS

There was an overall willingness and openness to engage with supporter groups and LGBT+ inclusion more broadly, but there was a lack of education and knowledge amongst administrators working in cricket. When administrators had engaged in LGBT+ inclusion before, they were not always confident and suggested ongoing CPD (continued professional development) would be helpful. Some had only had one hour of education, which they reported was a good introduction to the topic. There was discussion by several administrators that engaged with supporter groups and key volunteers would help educate them and open them up to new experiences and insights from the LGBT+ community, especially around trans and gender diverse inclusion.

## LGBT+ CRICKET FANS & RAINBOW FAMILIES

LGBT+ cricket fans spoke of the different types of cricket that fans could engage with, and suggested the Big Bash and the family orientated nature would be a good match in which to promote inclusion efforts and LGBT+ supporter groups. There was a perception and lived experience by some of negative and unwelcoming environments around test matches when matches occurred over several days, when alcohol was prominent. Rainbow families' members discussed the potential to engage a wide range of families in the Big Bash league, and that many children and families had an interest in cricket and sport more broadly. They did however also comment that cricket and other sports had never really sought to engage or reach out to diverse LGBT+ families and welcome them to their sport (especially live matches).

## 2. GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE KEY MESSAGES IN ESTABLISHING SUPPORTER GROUPS

Most participants, especially those within cricket and volunteers who initiated and set up the AFL Pride groups, commented that the formation of the groups should come from the bottom up and the top down. One comment summarises this thinking well:

*"Well, but it's... but I think what you've also got to understand is I think it's got to be led by members of the community in that. So it can't be a straight, white, male administrator saying, I'm going to be, I'm going to start this group and you're all going to join. It's not going to work. So they have to have some people in each club who want to drive this and they drive it and the club support it. So it's got to be driven by both"*  
(P12: Female, Pride Group Member).

Firstly, development of groups from the bottom up, being driven by LGBT+ fans and members was seen as important factor. Supporter groups are best formed through the interest and dedication of LGBT+ members, rather than purely from the organisation. Forming a large base of volunteers for the group was seen as paramount, and keeping the positions that hold decision-making power minimal, to avoid conflict within the group and too many diverse voices which could present challenges to the organisation (for example politicised issues such as marriage equality etc). An important aspect to the partnership between the club and supporter group is education, and the ability for training and education seminars to be presented by LGBT+ support group members to staff members. These seminars improve use of appropriate language, feelings of empathy and inclusion, and creates a cohesive value system within the organisation.

Secondly, it was seen that institutional support was needed from the club or organisation to help the supporter group flourish. Dedicating a community administrator role to support the LGBT+ supporter group was seen as crucial, so the group have someone to directly speak to for any issues or ideas that arise. Further, dedicating sufficient funds and a marketing time frame so that any planned events involving the LGBT+ community are not rushed or poorly done. The more effort, the more financial return participants reported. Pitching the inclusion efforts was also seen as key, for example, if support of LGBT+ people is marketed as a part of a broader picture – e.g., ‘we care about the rights/comfort of all of our members’ or ‘everyone can enjoy cricket’., then this avoids feelings of tokenism, which both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ members dislike.

Finally, policy was seen as imperative for basing inclusion efforts on. In particular, making sure there is a policy in place for handling backlash, particularly social media comments, and again make this in line with the broader picture (as point above/ cricket is a sport for all). Further, making sure policy is in place for when staff, players, or members exhibit homophobia or transphobia is needed.

We now provide more specific and detailed recommendations using the data from the key stakeholders. We believe this will help build a positive and meaningful narrative in creating LGBT+ supporter groups in the Big Bash League, whilst also providing a clear evidence-base and rationale as to why they are being initiated and needed. Facilitating a pathway for the inclusion of LGBT+ communities to attend and engage with the Big Bash league should be central in promoting and delivering this work.

### 3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING SUPPORTER GROUPS

#### Recommendation 1: Supporter groups to be developed as a partnership between the club and LGBT+ communities

The creation of a supporter group should be seen as a partnership between the club, and LGBT+ supporters, in equal contributions. There was a sentiment that clubs should lead rather than follow or be reactive, showing that social justice is important to them. In this regard, one participant suggested that clubs need to reach out and give the groups a “hand-up” (P15), so that the groups are not made to feel like they are fighting for acceptance and to be included within the broader club. Making the groups feel included and part of the club was seen as important, and most participants from the AFL and cricket sample stated that inviting the supporter group to club functions and events was a good way to make the group feel included and welcomed. As an example, a member of one support group commented that they had felt very included and integrated into the club:

*Well, there has been very... they've been very supportive in terms of our involvement with the players and the whole staff at the club itself. There's been so many opportunities where we've had to meet and mingle with the players and actually talk about what we do and educate them as well. Every year we have at least one day where we go and have a training session with the entire team and the entire coaching staff, admin staff of the club and we get to talk about a whole range of issues. We get to have an occasion where we can say to them 'This is who we are. These are the people that exist. We are fans of sport and fans of you and we want to feel as loved and supported as every other footy fan out there .*

Having buy-in and institutional support from the club was seen as crucial. A top-down message is much stronger but it can be tokenistic if clubs do not buy in. One participant suggested that organisations should be aware of tokenism, and stated:

*"A fear of being tokenistic (e.g. having a pride game/round) is holding some sports back – they are using it as an excuse to do nothing. And the easy way to solve this problem [of appearing tokenistic] is to consult with the LGBT+I people. Like if you're worried about doing it because you don't know enough then talk to the people who do know something. Run focus groups, you know. Figure out what feels tokenistic to the LGBT+ community and what doesn't"*

