



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission



RESEARCH REPORT

The Impact of Indigenous Community Sports Programs: *The Case of Surfing*

Report on Findings



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

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Indigenous reference

In this report, the word 'Indigenous' is used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In some cases, 'Aboriginal' is used instead of 'Indigenous'. This is because a title or a particular piece of work being referred to uses this term or refers specifically to Aboriginal people.

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 5 |
| 2.0 INTRODUCTION | 8 |
| 2.1 Research project origins | 8 |
| 2.2 Introduction to the literature | 8 |
| 2.3 Aboriginal background | 9 |
| 2.4 Research partners | 10 |
| • Laureus Sport for Good Foundation | 10 |
| • Australian Sports Commission (ASC) | 10 |
| • The University of Queensland | 10 |
| • Surfing Australia | 10 |
| 2.5 Research aim | 11 |
| 2.6 Research framework | 11 |
| 2.7 Choice of context(s) | 12 |
| 3.0 METHOD | 14 |
| 3.1 Participants | 14 |
| • Surfing participants | 14 |
| • Program providers | 14 |
| • Community members | 14 |
| 3.2 Participant recruitment | 14 |
| 3.3 Additional ethical considerations | 14 |
| 3.4 Measures | 15 |
| 3.5 Data analysis procedures | 16 |
| 3.6 Experiences from the field | 16 |
| • Building and maintaining relationships | 16 |
| • Attitude of partnership | 16 |
| • Acknowledgment and reflection regarding researcher personal history | 17 |
| • Strengths-based approaches | 17 |
| • Carefully selected methods | 17 |
| 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION | 19 |
| 4.1 Surfing — General / Outside of programs | 19 |
| • Surfing characteristics (general) | 19 |
| • Surfing outside of programs | 20 |
| 4.2 Indigenous culture | 21 |
| • Views on Aboriginality | 21 |
| • Diversity of culture | 21 |
| • Navigating communities | 21 |
| • Characteristics ascribed to Aboriginal people | 22 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 4.3 Surfing program — models and conduct | 23 |
| • Program models | 23 |
| • Programs require support | 25 |
| 4.4 Surfing program outcomes | 32 |
| • General comments | 32 |
| • Individual capacity building | 33 |
| • Organisational capacity building | 35 |
| • Connecting with and learning from | 36 |
| • Programs have a variety of aims and perceived outcomes | 42 |
| 4.5 Concluding and cautionary comments about program outcomes | 46 |
| 5.0 CONCLUSION | 49 |
| 5.1 Introductory statements | 49 |
| 5.2 Surfing and surfing programs | 50 |
| 5.3 Sustaining programs | 51 |
| • Key people | 51 |
| • Program ‘costs’ | 51 |
| 5.4 Key outcomes | 52 |
| • Learning | 52 |
| • Building capacity | 53 |
| • Escape, diversion and associated benefits | 53 |
| 5.5 Limitations and future research | 53 |
| 5.6 Concluding remarks | 54 |
| REFERENCES | 56 |
| Appendix A: Experiences from the field | 60 |
| Appendix B: Viability and sustainability questionnaire | 67 |
| Appendix C: Social capital semi-structure interview guide | 70 |
| Appendix D: Combined summaries | 72 |
| Appendix E: Combined recommendations | 74 |





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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this research project was to consider the social impact of sport and physical activity on the lives of Indigenous Australians and their communities. There has been strong research interest in the links between sport and recreation programs and various health and social outcomes and a well-established body of literature exists on the use of sport to address social issues in mainstream society (A Thomson, Darcy and Pearce 2010). The consensus is that physical activity is an important contributor to health for all people (Nelson, Abbott and Macdonald 2010). While there is strong research interest, what remains unclear is the value and impact of sport and physical activity on Indigenous communities (Cairnduff 2001).

Nelson (2009) drawing on the work of Jonas and Langton (1994) indicates that an **'Aboriginal person is a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as an Aboriginal, and is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which he or she lives'** (p. 97). Even this definition has the potential to be politically charged. At a general level, the collective terms 'Indigenous' (capitalised) and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' people (title capitalised) appear to be broadly acceptable terms.

Indigenous groups cannot be considered to be homogenous as there is much diversity between and within groups (Nelson et al. 2010; Parker et al. 2006). It is therefore important this report is not viewed as taking an essentialist view of who Indigenous people are and how they develop. Rather, this paper attempts to describe and discuss the experiences of some individuals and their communities in site-specific surfing programs.

Research components

The overall aim of this research was to investigate how surfing as an area of physical activity contributed to the lives of Indigenous people who participated in selected surfing programs. In particular, this exploratory investigation sought to examine two main areas:

1. **How surfing programs for Indigenous people function** (with consideration given to elements of viability and sustainability)
2. **The impact of these programs on the social networks of participants and how these may or may not be leveraged for benefit** (with consideration given to elements of social capital).

Indicators developed by Beneforti and Cunningham (2002) were used to assess program viability and sustainability factors. The other broad framework of relevance to this research is the notion of social capital (Putnam 2000). At the heart of social capital is the view that people can treat their connections with others as an important resource, which they can draw on for a variety of purposes.

Surfing Australia was chosen as the contextual partner for this research and based on its recommendations, sites were approached in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. As a result, five surfing programs chose to participate in the research from the geographical regions of Forster and Gosford (New South Wales), Geelong (Victoria), Stradbroke Island (Queensland) and Yorke Peninsula (South Australia).

The research involved 98 participants from a variety of categories including surfing participants, program providers and community members.

All interviews and face-to-face questionnaires were fully transcribed by a professional transcription service. A hierarchical content analysis was undertaken (Côté and colleagues 1993) and was assisted by the use of qualitative data analysis software (QSR NVivo 9). Validation occurred through member checking, cross reading by research personnel at The University of Queensland and in conjunction with other project members. The representative stories of the communities were agreed upon by the research team and presented to the communities for agreement, modification and refinement as an extension of the member checking process (Culver, Gilbert and Trudel 2003). The quotes included in this report represent a range of participants and would generally not be included if they were only made by one participant in one instance.

Findings and discussion

The results of this project indicate that surfing should continue to be considered as an appropriate sport for use with Indigenous communities.

It should be noted, however, that any program needs to take into consideration the diversity of Indigenous culture, how communities operate and should seek appropriate guidance.

While there was great variety in terms of how surf programs in this study operated, there were some common elements across all programs including: strict surfer-to-coach ratios, opt-in opt-out structures and avoidance of controlling coach behaviours.

In addition to these characteristics, quality programs also had consistency in personnel (small groups rather than single providers).

This research project provided experience and information to develop recommendations relating to future similar programs including:

- Programs should be supported in longer term allotments
- Programs should collect meaningful data (well-constructed interview and survey protocols) over and above simple participation statistics
- To achieve meaningful outcomes, programs need continuity and should not be one-offs
- As transport costs represent the greatest barrier to participation in programs and surfing as a lifestyle pursuit, programs should consider the transport options most suitable for their area.

Individuals who participated in the research highlighted that it can take a long time for the effects of programs to be felt. As a result, longitudinal tracking by program providers is required to provide ongoing evidence in support of programs. Funding to programs should also be sought across longer time frames to provide a greater platform to generate positive outcomes.

Through this research it was possible to identify the development of individual and organisational capacity. In both areas, however, these capacities were not automatically enhanced. Careful planning and strong encouragement and support from program providers were required.

The most significant finding of this research related to the potential for surfing programs to connect participants so they could learn and develop in a variety of meaningful ways. Surf programs provided a way for Indigenous people to (re)connect with country, foster connections between participants and program providers, form bonds with other Indigenous children and unite community members to reinforce and pass on aspects of culture. The key recommendation in this study is that:

- Program providers, community members and funding bodies should acknowledge the ability of surf programs to enable participants to connect with and learn from the ocean, program providers, Indigenous peers and Indigenous community members as well as the significance of these connections and subsequent ways of learning.

Beyond (and in some ways because of) this significant achievement, surfing programs were also found to generate other outcomes including:

- Participants learn to be safe and confident in the surf
- Programs offer an escape from boredom or difficult life conditions and provide a way for participants to physically exert themselves in a positive way
- Participants develop and can self-monitor their physical skills and improve aspects of their physical capacities
- Participants also develop psycho-social skills related to confidence, self-esteem, empathy, maturity and independence, and these can have an impact beyond programs (at school and home)
- Programs also foster an understanding of first aid and surf etiquette which allows individuals to better navigate the coastal environment.

It should be acknowledged that programs were not without fault or limits. The findings of this research indicate that surfing cannot be considered to be a 'cure-all'. Not everyone surfs or likes surfing, it is possible to be injured, and just because children surf does not mean they will stop anti-social behaviours. The subsequent recommendation is that:

- Rather than emphasising the peripheral things sport can achieve, programs which do not explicitly and purposefully pursue other agendas (such as by strategic partnerships with health services) should be primarily considered with respect to the value of sport for sport's sake.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Research project origins

This research project considered the social impact of sport and physical activity on the lives of Indigenous Australians and their communities. It aimed to provide data and other information to inform the development of future community-focused programs and initiatives by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and other partners.

The ASC has promoted the positive influence of sport and structured physical activity to Australians since it was established in 1985. This has included strategically targeting groups considered under-represented in physical activity and sport. These groups typically include women, migrant groups, people with disability, and Indigenous people.