Tokenism was discussed amongst many participants, but we encourage organisations to respect LGBT+ communities, and pay careful consideration to wider politics and debates within those communities. For example, the LGBT+ participants in the study were very aware when some of their clubs did not publically support marriage equality. The full discussion around this issue is beyond the scope of the report, but we would encourage sports organisations to be mindful that if your organisation would like to engage LGBT+ communities and want them to support your club, then to not 'have their back' as one participant commented, and support their legal rights, is seen as 'hypocritical' and 'upsetting' as some participants noted. However, when a club comes out in support for LGBT+ communities, it can be affirming, validating, and have a significant positive effect on an individual. The participants used powerful stories to capture this, with one story from a participant at the Purple Bombers standing out:

*The whole marriage equality survey was probably like the hardest time of my life, just 'cause it's not easy to have an entire country of strangers have their say on whether or not you deserve human rights and so as it was as a gay man, it was a very, very awful time to have to wake up every day and hear all the things going around you, all the news items all shouting their opinions, it just took its toll. We knew as the Purple Bombers that Essendon was going to have to say something, because it is too big an issue for major corporations, major brands, major anything to just ignore and of course, you never hear people complain about that unless it's people expressing how they feel as different to the way that you feel.*

*Obviously the AFL itself and AFL clubs had to be very cautious about how they handled the situation and we saw Carlton and Hawthorne as examples of clubs that decided to not really take a stance and that was a bit of a slap in the face of the LGBT+I fans, because it was a moment they could feel that their club had their back and they just did it in a very public way. It was their opportunity to say "Australians are Australians. We all deserve the same rights. We all deserve to be treated fairly" and they just didn't*

*get that and if I wasn't involved with the Purple Bombers, it still would have been a rough thing to have to anticipate, but because I was so directly involved with the group during that time, the sitting around and waiting was tough.*

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*The first step of relief was when Dyson Heppell, along with many other AFL personalities, stood in front of the Headquarters, in front of the sign that said yes. To see the Captain of Essendon do that and proudly stand up, was incredible and of course we shared it all across the Purple Bombers social media and it went nuts, but the big thing we were waiting for was the club actually taking a stand and thankfully one day they did. I got a slight heads-up that it was happening and to prepare for the social media stuff and the announcement came out, the press release. It was perfect. It was written perfectly. They explained how difficult it was to put into words, that at the end of the day, we are all Australians, we are all people who deserve the same rights and Essendon and the club does not ever want to see people treated unfairly and that includes the LGBT+ community and to have that statement in writing, I wouldn't say it made the whole process worth it, but it made me feel happier than I ever felt during the whole process. It made me feel like it was worth it, not worth it, it made me feel like all the anticipation paid off and while that scenario is slightly different to the entire marriage equality survey itself, it was a load off my back, to know this club I've devoted my personal life to, at that point it had been a year, had my back and was not afraid to tell the whole country, it meant everything. It really did mean everything*

As outlined by the participant, both the supporter group and the club can have a powerful impact on the individual. We encourage the Big Bash teams to use this narrative and positive framing to promote the impact that supporter groups can have, and why they might be needed. Framing the discussions and work away from homophobia and discrimination where possible, to inclusion and the impact sports can have in enriching the lives of Australians, will provide a meaningful and engaging way to leverage this work. Resistance and conflict can arise in this area, so approaching the work in ways which speak to the cricket community will be beneficial.

Finally, an example of a successful partnership between a club and their supporter group, which prompted the supporter group to be officially recognised and supported by the club, meant that there were tangible outcomes for both parties. One member outlined:

*We had an incident where there was, you know, a mother and her gay son that were watching football in the [name of stand] area, which is the high up membership of the [Football Club], and there was a guy behind them yelling out poofter and faggot, and basically using those words to insult players, but not only that, when someone said, "Listen, your language is actually a bit hurtful and a bit offensive, do you mind using other language," and he got worse, so it actually escalated, "No, freedom of speech," all that sort of thing. And they called the line with the social number, and there wasn't at that stage proper follow through.*

*And the mother got in contact with the club, and then got in contact with us, and then we worked with the club to really help refine their policies and make sure that everyone was looked after in that process, too, and I suggested to the club, "Give the son a call, and make sure that he's OK, first and foremost. But also this person's behaviour needs to be addressed. There's people paying for a lot of membership, you know a lot of membership fees in that area, that need to feel safe." So if the club wasn't working with us to do that, those kind of things would be very hard to address" (P2).*

## Recommendation 2: Addressing and responding to anti LGBT+ discrimination

Participants highlighted that stories around homophobia and transphobia are still prevalent, and often this was around verbal and casual homophobia and transphobia in particular. Homophobic abuse by fans does not make sport a welcoming space and means that many LGBT+ people miss out on the benefits of sport (health and wellbeing). This was discussed around sport in general, but with a particular reference to AFL, and on some occasions, cricket (mostly test matches). Some comments below demonstrate this:

*"There is still quite a lot of homophobia in football. I think whenever you hear fans, particularly AFL abuse players often they use homophobic slurs"*

There was discussion about calling out abuse and homophobia at matches. One participant challenged abuse but no one would admit to saying the comment:

*I actually had a bit of a confrontation with one of Bulldogs fans I think it was last year when one of them screamed out Toby Green you're an f-in fag and I just turned around was like who said that, that's really not OK, I don't want to hear that kind of language at the football. And yeah I think everyone was a bit stunned (laughs) because it's not usual for people to call out other people when they say those kind of things."*

One male cricket coach stated that casual homophobic language was common in the club environment, but often players might not have intent to cause harm:

*Yeah. So like there was times that not trainings, or just at the club in general, and sometimes a person would make a, it wasn't like offensive slur, it was usually words that some people might take offence to, I don't. But they would sort of look at me straight away and think, oh shit, sorry [participant], I just say that word, it doesn't mean by—so that helped, because they knew I was there, they knew who I was, and it just*

*made them...And I'm probably making some general assumptions, but I guess that language is probably quite common in sporting clubs, and people that probably don't even - they probably don't mean anything bad about it, but they... They were able to trigger and go, actually I probably shouldn't be saying that*

It is important that clubs speak out against homophobia and state that they are inclusive and do not accept vilification on any ground, and to understand that silence is damning as one participant commented. Visible statements of support are important, but also acting on these statements. As one participant suggested, "actions, yeah, cliché, but they speak louder than words" (P7). Addressing fans and anti-LGBT+ discrimination was discussed by the majority of the sample, and several claimed that the behaviour of fans at many live sporting events was behind the standard of society. One sports fan commented:

*As a spectator, I guess it's more like sometimes you hear the homophobic comments and the racist comments and those sorts of things about players on the field, or those ad hoc comments that make you feel really... like well personally there was a guy this year at a finals game that I went to and he started making homophobic slurs right in front of me. And it was really disheartening that, you know I felt if I say something, this guy's a big dude, there's six of his friends, they're all laughing, like what do I do in that situation when I'm the only gay woman in my group of friends, and they're not paying attention and I can hear it, so it's kind of like I'm uncomfortable, I feel like I shouldn't be here when he's calling them something*

Many participants discussed a perception of sport is that it is quite old-fashioned and conservative, led by old men and so it is "unconsciously homophobic. Therefore, developing an inclusive sporting culture means change needs to incur from within the organisation of Cricket Victoria and the associated Big Bash teams. One employee within cricket remarked that they were not sure how comfortable LGBT+ people would feel in the workplace, based on comments around women. They commented:

*Because I do still feel... like when you hear banter in the [Cricket Victoria] office, like throwing words around that just are a bit sexist and stuff like that, just off the cuff things that you're just kind of like, well if that's still happening, like how safe do I feel if I turned up with a rainbow flag one day and shaved my head and had big rainbow face, or something like that, like how included would I feel in that setting?".*

### **Recommendation 3: Clubs (using players) to make statements against anti-LGBT+ discrimination and promote inclusive spaces**

Institutional messages of support for inclusive and welcoming sporting environments are important to demonstrate that the club does not accept discrimination or vilification. Linked to this, a recurring theme in the data centered around a lack of messages of support from key players and staff in the men's game. By engaging and utilising straight allies, it can also send a message of inclusion and that players support the wider LGBT+ community. Demonstrating and communicating that a club is a safe space for LGBT+ people was a common finding across all participants. A Pride group in cricket may help people think that cricket is a safe space and increase or initiate engagement. There were several comments from participants and their view that cricket is well positioned to use a number of openly lesbian players and male players who would be supportive of broader LGBT+ inclusion efforts. One administrator stated:

*I would say cricket would almost be the best equipped sport to deal with it. We're almost zero contact and that's one of the issues that I think a lot of the winter, like the football type codes have. I would say football is also, as in soccer is also in a fairly good position just from the nature of what it is that the sport is. I've been really pleased when I've spoken to my male players about the work that we're going to do, that their first reaction has been positive, and it hasn't been, oh, oh why are we doing that? I haven't had to explain it. So I think it's probably we're a lot more accepting in cricket of different personalities because cricket is an individual sport masquerading as a team sport. We're a lot more used to quirky individuals, different personalities. So I think that lends itself better to it being more accepting in that space. I would say, as I said, sort of soccer would be similar. I think the other codes would probably struggle a little bit more just because of the nature of their sport and still some of those attitudes that float around.*

We encourage Cricket Victoria and the Big Bash teams to utilise allies in the space, and consider an ally program (or partnership with other sports or organisations potentially) to help publicise support for LGBT+ inclusion. In this regard, engaging male players is seen as important, as the research shows that there is a significant lack of male players speaking out and showing support in the space of LGBT+ inclusion (compared to some of the women's players). Alongside gender equality debates and striving towards more inclusive environments for women and girls, engaging males is important as it has been identified that male champions of change can have real impact on gender equality. Several participants said that this should be alongside transforming the cricket culture more broadly, with some participants suggesting the it was a "conservative, old man culture", "incredibly Australian" and "pale, male and stale". The more conservative culture was associated with Test matches (especially ones overseas), whereby fears of safety were raised by some participants:

*...I mean it's a dangerous environment [at Test cricket matches]. A lot of women don't feel safe in that environment too so are LGBT+ supporters going to feel safe there?*

How the LGBT+ supporter groups might be received at matches would be something to consider, and if there were a negative reception or resistance, to address this appropriately. However, there was a general level of acceptance that the Big Bash League, with a focus on family would be accepting and a positive avenue to promote the supporter groups. This leads onto the next recommendation about marketing the BBL as a safe space.