The ASC developed its Indigenous Sport Program to encourage Indigenous Australians to be more active and play sport at all levels. From 1993, the program promoted the many benefits of participating in structured sport, such as better physical health, social and emotional wellbeing, educational and employment outcomes and community cohesion as well as decreased levels of sedentary diseases, anti-social and criminal behaviour and substance abuse. These initiatives are now administered by the Participation Growth Support section within the Australian Sports Commission.

In November 2008, the ASC successfully applied to the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation for a three year funding commitment to support empirical research, training and development as well as equipment distribution.

2.2 Introduction to the literature

There is strong research interest in the links between sport and recreation programs and various health and social outcomes, and a well-established body of literature on the use of sport to address social issues in mainstream society (Thomson, Darcy and Pearce 2010). The consensus is that physical activity makes an important contribution to the health of all people (Nelson, Abbott and Macdonald 2010).

However, less clear is what physical activity means in the lives of Indigenous Australians and what (if any) impact physical activity programs have on the lives of those who participate (Cairnduff 2001). The Australian and state and territory governments (through the Council of Australian Governments) have demonstrated commitment to achieving better health outcomes and reducing Indigenous disadvantage through strategies such as 'Closing the Gap'.¹

Moreover, what has been established is that physical activity is embedded in a complex web of meanings in relation to family and the broader Aboriginal community (Thompson, Gifford and Thorpe 2000). It has been argued that sport and recreation, or organised physical activity, is a valuable community development tool that can help improve Indigenous social and health outcomes (Cairnduff 2001). The caution remains, however, of the need to move away from simply identifying problems in Indigenous communities toward a focus on providing realistic, evidence-based solutions to deal with the social and health issues facing Indigenous people (Cairnduff 2001).

1. *Closing the Gap* is a strategy that aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes. Endorsed by the Australian Government in March 2008, *Closing the Gap* is a formal commitment to achieve Indigenous health equality within 25 years.

2.3 Aboriginal background

Australia is generally considered to be a settler-colonial state (Wolfe 1991). This means the primary purpose of the Australian colonisation was the sequestration of land rather than the franchised approach to colonisation where the available labour (the Indigenous population) is mixed with land seizure (such as what occurred in India under British rule). The logical extension of this is the elimination of Indigenous populations since their presence serves no purpose to the intended use of the land. Given that Indigenous Australians have endured, with a continued presence on the land while the settlers were not repelled, then as Wolfe (1991) suggests, the relationship between settlers (and their continual flow over time) and the Indigenous population 'has been historically realised as a range of shifting balances' (p. 94). Many Australians would agree that no matter how the balances have shifted over time, they have generally tilted in favour of the settlers. In the Ben Chifley Memorial Lecture delivered in 2000 by Aboriginal lawyer and activist Noel Pearson (Pearson 2000) it was suggested the 'daggers of impediment' (Pearson's term) thwart the attempts of Indigenous Australians to make progress in Australian society. It is against this complex backdrop that social policy in terms of health, provision of facilities, recreational opportunities, education, and economic activity are played out.

The diversity of Australian Indigenous communities was also a consideration in identifying and clarifying the population this study sought to work with. The diversity of Indigenous communities is more widely distributed across the Australian landmass than non-Indigenous Australians (Nelson 2009).

The impact of the history of displacement is also significant and often those who identify as 'Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous' find it difficult to identify as a member of a particular tribe, group, clan or mob (all of these English words are widely used). While regional terms such as Murri, Koori and Nunga are sometimes used for Aboriginal people, these are not especially helpful as they conceal family ties to land and tensions within and across groups related to historical tenure of country. Nelson (2009), drawing on the work of Jonas and Langton (1994) indicates that an 'Aboriginal person is a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as an Aboriginal, and is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which he or she lives (p. 97). Even this definition has the potential to be politically charged. At a general level, the collective terms 'Indigenous' (capitalised) and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait² Islander' people (title capitalised) appear to be broadly acceptable terms.

To acknowledge the diversity of Australia's Indigenous people and groups is to recognise different historical patterns of land tenure, customs, languages and associations with country. Indigenous groups cannot be considered homogenous as there is much diversity between and within groups (Nelson et al. 2010; Parker et al. 2006). It is therefore important this report is not viewed as taking an essentialist view of who Indigenous people are and how they develop. Rather, this paper attempts to describe and discuss the experiences of some individuals and their communities in site-specific surfing programs.

There are however, certain characteristics that do enable the Indigenous population of Australia to be considered as a whole. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is relatively young (with a median age of 21 years compared with 37 years for the non-Indigenous population). This is generally attributed to the higher fertility and deaths rates occurring at younger ages among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). In terms of where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live, a little over 30 per cent reside in major cities, approximately 45 per cent in major regional areas and the balance in remote and very remote regions (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010; Shilton and Brown 2004). This information informed this research in that it inevitably had a youth focus (although not exclusively) and most sites which participated are located in metropolitan and major regional centres.

2 The Torres Strait is a body of water that separates the northern tip of Queensland from the Western Province of Papua New Guinea

Within the context of this research, beyond these basic descriptors of Indigenous Australians, the problem has historically been that 'The area in which (mainstream) research evidence is strongest, that is, physical activity and physical health, is not necessarily the area of most immediate relevance to Indigenous people, or the most practical or culturally appropriate in terms of data collection' (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002, p. 14). While this should not be taken to imply that Indigenous people are not concerned with the burden of chronic disease, it does indicate that family, community and Indigenous 'ways of knowing' have not been considered well (or even routinely ignored) in mainstream Indigenous research (for example Cowlshaw 1998, 2003). Indeed, Indigenous views of health differ from white western views of health (Cowlshaw, 1998, 2003; Nelson et al. 2010) in that it is generally a more holistic conception centred on connectedness (family, community, society) (Parker et al. 2006).

As a result, this report considers the learning of Indigenous surf participants while accepting the position of Fox and colleagues (1998) that in Indigenous settings, leisure cannot be separated from spiritual, cultural, social or physical connections.

2.4 Research partners

Laureus Sport for Good Foundation

The major funding partner for this research project was the independent international organisation Laureus Sport for Good Foundation (Laureus SfGF). The mission of Laureus SfGF is to use sport as a tool for social change through a world-wide program of sports-related community development initiatives. In 2008, the ASC received a funding commitment from Laureus SfGF for this research project.

Australian Sports Commission (ASC)

The ASC is the Australia's primary national sports administration and advisory agency, and the cornerstone of a wide-ranging sports system. Among other targets, it aims to increase the number of Indigenous Australians participating in structured sporting activities and provides pathways for longer-term retention. This research project and the continuing work of the ASC will contribute to the 'Closing the Gap' and 'preventative' health agendas of the Australian Government.

The University of Queensland

The University of Queensland was a partner in this research project and provided expertise in the development of the research agenda and the conduct of the project. The participation of the university was a result of the strong relationship between the ASC and the university's School of Human Movement Studies.

Surfing Australia

Surfing Australia is a not-for-profit national sporting organisation recognised by the ASC. It was formed in 1963 to establish, guide and promote the development of surfing in Australia. Surfing Australia is primarily responsible for providing the context and sites in which this research project took place.

2.5 Research aim

The overall aim of this research was to investigate how surfing contributed to the lives of the Indigenous people who engaged with selected surfing programs.

Given the lack of empirical research investigating sporting programs from a socio-cultural perspective, this project was largely exploratory in nature. As such, the aims of the research remained broad, with specific sites nominating areas of interest to be considered within the research. In particular, this investigation sought to examine two key areas:

1. **The functioning of surfing programs for Indigenous people** (with consideration given to elements of viability and sustainability)
2. **The effect of these programs on the social networks of participants and how these may or may not be leveraged for benefit** (with consideration given to elements of social capital, explained further in the next section).

Individual sites nominated particular areas of interest which were incorporated into the research questions at that particular site (for example, the ability of programs to bring people together). All the site-nominated areas of interest were considered under the broad research aims. The subsequent purpose of this empirical research is to inform the evaluation and development of sport programs for Indigenous youths (to facilitate evidence-based decision-making).

2.6 Research framework

Indicators for viability and sustainability developed by Beneforti and Cunningham (2002) were applied to this project. These indicators were developed in response to the desire of communities and sport and recreation providers to better determine the achievements of sport and physical activity programs beyond anecdotal reports. These indicators are highly relevant for measuring health and social impacts of sport and recreation programs in Indigenous communities.

The notion of social capital (Putnam 2000) provides the second broad framework for this project. While some contention exists about the veracity and definition of the term 'social capital', there is ample support in the literature for such a concept (Field 2006). Social capital provides a basis for a deeper understanding of how communities can be established and may offer direction for developing policies that build capacity within communities. At the heart of social capital is the view that the connections we build with others are an important resource we can draw on for a variety of purposes. Empirical studies have tended to confirm that social networks are significant in determining people's wellbeing with applications of the concept used to consider areas such as school attrition and academic performance, childhood intellectual development, sources of employment and occupational attainment, juvenile delinquency and its prevention, and immigrant and ethnic enterprise (Portes 1998).

A range of other theoretical constructs were drawn on for this research project. For example, some of the discussion is framed by Postcolonial research, Critical Race Theory and Self-Determination Theory. Indeed, the value of social capital as an orienting framework is that it allows (and to some degree encourages) the use of other theoretical perspectives.