#### **Recommendation 4: Cricket Victoria to market BBL games as an inclusive and safe space for all**

A theme of fear was common within the data, and a perception that many sporting fixtures meant that LGBT+ people were not safe, or generally feared the space of a stadium or live match. As one same sex parent commented:

*The fear of being singled out and being seen as being different and being victimised as a result of that, whether from supporters or other people" (P15).*

Another participant shared an experience whereby she witnessed verbal homophobia and did not feel confident to call it out or address the perpetrator:

*You know I felt if I say something, this guy's a big dude, there's six of his friends, they're all laughing, like what do I do in that situation when I'm the only gay woman in my group of friends, and they're not paying attention and I can hear it, so it's kind of like I'm uncomfortable, I feel like I shouldn't be here when he's calling them something*

The ability or inability of some LGBT+ participants to be out in sporting spaces meant that being at matches was not always enjoyable or comfortable. As two gay males stated:

*I don't come across as so gay that I can sort of sneak under the radar, I can be out when I want to be out, I don't have to be out all the time, so that's sort of maybe made it a lot easier for me*

*In terms of me, no I don't think I've experienced that [homophobic abuse] but that's just because I wouldn't be overtly or outwardly gay at an AFL match if that makes sense, or a sporting match in general. I think if there were two men holding hands at an AFL match they would cop a significant amount of abuse*

With such experiences in mind, we encourage the Big Bash League and teams to market a safe space, especially around families (and an understanding of diverse families such as Rainbow Families). Promoting the benefits of sport and how an inclusive space can help facilitate these benefits is important in marketing. Sport provides a sense of community, belonging and connection with others; a sense of camaraderie. These benefits are often heightened in LGBT+ supporter groups, and participants spoke to these benefits throughout their interviews.

With the potential to use the Big Bash League as a catalyst and medium to drive LGBT+ inclusion efforts in cricket, there are unique challenges and opportunities for cricket as a sport, which were discussed by the majority of participants. There were perceptions amongst participants from within and outside cricket that there was less sense of community amongst fans compared to AFL teams, but the BBL is in its infancy in comparison to other sports. Alternatively, though, the crowds at Big Bash League games are seen as distinctly different to AFL and rugby league crowds, and this was seen as a positive. One participant suggested that cricket doesn't have as far to come as other sports "in terms of driving inclusion", and one gay male participant felt more comfortable at a cricket match than an AFL match. Leveraging the Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) teams and women's cricket in general was discussed by the majority of participants also, and described as a good opportunity for LGBT+ inclusion as it is looking to "build a fan base in a way that hasn't been done before" (P7). There was a perception that women's supporters and the fan base for WBBL was more accepting and supportive towards LGBT+ inclusion. This has been reported before, whereby women have been shown to be more supportive of LGBT+ rights (Cunningham & Melton, 2014).

Several LGBT+ participants commented that lesbians and queer people have been at the core of women's cricket right from the very beginning. One participant commented:

*I thank all of those women, many of whom were gay who have got us to the point where we are now and I think, but I think that's never really been overtly celebrated. I think lesbians have just been part of cricket for a very long time but it's never been something that we've celebrated or made explicit and perhaps that's because of the pressures on women to not be open about their sexuality when it is such a negative stereotype around women's sport*

Lesbian players have (historically) felt pressure not to come out as there is such a strong stereotype of female athletes being lesbians, and there has been much academic and public discussion about this, specifically around lesbian stigma in sport.

### Recommendation 5: Provide education around LGBT+ inclusion and the impact of discrimination

A common response around the implementation of the groups and how they may be received within cricket was the need for education around LGBT+ inclusion broadly, and why the supporter groups are needed. LGBT+ supporter groups provide social networks for people that identify as LGBT+, and as there are existing AFL Pride groups, they would be able to help spread the message about new cricket groups.

Education of the BBL clubs is needed, and not just those staff involved with the support groups. A whole institutional and organisational approach is vital, so everybody across the organisation has basic knowledge and awareness about why the club might be engaging with this type of avenue to enact LGBT+ inclusion. It is also important to educate the players around language and behaviour and the impact anti LGBT+ sentiments can have on the wider community. Educating players will also encourage them to step up to support and advocate LGBT+, women's rights, taking a stand against violence against women and so forth. The impact on discriminatory language was discussed by many LGBT+ participants, in which they felt it excluded them from attending sports matches. Two participants noted:

*When you hear a lot of attitude, activity, language within those seats, which even though I'm quite tough-skinned, it was hard to hear myself*

*I was too afraid to go to the games being a trans-gender woman, because I was too afraid of the drunkenness and the language and wasn't sure how I'd go and didn't want to go to games on my own. I was a bit paranoid*

Promoting the message of why inclusion matters and why supporter or Pride groups are needed should be central within education efforts, and promoting the groups in the Big Bash league. Several participants explained why the groups exist:

*a lot of people have felt traditionally excluded from football because of their sexuality or their gender identity, so it's about helping I guess people that have felt excluded to come back in a lot of cases to supporting football and being involved with AFL*

*(a group) to not feel excluded from that macho stereotypical view of what a football supporter is. So that's what we're there for, to cater for everybody out there*

*We do have a mission statement, per se, which is just to run alongside the club, and to ensure that people can be their true selves when they're going to the football. So that's really our main aim, is just to be that light, to show that there are people there for you*

The power of storytelling through conversations was seen as crucial to advancing knowledge and acceptance, especially around trans and gender diverse people.

*We had transgender people speak at an Essendon event, and one of our guests remarked afterwards that it's the first time that they had been in a room where they could see people's jaws drop*

Most participants spoke about the need for trans and gender diverse inclusion, and that lagged behind acceptance and how society viewed LGB people (linking to the marriage equality).

## Recommendation 6: The business case for LGBT+I inclusion and supporters' groups to be emphasised

Promoting the case for LGBT+ inclusion within organisations has increased within Australia in the last five years. This has been driven by utilising the business case, and demonstrating how LGBT+ inclusion can lead to increased organisational outputs including new fans, players, and sponsorship. Several of the AFL supporter groups spoke of the importance of the business case in engaging clubs and “getting them across the line” as one participant informed the research team. There are a wide range of positive stories from members and clubs in utilising the business case and how the club has prospered because of their engagement in the space. Essendon’s supporter group ‘The Purple Bombers’ have even developed a tiered membership base, which helps create funds for the group, the club, and then to LGBT+ causes in turn.

Fans like to invest both financially and socially, and if they see the impact or know that their money may help support LGBT+ causes, they will be more likely to engage. This must be done in consultation with the LGBT+ communities though, and should not be exploited or used to target the ‘pink dollar’ without the interests of the LGBT+ communities at the core of the engagement. The encouraging thing to emerge from discussions with both administrators and volunteers was the beneficial relationship to both the club and the supporter group, and that it was a two-way partnership. When asked about the potential of the business case to drive inclusion and whether clubs were aware of the benefits to the club, one participant explained:

*The Swans are. Because two years ago when they brought in the rainbow scarf, I don't know whether you've seen the rainbow scarf... Yeah. So it was the highest selling item in the Swans merchandise. So when I think about it, the Swans only two years ago only made a profit of about \$35,000 or \$40,000 or there about and we think that that was the profit from the rainbow scarves. So we think that we're pretty valuable to them. I mean, yeah, it's... I don't think teams have cottoned on. I don't think, I think the AFL are slowly cottoning on. But I don't think sports in general do. So yeah, the Swans certainly get it.*

Utilising a campaign and grassroots movement is beneficial in this respect. For example, the Swans are one of two clubs (alongside St Kilda) who participate in the annual Pride Game in the AFL competition. They have used this as leverage to build awareness and their campaign was rewarded by taking out the Sport Award at the 2018 Australian LGBT+I Awards.

The opportunity of the Big Bash, and as it grows in popularity, was also seen as being complementary to developing the business case for LGBT+ inclusion through the supporter groups. As the league is more family focused and aimed at a younger audience, and cricket is played and taught in schools, it has the opportunity to reach diverse families, such as a Rainbow Families. One administrator commented:

*So if we could show them (clubs) that it will bring in more numbers and more money then that will definitely, like that would ring in the ears of the CFO and in older people in marketing commercial because they want more bums on seats, they want more people to attend their games, they want more memberships sold, they want more money coming in. If you have to create a specific community group for that, then do it. Like that's... you know what harm are you really creating in potentially opening up the avenues for more members?*

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<sup>1</sup>Pink dollar is a term used to describe the market value and money spent by LGBT people, but most commonly LGB consumers.

There are many tangible benefits to engaging with LGBT+ inclusion as outlined by the participant above, through promotion and engagement with the business case for diversity. However, when the business and social justice case for diversity sometimes clash, sensitive and open communication is needed from both stakeholders and LGBT+ fans. Central to the business case is the role of sponsorship, and the sometimes difficult terrain in engaging sponsors that may not always be a complementary fit for the LGBT+ community. One example was the Rainbow Swans group, who spoke about the challenges of engaging the club in discussions around one of their sponsors, Qatar Airways – whereby their country’s track record for LGBT+ rights was controversial (being gay can be punishable by death). A participant from the Rainbow Swans spoke about the challenge in engaging the club with concerns by some members, who did not think Qatar Airways should be a main sponsor of the club:

*Yeah, they are still a sponsor. And there were some members who didn't like it but understood where the club came from and they appropriately aired their grievances and they spoke through that forum and they were happy with the outcome. Whether they loved the outcome, they weren't. But they didn't cut up their membership and say go away. So they accepted the Swans position and they accepted that it is a commercial world. And they accepted that we could make a difference on the inside. And again, when they saw the photos of the rainbow flags in front of Qatar Airways, they sort of went, that's perfect. That's teaching them*

This leads onto the next recommendation; addressing and engaging with complex and challenging case studies and issues.

### **Recommendation 7: Engage in complex issues through open and correct communication channels**

Many participants spoke of the complex and sometimes controversial nature of LGBT+ issues, especially in the wake of the divisive marriage equality debate, and around state/ national elections. With the marginalisation and oppression of certain members of society, the issue of advancing LGBT+ inclusion will always be sensitive. The aforementioned case of sponsorship with companies or countries with oppressive LGBT+ human rights laws and practices is a good example of this. However, when issues do arise, it is important to engage with them, and work through any grievances or concerns in a professional and respectful manner. Hoping the issue will go away or settle down in time is not a good approach, as discussed by some participants.

An interesting quote from a participant identified that the area can be complex, and that many clubs have not engaged in the space due to fear of resistance or backlash, and an observation that “clubs don’t want to become too politicised I imagine for fear of putting off certain sponsors and things like that, because they are businesses”. That said, the issues will arise, and addressing them when they do arise should be encouraged. However, it is important to only have one main contact who speaks and represents the supporter group so that there are not too many diverse voices trying to address the issue. Two example statements demonstrate some of the issues, particular in AFL:

*Yeah we had a big challenge when Qatar Airways became a sponsor of the club. And we had a lot of backlash in the Rainbow Swans, obviously. We've got a lot of older gay men in our group who have a lot of history about their pathways and how they came to be where they are now. Bit different to the younger generations. The younger generation traditionally haven't had it hard. Which is interesting, and I fit somewhere in the middle. I came from the back end of that and now I've got the new end of this, the start of the new world. So we had a big problem between the Rainbow Swans and*