2.7 Choice of context(s)

Surfing Australia was chosen as the contextual partner for various reasons:

- It is a recognised national sporting organisation with an established and professional relationship with the Australian Sports Commission
- A great number of Indigenous-specific surfing programs are delivered throughout Australia (by a range of providers in a variety of formats)
- Surfing programs offered to Indigenous communities have great variation in terms of history, structure, format and delivery
- Surfing has performance and recreational pathways, meaning individuals can engage competitively or recreationally
- Individuals may engage in formal settings (such as specific programs) but may also engage in their leisure time
- While more males participate in surfing programs than females, it is socially acceptable for females to participate
- There are (potentially incorrect) prima facie similarities between some notions of spirituality in surfing and Indigenous culture (such as connection to ocean).

Based on recommendations from Surfing Australia, sites were approached in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, with five programs participating in the research: Forster and Gosford (New South Wales), Geelong (Victoria), Stradbroke Island (Queensland) and Yorke Peninsula (South Australia).

Figure 1: Locations of surfing programs which participated in this research project



To help preserve anonymity for participants, the exact location of program sites are not identified in the descriptions below.



Site 1

This program operated as a weekend camp two to four times a year. The camps included daily 2-hour surf lessons operated by private surf coaches who provided all equipment. These sessions were funded and coordinated by the state surfing body, which also funded the food and accommodation (group sleeping in a community hall). Coaches, participants and others involved had to travel a significant distance to this site. While most participants were young (aged 8–16 years), the program was open to all ages and many adults also joined the sessions. At the time of writing, this site was not operating due to a lack of funding.

Site 2

This program operated through the local school and was by far the most regular of all programs involved in this research project. This site operated every week during school terms throughout the entire year. After lunch, students were taken to the beach in a mini-bus (a 20 minute drive) and would surf for approximately two hours before returning to school at the end of the school day. The program was only open to children in grades six to ten (11–17 years). Some non-Indigenous children attended programs but the school predominately comprised Aboriginal students. The sessions were provided by teachers (one was a qualified and experienced surf coach). Beyond the program, the school had very good relationships with the Indigenous community and also leveraged other relationships to make the program work (to manage bus hire, surfboards and storage). An issue for this program was its inability to engage students who did not attend school regularly (truancy) and people who had finished school.

Site 3

This site was operated by a local council in a partnership between its aquatic leisure centre and Aboriginal programs. This site used paid surf coaches for programs that operated three to four times a year and involved a series of 1.5-hour surf lessons on Saturdays, culminating in an informal surf competition in February each year. The competition day concluded with awarding of prizes and awards for all participants, who were Aboriginal children aged 10–17 years. Food and drinks were supplied to participants in a nearby park. The local Aboriginal Corporation was involved in this particular program to varying degrees during this research project, but in the final year of this research (2011) did not provide financial or formal voluntary support to the program.

Site 4

This site was operated by the local Indigenous Sport Development Officer using paid, private surf coaches. The program, which targeted Aboriginal youth, was comprised of one-off 2-hour surf coaching sessions, including food and drink. At the time of writing this site was no longer operating due to a lack of resources.

Site 5

This program was operated by an Aboriginal Cooperative using paid local Indigenous surf coaches. The state surfing body helped facilitate the operation of this program. Surfing events under the program included a large-scale Indigenous state surf titles (attracting more than 200 surfers) and smaller camps and programs. Programs incorporated people of all ages although the smaller scale programs were youth-focused. The Indigenous state surf titles were a formal event with a presentation ceremony and entry provided for overall winners into other surfing events. The smaller camps and programs involved surf coaches working with youths to improve and develop surfing abilities.

The emphasis of all events was developing surf skills (most notably water safety), with other outcomes a by-product (no programs explicitly addressed other issues through surfing). The program that came closest to targeting other outcomes through surfing was Site 2 (the school-based program) which had stated aims relating to the development of positive risk taking and confidence in participants.

3.0 METHOD

3.1 Participants

There were 98 participants in this study, including surfers, program providers and community members. To help protect anonymity (and in keeping with the University of Queensland's ethical clearance requirements), pseudonyms are used throughout this report. To enable further comparison, participants quoted in this report are identified by their involvement (such as 'program provider'). In some cases, these span more than a single category (for example: Sam — program provider and community member).

Surfing participants

Surfing participants were youths who identified as Aboriginal. There were 39 surfing participants aged 15–25 years and 70 per cent were male. Most participants could be considered novices although some had surfed for many years. In each surfing session there were generally six to 30 participants.

Program providers

Program providers were all adults who were employed (some unpaid) to operate the surf programs. Some were also youth workers involved in work parallel to the surf programs. Some, but not all of this group identified as Aboriginal. A total of 24 program providers aged 22–50 years participated in this research project, including six females.

Community members

Community members included designated leaders, Elders and members of Indigenous Councils as well as parents, friends and health and education personnel. All identified as Aboriginal. There were 35 community members aged 25–80 years, and approximately 70 per cent were male.

3.2 Participant recruitment

Through the network of Indigenous Sport Development Officers coordinated by the ASC, contact was made with Indigenous Councils and/or representative Elders from each site. After familiarisation visits, potential participants were provided verbal and hardcopy information sheets about the project and how they could get involved. At the next visit, consent forms were offered to potential participants for signing.

3.3 Additional ethical considerations

This research adheres to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and incorporates the NHMRC Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (National Health and Medical Research Council 2003). In particular, strategies were incorporated into the research design with regard to reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity. Participants were informed they were free to decline participation in the project or withdraw at any time without penalty and their involvement was on an anonymous basis (except where participants requested to be identified).

3.4 Measures

Beyond the NHMRC's guidelines, the approach used in this research sought to adopt aspects of an anti-racist research methodology. Anti-racist research recognises there are multiple ways of knowing and that what is known and by whom depends on the context of the research (Dei 2005). As a result, the methodology sought to incorporate the anti-racist notions of: building relationships (for example Chino DeBruyn 2006; Dunne 2000), acknowledging the personal histories of each researcher (for example Max 2005; Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008), adopting a strengths-based approach (Bond 2005), and considering the cultural interface (for example Nakata 2007).

Qualitative methodology enables participants to make their own choices about the knowledge they wish to share (Patton 2002). Given the exploratory nature of this project and the need for high degrees of research sensitivity, a qualitative research methodology was deemed most appropriate. A full consideration of the reasons for this decision and the lessons learned regarding the implementation of these research methods in Indigenous sport settings is included in **Appendix A: Experiences from the field**.

Recognising there is variation within and between different Indigenous communities, the research undertaken was collaboratively identified and conducted to meet the individual needs of each participating community. Accordingly, the research used various methods based on the needs and wants of each community. The methods included face-to-face questionnaires (based on the guidelines of Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; **Appendix B: Viability and sustainability questionnaire**), field notes, photographs, video footage, participant observation, document analyses, semi-structured interviews (**Appendix C: Social capital semi-interview structure interview guide**), photo elicitation and focus groups (Patton 2002) though these were increasingly referred to as group 'yarns' (see Rossi, Rynne and Nelson, in press) to maintain a connection to Indigenous vernacular. Data collection methods were also developed in relation to emerging data and initial contact with communities. So while each site was somewhat different, the typical progression of data collection was:

1st site visit — connect with communities and source information to inform the project

- Describe the proposed research framework
- Ask communities to consider their expectations of the surfing programs and what they would like to know more about
- Secure community endorsement

2nd site visit — engagement with surf program

- Data collection through field notes, observations, photos and videos
- Further development of research protocols
- Securing informed consent from potential participants
- Possible data collection through face-to-face questionnaire

3rd site visit and beyond (up to 5 visits) — engagement with surf program participants

- Secure informed consent from potential participants (ongoing)
- Data collection through face-to-face questionnaire (strict format administered with program providers and selected community members and filled out by the researcher)
- Data collection through semi-structured one-one-one interviews and/or focus groups (loose, conversational format administered with all categories of participants on an ongoing basis)
- Member checking with participants regarding emerging themes (ongoing)

The research team travelled more than 76 000 km during this project (including more than 64 000 km by plane, 12 000 km by car and 420 km by boat). The resulting data set included 17 sets of field notes, 32 one-on-one or focus group interviews, 646 photographs and 422 video clips.

3.5 Data analysis procedures

All interviews and face-to-face questionnaires were fully transcribed by a professional transcription service. The research team then used an iterative process to develop storylines within the data. This hierarchical content analysis followed procedures suggested by Côté and colleagues (1993) and was assisted by the use of qualitative data analysis software (QSR NVivo 9). This process necessarily relied on the analysts' subjective decision-making process but was enhanced through the use of decision-making heuristic developed by Côté and Salmela (1994). Validation occurred through member checking but also through cross reading by research personnel at The University of Queensland and in conjunction with other project members. The representative stories of the communities were agreed upon by the research team and presented to each community for agreement, modification and refinement as an extension of the member checking process (Culver, Gilbert and Trudel 2003).

3.6 Experiences from the field

The research team learned a great number of lessons throughout this project. While it is more appropriate to provide detailed discussions of these insights in other forums (such as journals; also see the review in **Appendix A: Experiences from the field**), it is worthwhile briefly mentioning some key discoveries and recommendations in this report.

Building and maintaining relationships

There is (understandably) a degree of cynicism in Australia's Indigenous community about programs and projects conducted by research and government institutions. To counter the potentially damaging and limiting effects of this general attitude, this research:

- used existing networks already respected and trusted by the selected communities (such as the Indigenous Sport Development Officer network)
- invested in multiple site visits with a stable group of personnel
- received strong project leadership and coordination from key partner agencies (such as the ASC).