*the club over who they chose as a sponsor. So we had to deal with that quietly and internally and we had several meetings ... and so that we could air our grievances in a professional manner with the club. So we had quite a thorough discussion around all those issues*

*Yeah. And also, Etihad Stadium came out. So we've had the Pride game in Etihad Stadium now twice and Etihad is from the same area. So Middle East, being gay is illegal, et cetera, et cetera. So it's how do you change and do you believe that change is by opposition or change is from inside and teaching*

What is important to note is the importance for the club administration to come to the table and be willing to engage in these discussions. Some participants from some LGBT+ groups did acknowledge that often there were not opportunities to raise and discuss problematic situations. If organisations want to engage with LGBT+ communities then they need to be responsive to concerns, and engage in open dialogue. Another example was when the AFL hosted an AFL Women's (AFLW) pride game between the Western Bulldogs and Carlton. This was after the AFL had excluded a trans player from being drafted to the AFLW competition, and Carlton had not publically supported marriage equality. One participant commented:

*Yes, I thought that was a cop out. I thought they were cashing in on the quite large lesbian following of the AFLW. But ... so to me that was token. I didn't, I didn't jump onto that bandwagon. If it had been another team other than Carlton, I would have gone, would have flown down, gone to the match, supported it wholeheartedly. But for that reason I found it a little bit wanting. Bulldogs are very vocal.*

In this vein, involvement in AFL Pride games (and support) can appear to be somewhat selective by clubs and organisations within sport, and often only champion LGB rights and not T or I. Further, some AFL clubs have supporter groups but the clubs' stances on marriage equality did not correspond to a support for LGBT+ rights. It is worth noting that administrators should have an awareness of such issues, but engage and use the supporter group for the club to help educate and work through them. The LGBT+ supporter group can be an important source of information (and navigating politics etc) in this respect.

### **Recommendation 8: Work with trans and gender diverse people (and allies) on the ground.**

Working with the LGBT+ supporter group in an active and engaging way was seen as crucial in developing strong relationships and building a faithful supporter base within LGBT+ communities. However, one area of concern and in need of development was trans and gender diverse inclusion, in light of recent ongoing discussions about trans athletes in sport (and an unfair advantage). Trans is an umbrella term for those individuals whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth, and gender diverse may mean anyone who sits between or outside the male female binary (for example, non binary or gender non-conforming) Although this affects the elite level, it has trickle-down effect into the grassroots space, and can lead to trans and gender diverse people feeling unwelcome, or being targeting (especially online) by sports fans. Using sport as a platform to target the trans and gender diverse communities with abuse has become common in recent years. Therefore, working with LGBT+ supporter groups and trans and gender diverse members, can have a positive impact and help contribute to changes in both policy and club practices. One participant reflected:

*We've helped the club inform their inclusion policy, or their diversity and inclusion policy (we) ... helped the AFL I guess develop their policies as well. So a lot of things have started to progress with their policies around behaviour at grounds.*

*They [the club] said to us, we come to you, ... because we don't know anybody else. So we want to know how this will affect you. So even on the pride game, they came to us talking to us about having gender neutral toilets.... But there are other things that they will come to us and say hey, can you help us with that? ... And in those things, they will make it about us more than them.*

One supporter group member, a trans identifying woman, was given the opportunity to deliver training and help give feedback around trans and gender diverse inclusion. She commented:

*The Administration wanted to do training with staff, so I did training with staff on trans training. I gave them guidance around the pride cup game and said "you need to have that glow at the pride cup game", stuff to be aware of with trans, trans stuff with toilets and so they really took that on board and want to roll that out at all their other spaces.*

Developing a collaborative and working relationship with the administration of the club was seen as important too. One administrator commented on their level of support for their LGBT+ supporter group and level of ease in engaging with the group and its members:

*"Our supporter group doesn't really need much from us. We're available to them all year, whenever they need us, but they tend to run themselves, which is pretty handy. We don't really have to jump in too often. We help out if they host events, and they need some assistance with some items to raise some money, or things like that. Sometimes they just want us to come along to their events and just be there as a shoulder support... So in terms of offering them support, they're definitely the easiest group for us to be able to deal with " ..*

Furthermore, progressing LGBT+ inclusion was often driven by the supporter groups, and was identified as an opportunity for administrators to learn more LGBT+ inclusion. An administrator from an AFL club commented:

*It gives us opportunities to bounce ideas off them. We by no means think that we're experts in the LGBT+IQ space, so it gives us the ability to talk through ideas that we have with them... I think it's important to have different groups and different people from the LGBT+I community that you can lean on to make sure you are heading down the right track.*

Finally, interviews showed a need for LGBT+ supporter groups to work with the club to address homophobic language/behaviour on the stands, supporting both LGBT+ people who feel unsafe but also to educate offenders to change their language and abusive behaviour; also to streamline procedures that can with the policies.

### **Recommendation 9: Institutional support for LGBT+ supporter groups and their allies**

One key theme to emerge from interviewees was the need for institutional support for LGBT+ inclusion broadly, but also for LGBT+ supporter groups. There were discussions in interviews about the need for the whole club to be on board, and a level of support from senior leadership, and not

just one champion within the club who may have taken the role on (for example the liaison between the club and group). Support can come in various ways, and does not always need to be financial. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Equipment (banners, shirts, stickers),
- Holding events and catering for social functions,
- Gathering support from current and former star players and their families,
- Free or discounted tickets on special occasions,
- Material, psychological and social support (messages on social media, emails).