Attitude of partnership

The research team were keen to acknowledge they were, and continue to be, guests in their land (or country) and as such, need to be cognisant of the cultural protocols and common courtesies that have been ignored by some institutions and agencies in the past. For this reason, and to further strengthen the program of research, a real effort was made to approach communities with a genuine attitude of partnership. Initial contact with communities was made through specific Indigenous Council or other representative bodies regardless of what other authorities may have had some claim (such as state departments of education and other government organisations). Moreover, participating sites were viewed as partners in the design of the project as well as the collection and analysis of data.



Acknowledgment and reflection regarding researcher personal history

There was a need for the research team to engage in meaningful and ongoing personal and group reflection. This reflection was enhanced by engaging with Indigenous participants, other researchers and other partner organisations (some engaged in the project and some who were not). The scheduling time for reflection at regular intervals (before, during site visits, immediately after, and in the weeks following site visits) was important and the individual and group reflections were recorded and drawn upon in subsequent research design and reflective activities.

Strengths-based approaches

While Indigenous people may experience poverty and a lack of material resources, the researchers (along with many Indigenous organisations and individuals) advocate for research and interventions in Indigenous communities which are strengths-based rather than deficit-focused (Bond 2005; Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008). A strengths-based approach recognises the existing knowledge, resilience and capacity within Indigenous individuals and communities and starts from this place, rather than viewing Indigenous people from a position of being 'poor'. In the case of our study, we sought to examine the network of relations and interactions that did exist (such as between surfing participants and program providers) rather than focusing on what was missing or absent in each community (such as focusing on dysfunctional family relations).

Carefully selected methods

A qualitative methodology was chosen as it allows the consideration of context and different ways of knowing. One method used was semi-structured interviews that took the form of one-on-one and group yarns. Semi-structured interviews are based on the premise that (to paraphrase George Kelly 1955) the best way to know what someone is thinking is to ask. Consideration was given to the threatening nature of the make-up of the interview (such as the number of researchers present), the tone and flow of the interview (such as language used, progression of questions, strengths-based), and potential for employing non-traditional methods (such as photographic and video stimulus). In the analysis of data, extended versions of participant checking were used (such as checking accuracy of transcripts, opportunities to change or revise statements, selected participants involved in analysis of emerging themes). Finally, in addition to the standard ethical clearance procedure, ongoing consideration was given to the ethical representation of participants.



SURFING VICTORIA
PLAY IT SAFE
BY THE WATER

Snapper

LORD & M
ENERGY

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In presenting this research it is important to note that qualitative research uses the words of participants to characterise the overall situation. Quotes included here represent a range of participants and would generally not be included if they were only made by a single participant in one instance.

This report aims to be accessible to government, sporting and Indigenous audiences. Its language and style is intentionally quite colloquial and formal references are minimised (while still indicating the level of sophistication in the analysis and discussion of findings). Finally, the researchers were heavily engaged in this research (as indicated by the high number of site visits, field notes, interviews and multimedia files) and, as is encouraged in ethnographic research, this reports features participant (researcher) observations.

The following sections outline key findings of this project. It should be noted the extremely 'rich' nature of the qualitative data collected means a range of findings beyond those provided here are possible. It was also not possible to explore all findings presented in this report to their full extent. As a result, the research team encourages readers of this report to contact the authors if they have areas they would like to explore further.

Having said that, the key findings presented relate to the characteristics of surfing, Indigenous culture, the models and conduct of surfing programs, the perceived outcomes of surfing programs and suggestions for future surfing programs. Each section includes a short summary and where appropriate, recommendations are made. A collated list of summary items is found in **Appendix D: Combined summaries** and similarly, a list of all recommendations is found in **Appendix E: Combined recommendations**.

4.1 Surfing — General / Outside of programs

Surfing characteristics (general)

Through this research it was possible to establish or confirm that surfing:

- can be competitive and non-competitive
- is difficult (physically demanding and takes time to improve)
- provides a range of benefits (considered to be healthy, operates in an ever changing environment, delivers a sense of freedom)
- like many sports it requires time and adequate practice opportunity to reach a level of competence.

Somewhat problematically for the less prevalent sport of surfing in Indigenous communities, previous research has indicated that in Indigenous culture, non-dominant sports are marginalised and kids are often 'teased' for their participation (Nelson 2009). In short, it makes it less attractive for a child to engage in sports other than football for boys (rugby league and Australian rules football) and netball for girls. One reason for the popularity of these sports is that team sports are viewed as more communal and therefore more akin to the social interaction of Indigenous communities (Cairnduff 2001). As described later in this report, the surf programs are very communal and provide an opportunity for families and groups to come together. Another associated advantage of surfing reported was that males

and females generally participated in the same space. This had important implications for families with boys and girls, in that unlike other sports that host championships of males and females at different times and different venues (such as basketball), the entire family could come to the beach together.

A fairly distinctive feature of surfing compared with many other sports in terms of the mastery of skill and development and maintenance of self-esteem is the internal focus of participants. In surf lessons, participants are generally too focused on their own performance (balance, body position, wave formation) to notice too much about the performance of others. So when people fall, slip, or do not perform as hoped there is far less chance their peers have noticed. The opposite is the case in organised ball sports popular in most of the communities (rugby league, Australian rules football, netball and basketball), where if you miss a kick, pass or goal everyone notices.

It should be acknowledged that participants in this project reported surfing was not without some drawbacks. Not everyone likes surfing. Some are scared of the water and of sharks, in some places the water is particularly cold especially in the southern states of Australia, and some simply prefer other sports. Another issue was the level of risk designated by education departments, which has made it increasingly difficult to maintain surfing programs in the curriculum. Finally, while they were not directly observed at programs, participants made reference to negative aspects sometimes linked with surfing such as violence (associated with localism and territorialism), a 'soft' drug culture and a 'truant' culture.

Surfing outside of programs

Participants were able to describe a number of surf-related careers participants may be exposed to through involvement in programs. While it was clear a career as a professional surfer was unlikely for most, there were examples of those who had involvement in the industry as surf coaches as well as with clothing and surfboard manufacturing.

As well as participants being exposed to opportunities through surfing, the children were able to bring surfing into their non-sporting lives also. Examples of this generally related to school work where children would relate their experiences in surfing through their class in art (drawing, painting and sculpting) and English (writing). Some participants would also actively engage in surfing outside the programs. This depended on their access to surf boards and appropriate transport and supervision. These children typically surfed with their parents, friends and sometimes social workers. Of course, many were unable to surf outside the designated programs because they did not have adequate access to equipment, transport or had not developed the requisite skills.

Recommendation

- Surfing should continue to be considered as an appropriate sport for use with Indigenous communities.

4.2 Indigenous culture

Views on Aboriginality

There were quite strong views voiced about what Aboriginality entailed. For some it was about being part of and contributing to a family beyond skin colour and blood lines, while for others it was more complicated: '...there's great concerns about Aboriginality and about what constitutes being Aboriginal ... a lot of people call it the nigger in the woodpile complex, where they just go back, search, search, search, search until they find a bit of Aboriginal blood and then they — and that then constitutes being Aboriginal ... Which, to me, is wrong because I trace my history back and I've got — my great, great grandfather was Chinese ... but they won't accept me down at Chinatown ... the argument is if you haven't had a continuous connection to Aboriginal people then you shouldn't be classified as Aboriginal' (Sam, program provider and community member). While it is well beyond the scope of this research project to examine these views in any depth, it was necessary to raise them so as to characterise the complex political environment these programs operate within.

Diversity of culture

One of the things made clear was the diversity of Indigenous culture. Bill (program provider and community member) made this very point by saying: '... each different Indigenous group, the cultural stuff is different ...'. Similarly Sam (program provider and community member) said: 'Aboriginal culture is a living culture and it has to evolve'. This is very much in keeping with the previously discussed research cautioning against considering Aboriginal people as an homogenous group. Thomson and colleagues (2010) make the point that culture is contemporary, not only in history. The subsequent suggestion is that acknowledging the diversity within the Aboriginal community can help avoid overgeneralisations and enhance sensitivity and awareness (Hanrahan 2004).

Navigating communities

Despite the diversity in culture, an aspect similar across all sites was the presence of 'preferred' community access protocols.

One aspect was the need for an appropriate 'welcome to country'. Sometimes this was quite formal as described by Gary (program provider and community member) when he said: 'For us it's important to have welcome country and some dances or some things to welcome because welcome to country is welcoming other mobs to our country for that period of time'. Similarly, Dean (program provider and community member) made the comment that for him: '...it's seeking that endorsement from other tribal areas to come and conduct business on that land. So the analogy is like a knock at the door. If you go to someone's house, you just don't open the door and walk in. What do you do? You knock on the door.' The lack of an appropriate welcome to country was considered disrespectful and would not encourage productive programs and relationships.

Aside from welcomes, there were preferred entry protocols that related to operating through the right channels. Having worked extensively in Aboriginal communities across Australia, Bill (program provider and community member) emphasised this point by saying: '... what you need is someone who actually is a liaison person will tell you what the cultural stuff is and how to run your program'. As described in the method section of this report, for this project the Indigenous Sport Development Officers helped researchers navigate this somewhat complicated and generally unspoken network.

There were reported benefits to adhering to these 'ways of doing business' with Bill (program provider and community member) suggesting that: '*...once you've proven yourself to one Indigenous family, then they talk to their cousins who talk to their cousins*' and Indigenous Sport Development Officer Dean saying: '*... by going through me, you've been able to capture specific stuff by talking to the appropriate person*'. That was certainly our experience when conducting this research.

Characteristics ascribed to Aboriginal people

Many characteristics were ascribed to Aboriginal people. By far the most commonly discussed characteristics of Aboriginal children were they are physically skilled, talented or naturally gifted. While much of the comment came from (mainly non-Indigenous) surf coaches, there were a range of Aboriginal community members (coaches, Elders, parents) who offered the same view. The overall sentiment was captured in a discussion with Aboriginal health worker Kyle when he said:

'No matter what sport they play, they're talented in just about any sport. In sport — they'll never say no to sport ... you rarely see Aboriginal kids not liking sport. Some of them, only because of their upbringing because they just sit around the house being lazy and that's the way they've been brought up. But you'll find that they'll have talents for sport, you know they've got the skills and all that to play any sport, it's just a matter of getting them motivated.'

(Kyle, community member)

While this research does not deny the notion of natural ability in Indigenous people, it is not possible to support the essentialist notion that all Indigenous children like sport and are good at sport (Nelson 2009). As noted later in this report, there were clear cases where children did not enjoy or were not particularly good at surfing.

Summary

- There is diversity of Indigenous culture (in that it is dynamic and ever changing) and communities have somewhat complicated micro and macro politics associated with them.
- Many characteristics are ascribed to Aboriginal people and in the context of this research it was the natural talent of children that was emphasised by participants.

Recommendation

- Any program needs to take into consideration the diversity of Indigenous culture and how communities operate and should seek appropriate guidance.

4.3 Surfing program — models and conduct

Program models

Eligibility

Most programs had a fairly open approach to the involvement of participants. The general consensus was that programs were for Aboriginal people only (although some exceptions were made for a small number of friends and extended family). Most were aimed at Aboriginal youth but three of the programs allowed and encouraged adult participation at certain times. These flexible aspects of the programs were highly valued by participants as they contributed to the family atmosphere and supported the community in coming together (an aspect also emphasised later in this report).

There were some further conditions of entry, especially in the program operated through the school. Children had to be enrolled students and were required to attend school on the day of the program (they could not just turn up to surf). They also had to sign a 'behaviour contract' outlining the behaviours expected while in the public space. This aligned with the school's aims of increasing attendance and maintaining standards of behaviour. Several teachers and youth workers reported increased attendance on days when the surfing was on. Bill (program provider and community member) recalled: 'If there's surfing on Friday they go to school' and went on to describe this as a 'win for the schools'. Even programs that did not operate through schools in school hours were thought to generate benefits. For example, the skills and capacities promoted in programs (such as improved self-esteem, discussed later in this report) were perceived to have flow-on effect at home and at school. As a result 'the classroom teachers are happier' (Bill). This aligns with previous studies (for example Cairnduff 2001; Dinan-Thompson, Sellwood and Carless 2008) that suggest that sport and physical activity have been used as an avenue to increase attendance at school and other educational outcomes.

Students were aware of the required behaviours during the program and could provide examples of the consequences if they did not behave accordingly: 'If you mucked up on surfing days you miss out for the next day and get detention ... Yeah, my mate is staying at school today because of bad language last week. He wasn't allowed to come this week' (Harry, surfing participant). The children agreed this had caused them to refrain from unacceptable behaviour such as swearing because they did not want to miss out on surfing.

Program approach

Some aspects of the programs were quite strict. For example, they all had firm coach-to-surfer ratios (generally more coaches than suggested by the national body) which was directly related to safety. Although participants were largely unaware of these provisions, program providers were very careful to adhere to them. Structured surfing competitions were also part of the program, which were held at two sites and included timed event heats and scoring from judges. These competitions were generally casual with Sam (program provider and community member) noting: 'The competition idea was just to make them feel like they'd achieved something ... just to say 'hey you've done really well'.

Despite the emphasis on safety, the programs were quite relaxed with flexible opt-in, opt-out lessons. The autonomy-supportive environments observed at surf programs (and not a controlling-coach environment) are linked with greater performance, self-worth, enjoyment, effort, and intrinsic motivation (Mageau and Vallerand 2003). For surf coaches, this was intentional: 'I just leave it a little bit more open for them to find their own way' (Duncan, program provider). Moreover, the coaches and program staff did not want to be disciplinarians. June (program provider) characterised this sentiment by saying: 'I generally let them go and do what they want unless I can see someone either getting hurt or they're

damaging something'. Teacher Ray (program provider) expressed that this was certainly a difference between surfing and other sports: 'It's not as structured as what you might have in a lot of other sports'. Several participants noted the prevailing surf environment provided the structure so coaches were not required to be highly controlling in their actions. Exemplifying this was Ray's comment: '... you've got that ocean that's always going to keep pushing them back towards you anyway'.

There was a prevailing attitude that surfing and the people associated with the sport fit quite well with the needs and desires of the Aboriginal communities. The interchange between Gary and Sally (program providers and community members) demonstrates this:

Gary We do structure it up to a point where we know that we can operate and get through the day ... I mean one thing about the crew from [surfing] they're real casual people and nothing fazes them. Like you move a whole event — they do it all the time to follow the swell. It doesn't seem to faze them. They're a pretty casual sort of breed in the way they operate. We are much the same. I think that's why it fits really well. We're reasonably casual. We have a laid back sort of attitude.

Sally It's more a casual. It's still structured but it's casual.

Gary: We're still structured because we know we need to get through certain things but we don't force ... As I said I think the partnership works for us because our own operational — the way we operate — we say BFT time and stuff don't we? Black fella time.

Sally: Yeah.

Gary: It's pretty easy to do that.

Sally: I think because it's an event where it's not just about competing, it's actually connecting and it's about identity and things like that that it's important that you have that laid back type structure because we're not saying if you can only stand up you can participate. So that laid back structure makes it more open and inviting for others and makes it more that holistic day for the whole family. That means just families sitting on the beach and some participating I think it's good.

Summary

- There is great variety in terms of how programs operate, however, there were some common elements across all programs. These included strict surfer-to-coach ratios, opt-in opt-out structures and avoidance of controlling coach behaviours.

Recommendation

- These elements of surfer-to-coach ratios, opt-in and opt-out structures and avoidance of controlling behaviours should continue in programs to facilitate self-determined forms of motivation.

Programs require support

There are key people in each program

A common feature across the most successful sites (those operating for multiple years with high levels of satisfaction from participants and continued funding) was the involvement of key people. Several participants emphasised the importance of these individuals and Angela (program provider) commented: 'Without me, with the connections, with the rapport, with the knowledge, I don't think it would work to be quite honest with you'. These key people were from diverse backgrounds and included non-Indigenous people with experience living and working with Indigenous communities. For example, Ray (program provider) had worked on Thursday Island, as a Tuna fisherman, and had built fences on the Nullarbor Plain. Some Indigenous people that were key to the success of programs had overcome their own struggles to build their life and careers and held senior positions in government and Aboriginal organisations and it was felt these people had high levels of life experience. Spoonley and Taiapa (2009) described the value of people from diverse backgrounds in their consideration of the sport and leisure needs of minority groups.

These key people all had a passion for surfing (having taken it up as a lifestyle choice) and/or a passion for encouraging Indigenous people to participate in sport and physical activity. There was a strong sense their diverse backgrounds allowed these key people to leverage situations to the best advantage of the programs and to better understand the needs of their particular community.

'The importance of developing this understanding was underscored by Angela (program provider) who commented: '... relationships are what make these programs work'. It was also clear these relationships were not developed over a short time. This was characterised by Bill (program provider and community member): '...you have to build the relationships, and that just takes time'. A key theme emerged relating to the need for **consistency in personnel**. Bill made the point that 'you've really got to have people in for the long haul'. It was clear the strong preference for communities was to have a single point of contact, demonstrated by Dean (program provider and community member): '... the first thing that I would say is that, when you're dealing with Indigenous communities, have one representative'. Jim (program provider) mentioned this consistency in staff was important even if others were involved: 'I think you can have a few extra people along as long as there's ... core people'. The importance of this continuity has been described in other research as a key factor in the success of sport programs (Cairnduff 2001).



A single contact person or key person allowed great rapport building and trust and enabled a number of programs to function well. However, in some instances this arrangement was problematic. It was a major issue if the key person could no longer be involved. Kyle (community member) said in his situation the program ‘... would shutdown probably because no one else can do it’. Single point of contact arrangements also created other issues. From a program coordinator’s perspective, June (program provider) described how her single point of contact in the community was hard to reach: ‘I rang that [place where the contact works] again and I said, “look I can’t get hold of [the contact], is there anyone else I can speak to about organising this camp?” She said no’. The data showed that in the communities we worked with, often a single person was charged with helping organise surfing events. This person was often the only contact for many events (such as surfing, dancing and health). June further emphasised this problem: ‘... [my contact] is the one man band sort of thing ... if [she] is busy doing everything ... there’s maybe no-one else to do it’.

Two programs susceptible to this dilemma were operated by an Indigenous Council and an Aboriginal Cooperative. The reason these programs overcame the problem and were successful was because each had a small team of people responsible for the programs, rather than one individual. The composition of this group shifted and changed over the three years of this research project but a high degree of continuity in the team was maintained (one or two people left and were replaced at a time rather than the entire group). The benefits of this were described by Gary (program provider and community member): ‘... we’ve got a team that would pick it up and will continue ... I would hate to think that if one of us fell over and the program didn’t continue that would be — yeah I’m pretty confident that we’ve got a good bunch of — team of people that would pick it up and run with it even if I walked out tomorrow or Sally walked out tomorrow’.

Summary


- Key people had diverse backgrounds, a passion for surfing and/or a passion for Indigenous participation.
- Consistency in program personnel was critical to success and was most effective when the management team was a small group and not a single provider.