In this vein, it is important for the club to show that LGBT+ fans matter to the club, that they have a budget (where necessary) and will invest money and energy to make the groups feel safe and included. Building inclusive and safe spaces for social gatherings with fans from the same club but also with opponents' fans is also seen as important during match days. Putting emphasis on the social element to the supporter groups is also important, and promoting feelings of belonging and feeling part of a community. Some comments from participants below highlight this:

*As a trans-woman, there's nothing for a rainbow family like me, so to take my kids to the oval and meet a few players and just watch a game and create a family atmosphere, that's so important to me.*

*I went to the first pride game, and it was amazing. And there were once again, stereotypes. They worked both ways, but it was people that you wouldn't think would ever have a rainbow flag or scarf, or jersey around them. They bought it, and that was a bit of an eye opener... It was quite empowering actually. It was like, wow, how far we've come. It was quite powerful in the lead up to the marriage equality vote. And it was like, OK. I don't think it's as bad as I had in my own little bubble.*

*And it sounds weird, but the emergence of these groups and stuff has made me fit into the LGBT+I community. So yeah, it just gave you a family in that community, in the LGBT+I community.*

Evidence of institutional support could also be from institutional statements on social media or through policies that communicate the club or organisation's active commitment to LGBT+ inclusion. One comment outlined the support provided by the Sydney Swans to the Rainbow Swans group:

*They give us access to facilities, they support us. We... they put out... whatever we need them to do they put up on the website. They get access to players, they support us around the Pride match, they activate it, I mean obviously it's... their side is both commercial and community. But we work strongly with their committee department and Fair Day, midsummer, family picnic out at Parramatta, Mardi Gras obviously, Pride match, the diversity action panel which is where it's not commercial. So that's completely community. So the support that we get from the club is fantastic. We've got one of the Swans staff on our board, on our committee. And she's as passionate and drives it internally, so it's great).*

Building allies to develop and cement institutional support can also be important so that the LGBT+ group do not always feel they are fighting the battle for equality and inclusion, and these allies can be a counterpoint to the 'negative views' brought by others in social or mainstream media. As one participant outlined:

*But somebody the other day was talking about promoting our group, who I've never met, don't know, but because they see the benefit of it. So then I had to do a little stalk. It was just an ally, but they see the benefit of what the group is. So we're at the point now, where if somebody is negative, you've got other people other than the group that sees the benefit of it. So we don't have to be at the warfront.*

*I feel like the LGBT+I community would be nowhere without our allies, because unfortunately we are a minority and we can scream and demand rights all we want... I think to see people who are considered to be typical sports fans, who embrace diversity and most of all inclusion, in something as huge as AFL football, it's really heart-warming and does make a huge difference. We can go to the football, every game that St Kilda play you'll see people wearing the rainbow scarf, or a rainbow hat.).*

Financial support where possible could also make a positive impact to those within the LGBT+ communities who may experience financial hardship. One trans participant explained:

*You're also looking at a group that's so financially hurt. We're 50% more likely to be unemployed. When we're employed, the majority of us are under-employed and we barely make I think a thousand dollars a fortnight... I would love in the future, to see the club say "there's going to be a discount because you're part of this group, that's contributing something to our club". Maybe a hundred, hundred fifty bucks off, I don't know, just something that allows that isolation to be removed and if cricket could do the same thing, amazing.*

### **Recommendation 10: Visibility as key for insiders (LGBT+ people) and outsiders (broad community)**

A central message from LGBT+ participants was the importance of being visible and proud of who you are, and the supporter group makes this possible. Participants reported that the feeling of inclusion and belonging is beyond feeling safe, it's about being proud of your identity, your sexual identity, and your community identity as a sports fan of that particular club. The supporters group helps this identity to be acknowledged and safe within the broader sports community. One key avenue for visibility therefore is the inclusion of LGBT+ club logos and (rainbow) merchandise. Some comments from participants around the importance of visibility and the impact of the visibility are outlined below:

*Or even if you say you're from Saints Pride, people in the crowd know who they are. And we'll have fliers for staff. And we were talking to people at half time, and they were like, oh Saints Pride. So just being known is a big thing for us.*

*I had an email or a message from somebody who had been a member for 40 years or something like that, who through the group and through having a pride game, and through being that visual for the community, that he could come out. So I think without them, a lot of people in the community didn't really feel like they belong. I was one of them).*

*But getting the message from somebody to say hey, through you guys, I've been able to come out, kind of is the top of the tree for us, on how successful we've been and how we've grown, that we do have that visual presence that people can actually be their true selves.*

In times of resistance and pushback to inclusion agendas, whether around gender or sexuality, visibility is crucially important, especially for those who might not be able to be openly out due to culture or family background. A statement demonstrated the role of supporter groups in addressing resistance:

*From an AFL perspective, we're still seeing a lot of pushback from football supporters in LGBT+ space. So I think more than anything it's just kind of a safe space for them to feel like they're not as much of an outsider as they probably think they are... So I think that having those supporter groups gives them a foot in the door to what the sport can look like, and then opens it up to them from there.*

Another participant explained how using the platform of a LGBT+ support group and connections to the sport club can have a positive impact on young people. They explained:

*At the Pride game last year in Sydney. So we had, we were allowed to have 40 people as the guard of honour on the ground... But one father contacted me and he said, look I've got a 12-year-old trans child who's struggling... And he came down to the ground and was in the guard of honour and changed his life. He felt completely accepted for the first time ever as a trans kid).*

Visibility is important to advance inclusion efforts, and positive stories and case studies can be disseminated amongst members and the wider club. However, many participants within cricket in particular, suggested that clubs and organisations are poor at disseminating or promoting their policies and practice around LGBT+ inclusion. One administrator commented:

*We [Cricket Victoria] don't share our story as well as I think I'd like us to.*

Promoting LGBT+ inclusion efforts means visibility is key and ensuring that LGBT+ fans are not erased as heteronormativity is common and can be damaging for LGBT+ fans. The visibility of players is equally important, and we have seen an increasing shift to women cricketers being more comfortable being open about their sexuality following the marriage equality debate. Using a wide range of stakeholders such as players, coaches, managers, and fans is crucial to being visible and proud of that visibility in sporting environments.