Recommendation

- Programs should aim to create small working groups with fairly stable membership.

Programs need financial support

All programs were provided free to Aboriginal youth and funding support was thus needed for equipment, coaching and other requirements. This was sourced from government bodies (such as state departments of sport and recreation and justice, plus local councils) and Indigenous Land Councils and Aboriginal Cooperatives. The surf industry (surfboard rider foundations and surf clothing companies) and sporting bodies (Surfing Australia and the state and territory surfing organisations) also supported the programs, which operated on cash budgets ranging from \$3500 (for the school program that could leverage other resources and support) to \$30 000 (for programs that ran on multiple occasions each year).



Equipment, coaches, food and transport comprised the main costs. Equipment generally purchased or hired included surf boards and (for some programs) wetsuits. Some programs also had to pay for storing surfboards. All participants reported that equipment was of sufficient quantity and quality and in some programs the equipment was brand new. Program providers identified that approximately 10 per cent of their equipment would need replacing in the near future.

Programs employed qualified coaches to operate surfing sessions, with the importance of this emphasised by Sam (program provider and community member): 'I'm a believer if you want to do something for Aboriginal people, they deserve the best ... My attitude is, us Aboriginal people we've been volunteers in our own country for too long. So if I can't pay them I won't do it ... So I pay — there's six professional surf people down there on that beach. I pay the lot of them. They're all on overtime. I don't have volunteers very much ... So basically I pay for all of the staff to make sure it works properly'. Beyond this, it was clear surf coaching is a specialised area that requires qualified people directing and supervising it. The implication is that qualified coaches are required at each event and can cost up to \$4000 per event (depending on the size and duration of sessions).

Buses were hired to transport participants to and from the beach in some programs and this cost had implications for program providers (costs) and program participants (accessibility) which are discussed further in this report.

Regarding the provision of food and drinks, the amount, type and source varied across programs. In some programs, it was included in the budget, while in others it was provided by health services or Aboriginal community organisations.

Because programs operate at no cost to participants, all relied on funding to cover running costs. Thus programs can never be self-sufficient under the current models of operation (nor is this an intended aim). Throughout the literature, there is a strong call for partnerships between schools, communities and/or programs with the suggestion this may leverage other resources to enhance long-term success (Dinan-Thompson et al. 2008). In the current research, Councils and Aboriginal Cooperatives were involved in these partnership and in some cases they were able to leverage further support. So while the programs operated by the Council, the school and the Aboriginal Cooperative managed (with some difficulty at times) to negotiate issues related to ongoing funding and support over several years, other programs have struggled.

The lack of long-term funding and support caused much anxiety and in two sites meant the programs could not continue. Characterising this annual need to 'chase funding' Sam (program provider and community member) said: '... every year I'm looking to try and fund from another source'. Similarly June (program provider) said: 'Well it's virtually like a yearly thing and in about June this year I'll have to apply for more funding'. While highly skilled in other areas (providing sport programs), the people applying for funding typically had little experience and received little guidance on how to complete applications for the best chance of success: 'There was no guidance [when I came into this position]. It was "here's your funding applications, here's who to call if you have trouble, good luck"' (June).

There was a strong sense of 'opportunity lost' because of these short funding cycles. Jim (program provider) said: 'If you can guarantee to the kids that it's going to be coming up again, they're not just going to lose interest — it's a one off. They can actually get enthusiasm and then just keep it going'. When speaking of the possibilities for the program if longer term funds were secured, Bill (program provider and community member) said: '... if it was a five year program and ... at the rate it's going, it's a bit scary about where it could wind up in five years. Because we would have the Indigenous surf coaches ... you have to build the relationships, and that just takes time ... You can't do that in one year. That would probably be the limitation [with] the one year funding. You've really got to bite the bullet ... what you're really talking about is a long-term thing ... Otherwise what happens when the money stops?' Bill's comments highlight the tension between the need for long-term investment and

planning and funding generally being provided in annual instalments. Beyond this, a criticism of many Indigenous programs has been that evaluations have tended to be anecdotal, ad hoc and/or primarily financial acquittals rather than collecting meaningful data that may be used as evidence to secure ongoing funding (Cairnduff 2001). This research represents a way of countering this criticism for the communities involved.

Summary


- Annual budgets ranging from \$3500 to \$30 000 are sourced from government bodies (such as state departments of sport and recreation, local governments and justice organisations) as well as Indigenous Councils and groups (Land Councils and Cooperatives), the surf industry (surfboard riders, manufacturers) and sporting bodies (national and state).
- These organisations and groups help fund the purchase or hire of equipment, employment of surf coaches as well as transport and food.
- The reliance on short-term external funding is a key issue for programs because it is time consuming and perceived as being dependent on 'loose' and changing criteria.

Recommendations

- Extended funding support for programs should be provided, which can be achieved by adopting operating models such as the local government Council-operated program that lists the surfing program as a budgeted item which contributes to desired Indigenous community outcomes.
- Collection of meaningful data (such as well-constructed interview and survey protocols) over and above simple participation statistics is important.

Programs receive support other than dollars

Aside from the paid contributions of individuals and organisations, other organisations supported the surfing programs. These included government organisations such as the Federal Department of Child Services, state police and local governments, which provided people and resources for events (generally from their own budgets). The state education department and individual schools sometimes provided personnel (by releasing teachers for coaching and supervision) and equipment (purchasing equipment from sport budgets). Indigenous Councils, Cooperatives and health services also provided people and resources. Most program staff from these Indigenous groups were volunteers and while Indigenous community groups generally supported programs, sometimes their involvement was limited due to financial and capacity constraints or tensions between groups. Indigenous Sport Development Officers and youth workers from non-government organisations also supported programs by providing staff and other resources. Parents of participants and extended families often attended programs and contributed. Media supported events through television, radio and newspaper coverage and the surfing industry provided products for giveaways. The official surfing bodies (generally state associations) often provided support in terms of program oversight.



While highly valued, this support represented the ‘gift economy’ present in virtually all programs. Gary (program provider and community member) made the point about the difference between the budget they worked with and what the actual program was worth: ‘...that dollar amount is just the tip of an iceberg where as you say it’s people’s time, coaches, transport all that kind of stuff’. For example, staff costs are somewhat hidden in many programs because some people assisting on an event day are employed by organisations such as the state education department or local government. Louise (program provider) explained her situation: ‘I don’t get paid for today but I’ll get time in lieu’. In short, it costs money but not for the surf program directly. Associated with this, in some programs, coaches and program providers will bring family and friends who help with supervising activities, cooking barbeques and cleaning up for little or no money. Equipment costs also remain somewhat hidden in some programs, with boards and wetsuits being borrowed or donated with similar arrangements made for storage. Actual transport costs are similarly hidden, with program providers and coaches often absorbing fuel costs and buses borrowed or secured for small donations. The idea this economy is hidden is important as this type of ‘capital’ (to use Bourdieu 1985) never appears on the books.

Summary

- A range of other organisations provide support for programs including government departments and organisations, Indigenous groups, media, the surf industry, parents and friends, as well as sporting and youth support organisations.
- There is a ‘gift economy’ in virtually all programs with personnel, equipment and transport costs being absorbed by individuals and other organisations.

Timing and frequency of program

In determining the timing and frequency of programs at each site, there were a number of factors that came into consideration including the community’s preferences, funding availability (and the period of funding), popularity of other sports, timing of the school year, the season and prevailing weather conditions. With the exception of the school-based program, the most important factor regarding the frequency of programs was the funding. As Sam (program provider and community member) put it: ‘I am governed by funds and I can’t afford [any more programs]’. Beyond this, the climate tended to determine when it was desirable to hold camps with only the northern-most program operating year-round.

Despite the variation in timing and frequency across the research sites, there was a profound and pervasive sense that Indigenous surf programs need continuity. That is, they should not be one-offs. Gary (program provider and community member) highlighted this: ‘...obviously when you have something that has a bit of longevity to it and a lot of support there for that I think that is a key’ and Sam (program provider and community member) said: ‘We try to keep the order of the programs regular so that the kids get used to it’. Clearly the ability to run programs with some regularity and/or continuity is highly dependent on financial and other resources. Along with others, Dean (program provider and community member) made the connection between short-term funding and a lack of meaningful outcomes in programs: ‘...if government run — if they give me money to run a program here, a one-off program what does it mean? ... It means it was a good day. I got active for one day ... but what does it mean? ... Because it doesn’t add value to anything, it’s just a good day. Money is spent, money gone, good day, finished’.

Summary

- A number of factors determine the timing and frequency of programs. Factors considered include community preferences, available funding, positioning of other sports, the timing of the school year and the prevailing season.

Recommendation

- To achieve meaningful outcomes, programs need continuity and should not be one-offs. Programs should seek funding on this basis.
- This also requires funding agencies to include program longevity as a possible criteria upon which funding may be awarded.

Attendance at programs

Attendance at programs was generally very strong but could fluctuate unexpectedly. Individual sessions typically included 8 to 20 surfers, with a commensurate number of coaches. The events (several sessions in a day or over a weekend) generally catered for around 40 surfing participants with the smallest event having approximately 20 participants and the Indigenous state titles attracting more than 200 surfers. The mix of males and females varied greatly between sites.

While some fluctuations occurred at sites, the program providers at one particular site expressed concern with 'lateness'. Duncan (program provider) said: '*...the big thing is just consistently getting people here on time at the start of the lesson*'. This was a recurring issue for Duncan and other program providers, with delays of 30–75 minutes while coaches waited for some groups of participants to arrive. The typical reaction from the (generally non-Indigenous) surf coaches was frustration and often led to the perception that participants did not value the coach or the activity. A number of Indigenous coaches and program providers also expressed frustration and were quite clear participants should arrive on time.

Program providers tried several approaches to counter the financial impacts (paying for coaching that does not occur or extending coaching sessions) and learning impacts (less lesson time, unfavourable tides) of this lateness. These included promoting starting times and well in advance of events and even setting earlier 'false' starting times to ensure people arrived by the actual start time. June, Gary, Bill and Sally (mix of program providers and community members) all suggested a role for communities to ensure participants arrived on time. However, the most prevalent and somewhat successful strategy was to 'just deal with it'. Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants often talked about '*Black Fella Time*' and '*Koori Time*'. Once it was accepted that programs needed to be adaptable and flexible (within reasonable confines) most of the angst and frustration was taken out of the situation. June (program provider) summarised her attitude: '*...you still need to mix an understanding of the community and being flexible, with the commercial world as well in a way. You can't be ridiculously flexible where if they turn up four hours late, you still get a two hour lesson. So you need to be flexible like okay if they come late, the lesson's still running you get them in their gear and they surf for an hour instead of two. They're probably happy with that*'. This is certainly consistent with Nakata's (2007) discussion of engagement with the 'cultural interface' where '*we all have to give up something in order to reach common ground, mutual understanding and a re-shaping of thinking*' (p. 113).

Summary

- Attendance at programs was generally very strong but did tend to fluctuate somewhat unexpectedly.
- Lateness was an issue at some programs as it had perceived financial and learning impacts.

Recommendation

- The recommended strategies to avoid frustration regarding lateness include consulting communities in deciding program dates, advertising agreed dates early and widely and remaining flexible in session structure and start time.

Program locations and conditions

Programs were held at a variety of beaches and were generally selected by whether they were patrolled and based on prevailing conditions (safety). One issue with beach facilities related to available amenities at some sites, with improvements to car parks and a lack of change rooms mentioned. Despite these minor issues, all those who made it to the surf programs were satisfied with the beaches used. The most significant problem related to travelling to some locations.

For some participants, the beach used by their particular program was nearby but for most, travel was involved, which ranged from 5–50 minutes by car. In camps-based programs, travelling could be 4 hours. While some participants travelled by buses provided by program providers, most travelled privately in cars. This need for generally private transport was a major issue for participation. At all sites, there were limited transport options (especially if participants wanted to bring their own boards to programs or to surf privately). Sam (program provider and community member) made the point that *'one of the biggest problems [in our area] is that we have a shocking public transport system and that affects our program a bit'*. Sometimes the same individuals provided the transport. June (program provider) recalled the efforts of one community member involved in her program: *'...she drove about four or five times ferrying people backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, because not everyone's got vehicles'*. This had cost implications for individuals and clearly not everyone had access to reliable transport. Access to motor vehicles and difficulty getting to sites was identified as a significant barrier to participation in an Australian Bureau of Statistics report prepared for the Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport Research Group (2004) and by Beneforti and Cunningham (2002) in their report on health and social impact measures.



Summary

- Programs make use of a variety of beaches that are generally patrolled and have safe conditions for beginner surfers.
- Transport is a major factor for families who do not live within walking distance from safe parts of the coast. While some programs offer limited transport support (buses) most participants get to programs via private cars.

Recommendation

- Transport most likely represents the greatest barrier to participation in programs and adopting surfing as a lifestyle pursuit. Programs should consider the transport options most suitable for their area.

4.4 Surfing program outcomes

General comments

Participants noted it often took a long time for the positive effects of surfing and programs to emerge. Regarding the time it takes for some very important outcomes to be achieved Gary (program provider and community member) said: 'With a lot of our programs they are developing our kids and ensuring that they are active and involved. That evidence can be used down the track when we have good kids who are active in community and are employed and all that sort of stuff and are staying at school and all that sort of caper. The evidence is not straight there but I can tell you right from the start and Sally can say the same that you know we've been around for a long time and I've seen the progression of our kids' involvement and where they've gone and where they've gone on to'. Ray (program provider) pointed out that participants probably were not aware of the impact until later in their lives: 'Maybe these kids won't realise it themselves until they're older and they look back and go, what we did, that was pretty awesome'. Returning to the pervasive issue of funding and the need for long-term support, Bill (program provider and community member) made the point: '...there's no doubt in terms of indicators that the program is a winner' but went on to say that governments and many other organisations do not generally think or at least fund in 10-year increments and therefore do not appreciate and derive appropriate value from programs.

Programs were also felt to have fairly holistic aims and outcomes. Along with many others, Dean (program provider and community member) made the point: 'It's not just about surfing, the actual board and the person, it's bigger than that'. This holistic approach serves to recognise the interconnectedness between family and community and a link to the real world (Dinan-Thompson et al. 2008). Indeed, program developers have been cautioned against attempting to dramatically move away from the holistic philosophies and sacred geographies of Indigenous people as it may initiate irreparable damage to cultural and spiritual processes (Fox et al. 1998). This notion of a 'holistic approach' is imbedded within Indigenous life and when trying to improve participation a holistic approach is advocated (Blodgett et al. 2008).

Program providers and parents of participants supported this by suggesting that programs acted as a vehicle for many other outcomes related to individuals and families. The following sections outline some of the major outcomes of these programs.

Summary

- It often takes a long time for the positive effects of surfing and programs to be revealed.
- Programs have holistic aims and outcomes (beyond improvement in surfing).

Recommendations

- Because it can take a long time for the effects of programs to be felt, longitudinal tracking by program providers is required to provide ongoing evidence in support of programs.
- Funding should also be provided across longer time frames so as to provide a greater platform to generate positive outcomes.

Individual capacity building

The ability of programs to realise these benefits varied greatly. The average capacity to run programs in the absence of current providers was reported to be **medium** with respect to program administration, **low** with respect to experience, **medium** with respect to management, **low** with respect to reliability and **medium to low** with respect to sporting know-how (based on the indicators developed by Beneforti and Cunningham 2002).

Despite these fairly moderate appraisals overall, it was clear through this research that **the capacity of individuals may be enhanced through surfing programs**. The main way this occurs is through the achievement of surf coach qualifications. 'We have educational programs now where the surfers can go into coaching roles and none of that was around four years ago' (Angela, program provider). Indeed, some participants had gained qualifications with Sally (program provider and community member) making the point: 'I think we've got nine here that are qualified now which is absolutely amazing'.

But others have struggled to complete qualifications with June (program provider) mentioning that '... for whatever reason doing the hours is a barrier' and Jenny (community member) saying: '...we didn't hear from her [Angela] so it [surf qualifications] sort of ended'. This is despite the participants reporting they had a clear idea of what was required to finish (they knew they had to complete a certain number of hours), there being perceived opportunities to complete them: 'I thought they would have just come forward and said look I'm here to do my hours' (June), and that other qualifications already achieved were thought to be harder.

For those that did complete them, there were reported benefits including:

- Access to equipment: 'They've actually got equipment that some of it [the state surfing body] is storing it and boards and that. But we haven't handed over the boards because they've had no one qualified. But rec and sport did buy some boards and wetsuits. The wetsuits are in a box and they're brand new' (June)
- Giving back to the community: 'To me it's quite emotional to stand there and see these young kids now giving back but in a professional type way' (Sally)

- Becoming trusted role models: 'Because these older kids have done it they know it's not going to be failure in a sense. 'Look if they can achieve it so can I'. Sometimes people just need to see that perspective' (Sally)
- Employment: 'So rather than paying non-Aboriginal surf instructors that we don't know to come in, we're able to do this and it's a real enjoyment' (Gary)
- Self-sufficiency: 'Obviously what will happen eventually — my vision is — once we train all these coaches up, the communities will be able to run the programs' (Angela)

These benefits were certainly in keeping with the previous findings of research showing that successful programs may create opportunities in sports participation, sport development, training and leadership, employment and volunteering (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002) as well as supporting health infrastructure or service development (the necessary structures, support, skills and resources in the community), program maintenance and sustainability (the ability for the community to continue to deliver sport and recreation programs, with minimal non-community support) and problem-solving capability of organisations and communities (the ability to apply skills developed from delivering programs to identify and address other issues within the community) (Cairnduff 2001).

In keeping with the findings of previous research (such as Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke and Forneris 2007) a factor for the success of programs was the quality and commitment of the coaches. A key example was the qualifications of Bill (program provider and community member). Despite working with surfing programs over many years, social worker Bill had never completed any formal surf coaching qualifications. This somewhat limited the activities and resources he could provide to a growing group of Indigenous kids he worked with through a community organisation. Through the support of the surf providers and his own personal drive, Bill completed his formal surf coaching accreditation. He now operates additional surf programs for Indigenous locals and has established the programs in a way that is potentially self-sustaining: 'The interesting thing is, also I don't — in my sessions — I don't actually teach the new kids. I sit and supervise, but the Aboriginal kids actually ... do the teaching'.

This example demonstrates that the surf program operated in at least one location contributed directly to the development of an individual's capacity (i.e. gaining recognised surf coaching qualifications). This increased capacity allowed Bill to independently operate surf programs for Indigenous children, which positively influenced social development and school attendance. This example also demonstrates the benefits of teaching those who are already working with marginalised populations effective strategies for working in sporting environments (in this case providing basic coach training so that an individual could become accredited) (Blodgett et al. 2008; Fox et al. 1998).