## NEXT STEPS: FOR THE BIG BASH TEAMS

There are some short term actions the Big Bash teams can take in establishing the supporter groups.

1. Engage with this report and research findings to better understand the background and success stories of supporter groups from the AFL.
2. Ensure the whole organisation is on board and understands why the groups are needed and the impact the group will have on both the club and LGBT+ communities.
3. Engage members of the LGBT+ communities and volunteers to establish a working group or committee.
4. Engage organisations such as Proud 2 Play, who Cricket Victoria already have an established working partnership with, to help initiate the supporter groups and engage the wider LGBT+ communities.
5. Once a working group has been formed for each group/ club, identify roles and responsibilities and action plan working forward.

## CONCLUSION: THE CHANGING NATURE OF LGBT+ INCLUSION

As we have outlined in the recommendations, the climate around LGBT+ inclusion has changed dramatically over the past decade, and has taken on added significance in recent years with Australia's legalisation of same-sex marriage. There is a growing body of research, primarily from the UK and USA whereby research indicates that the climate around LGBT+ athletes is changing, with a reduction in homophobia and homophobia (Anderson, 2011) and growing acceptance of LGB athletes across western societies (Magrath, Anderson and Bullingham, 2016). We note that there is much progress to be made around trans and intersex inclusion however. From our data, we can support these observations, and as many participants shared, there are more positive stories to share now, from an inclusion perspective, rather than simply discrimination and feelings of exclusion in sporting environments. That is not to say anti-LGBT+ discrimination does not exist, participants outlined that it does still occur. However, the nature of discrimination is changing, and with more accepting attitudes, people are more likely to call out language and use appropriate methods to document incidents and get clubs to follow up.

We conclude the report with some key observations and some powerful quotes from participants. LGBT+ supporter groups that currently exist within the AFL (although mainly around men's competition) give a platform for LGBT+ communities to engage with sport in a meaningful and positive way, and can have significant benefits to them on a personal level. In this way, Cricket Victoria and the Big Bash teams should be mindful that developing LGBT+ supporter groups can actively contribute to a healthier and inclusive society, whilst helping with various problems which are prevalent to LGBT+ communities: social isolation, marginalisation, discrimination, and issues around safety.

On the importance and need for LGBT+ supporter groups, one participant shared a powerful commentary:

*I wish they weren't [needed]. I think when we get to the day where they're not needed we've all done our jobs and the society is awesome. Why do you think people are... why are there charities for domestic violence? Why are there... because the general population still have in their thought process that we're different, that there's something wrong with us, that there's... if we touch them they'll become gay or it's in the water. Or there is still a huge homophobia and huge discrimination in the community as evidenced by every time the Swans do something that is remotely gay friendly or put a post up, all the diatribe that goes up, the members, I'm going to cut up my membership. When they said they were marching at Mardi Gras, they sent emails, I'm going to cut up my membership, this is about sport not about political issues, blah, blah, blah. And again, that makes them want to do it more. So, also not... it's also, so there's two sides to it. That's for the community education, that we're just the same as everybody else and we're just, our passion for whatever sport it is runs the same as everybody else. But it's also for the supporters themselves to have that safe space, to watch and participate even in the games that they love and whatever sport it is. So the stories that we get about, I finally can be at the football rather than hiding and I can wear my scarf with pride and I can sit with other people. Just hang out beforehand or afterwards or watch the away games. So we call it our little tribe. But they're now who they want to be at the football. And they feel safe and they... whereas in the past they haven't felt safe, they've always sort of been, I'm a supporter but I'm not me, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I just think that's awesome. So I think there's sorts of two sides.*

The sense of inclusion, belonging, and power of supporter and fandom groups should not be underestimated. The Big Bash League is seen as an opportunity to engage LGBT+ communities, which have traditionally been excluded from sport generally, and cricket specifically. Our concluding comment in this report is on the changing nature of stories heard in the space, and the emergence of more positive stories told around LGBT+ people in sport. On whether they had witnessed or experienced homophobia or transphobia, one participant commented:

*I haven't, personally. I've heard of lots of stories, more in the past. I mean you still hear people yell out, poofter, faggot, you play like a girl. You know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But I haven't... I mean I hear good stories now, not bad stories. So people who are proud of being who they are at the football and people who have curbed their language and their use in the member's areas where people sit. So... but at other grounds and other teams, I have not experienced it myself, but heard lots of other stories. Just, you don't have a right to be here, what would you know about football. Things like that. Again, it's more about aggressive behaviour, not necessarily to the individual, but yelled out to the players. And then someone comments, hey that's not appropriate. And then a bit of a stoush happens and then security gets called and that person gets removed. So that's the more of the stories that you hear now.*

We encourage Cricket Victoria and the Big Bash teams to engage with the recommendations, and use organisations and established partnerships in the LGBT+ sport space to enact the recommendations in order to facilitate LGBT+ supporter groups in the Big Bash, which in turn will have positive contributions to society and LGBT+ communities.

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