Bill also reported flow-on benefits from the program relating to parental support and social skills development: 'And the parents also know that, because the social skill learning that goes alongside of it, they're seeing changes in the kids. So the Indigenous people want to actually put their kids in the program ... The parents are seeing a win'.

Similarly, there are benefits relating to school attendance: 'We've had a few issues with the school but, the reality is if you looked at the evidence from the schools, is the kids are going to school more often ... One of the parents said to me, they could never get their kids to go to school on Friday, but if there's surfing on Friday they go to school. So it's a win for the schools'.

Summary

- There are opportunities for individuals to develop professional capacity, and there are noteworthy benefits associated with these advancements.

Recommendation

- The capacities of individuals are not automatically enhanced through surfing programs. Careful planning and strong encouragement/support from program providers is required to develop the capacity of individuals. This may be in the form of targeted recruitment for coaching programs, providing regular feedback to community members and actively gauging interest of community members to be involved in aspects of program provision.

Organisational capacity building

Just as individuals can build their capacities (skills, abilities and knowledge) it is also possible for organisations to benefit from participating in programs by improving their workforce skills, gaining access to previously inaccessible or ignored markets and improving their policies and processes. In three of the sites, there was evidence of greater organisational capacity as a result of the surfing program, with other programs being generated (spin-offs) as a result of the surfing programs. Liz (community member) mentioned the surf program had generated other activities such as fishing, 'rock and water' (a bullying and anger management program for 12–20 year olds) and a water safety program.

Doug (program provider) emphasised that skill development and enjoyment '**works on both sides**' with Indigenous kids and others developing skills and understandings as well as the staff of the particular state surfing body involved. Doug views this program as a form of professional development for his non-Indigenous staff working in Indigenous settings and for his Indigenous staff in competition and program management.

Another strong example of organisational capacity building came from the community support organisation for which Bill (program provider and community member) works. Historically this organisation serviced an entirely Anglo clientele. Having seen the excellent outcomes of Bill's work through the surfing program, the organisation's work has significantly shifted with Bill noting: '**...our organisation, now we're 90 per cent Indigenous [in the work we do]**'. This increased capacity, related to Indigenous support, has continued to build momentum as well as a high degree of recognition: '**...we are beginning to be identified by Aboriginal organisations as a prime group to deal with the 10 to 12 year old age group ... [and] the Education Department is coming to us and saying we want to meet ... They're actually seeking [us] out as an organisation ... it's kind of gone a little bit like wild fire for us, because now we're stretched. But what it's meant, it's improved our capacity as an organisation ... So it's actually revamped our whole organisation**'.

Key to this shift has been applying what Bill considers to be a 'successful template' for operation: '**With this group of kids what we can do is we got already a template for a successful model to apply. That is we can use our kids as peer leaders and as a group of a positive way forward**'. This shift in 'core business' has allowed the organisation to replicate successful ways of operating to impact on a broader range of individuals. The importance of this was discussed by Bill: '**Surfing can actually set a kid's ... change his whole life. I was actually talking about that with [the surf coach] today because ... one of his mates is actually an ex street kid ... that came through my program ... his whole life has changed through surfing. He's got lifelong friends, the way he views the world, where he lives, the person he married, has all changed because of surfing**'.

Summary

- There are opportunities for organisations involved in programs to develop professional capacity, and there are noteworthy benefits associated with these advancements.

Recommendation

- Like individual capacity building, organisational capacity building requires careful planning and strong encouragement and support. This may be in the form of engaging in surfing programs as professional development, aligning organisational policies and goals to program outcomes, and leveraging community connections.


Connecting with and learning from

A major story that emerged during this research project revolves around the impact of surf programs on the ways Indigenous people can connect with and learn from others and the environment. This has specifically related to connections with and learning from the ocean, program providers, Indigenous peers and Indigenous community members.

This is where the organising framework of social capital becomes most relevant. It should be noted the notion of social capital is not without its critics and remains controversial in the extent of its uses and to some extent in Putnam's (2000) rather romanticised view of idealised American life. However, it has been used before to bring understanding to research work with Indigenous communities (see for example Brough et al. 2006) and has been used widely in sport (see for example Skinner, Zakus and Cowell 2008). At the heart of social capital is the view that people can treat their connections with others as an important resource, which they are able to draw on for a variety of purposes. In particular we considered Putnam's (2000) notion of bridging and bonding capital to have some merit for this project. Bonding capital is concerned with the social networks formed within groups and bridging capital is about developing social networks across groups (or communities).

In this research, the theme of forming connections closely aligned with the notion of surfing events as a reason to come together. Sally (program provider and community member) made the following representative comment: 'It's all about connecting back to community and [countering] isolation and all that's — those things are really significant in those events. That's one event in particular recently that I sat back and looked at that side of things with some families. How valuable those little days and significant they are'. This sentiment was characterised by Kate (community member): 'It's the best thing about this is just having all people in the community to be here ... That's why I think it's really good to have these surf things because it stops people and just to sit together, like put the community together'. This certainly represents the strong capacity of surfing programs to foster the development of bonding social capital.

With respect to what this 'coming together' provided, Bill (program provider and community member) noted that the more social networks and associations that Indigenous kids have (with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians), the more equipped they are to deal with life. He emphasised: '... although it's surfing, what you've actually created is a group which is actually strengthening the ties within the Indigenous community, amongst themselves'. As represented in Bill's comment above, the literature also suggests that bonding social capital helps individuals to 'get by' with many teenagers characterised as active social capitalists engaged in, for example, developing areas for play, revitalising new spaces to hang out and maintaining old facilities (Weller 2006).



Several surfing programs appeared to provide one of just a few places where people regularly came together: ‘...[surf programs] are always around connecting and catching up with family. Sometimes that’s the only time they do catch up because you’ve got some mobs from one part of the state to the other mobs in the other part of the state’ (Gary, program provider and community member) and were far more positive than some other events that brought communities together: ‘...we’d rather be that than the funeral because we always catch up at the funerals too’ (Gary). These examples provided strong evidences of the capacity of surfing programs to encourage bridging social capital.

Connection with and learning from the ocean

Surfing participants and others spoke of learning that related to the making or rekindling of a spiritual connection to land and ocean. Throughout Australia’s colonial history, Indigenous people have been excluded from opportunities for connection with the water. This exclusion has occurred either through government policies denying access to swimming pools or through broader policies which resulted in dispossession of traditional lands and oceans (Hall 2001). The lack of access to traditional lands by the surfing participants was still noted today: ‘...a lot of them don’t live on their own land anymore’ (Bill, program provider and community member). Despite this, kinship and spirituality remain an important aspect of everyday life for many Indigenous Australians (Thomson et al. 2010).

Surf programs were extremely important in helping to (re)establish connections to the water for surf participants. As a non-Indigenous program provider aware of some of the history of his particular region, Matt (program provider) made the point: ‘So I think a big part of this is also about healing. And part of that is also trying to take a little bit of the — try and break down a few of the barriers and there’s the whole white fella black fella thing, you know?’. Community leader Sam (program provider and community member) was particularly clear about the importance of surf programs in (re)connecting the youth and community more generally with the ocean: ‘...we [Aboriginal people] all have a connection ... if you look at an interconnection with culture, the sea has been one of the mainstays of Aboriginal culture throughout generations’. Traditional lands and seas have previously been described as places of safety and significance (Nelson 2009). A number of program providers and support staff made reference to this when discussing the significance of the ocean to participants. Kate (community member) even made the connection with some study she was undertaking: ‘I’m doing Indigenous Counsellor Training ... Up at [a University]. So — and it’s all about that, learning about therapies and ... salt water is a big thing’. Sally (program provider and community member) gave a poignant example of how programs provided some relief for struggling families: ‘One family came down on the Sunday and things are pretty bad with that family at the moment. She’s like ‘why don’t I do this more often? We’ve had a beautiful day. This beach’ she goes ‘I just sit here and I look’ and she goes ‘it’s nature. It’s part of who we are”.

Connection with and learning from program providers

Given the dispossession and policy-led exclusion described above, there is a general absence of surfing culture amongst many young Indigenous communities. Because of this absence and the associated knowledge and skills from the Indigenous communities involved in the research, it was reportedly important that others contribute to learning in this area. In this way, the connections discussed in this section may be thought of as being representative of bridging social capital in that it enables people to ‘get ahead’ (Field 2006; Putnam 2000; Weller 2006).

While generally non-Indigenous, the program providers (especially qualified surf coaches) were of value to this. Surf participants could speak of techniques like ‘the lizard’ (a technique to counter large waves) they learned from in-water interactions with surf coaches. Participants also developed skills related to surf safety (a demonstrated knowledge of rips and currents) and surf etiquette (understanding ‘right of way’ in surf ‘line ups’). This reportedly helped bridge a divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and helped Indigenous participants in ‘reclaiming’ some lost territory (access to and knowledge of the ocean).

The significance of these connections was explained by surf coach Grant when describing the difference between Indigenous surf days and events held for other groups:

'...this becomes very personal, the Aboriginal one here — the Koori day, because these kids are — we really become friends with them and we get a good relationship happening because these are repeat kids that have been coming back. Kids that have been — that first came from this peninsula area and they really look forward every year to us running these couple of events in January, February and March. So they come along and we're really happy to see them and we miss them when some of them don't come along. The main thing there is that you can see the improvements each year. Surfing's a very difficult sport and we always say that to them but it's an extremely fun sport even when you're learning from the very start. So you're not going to see those improvements in one day ... So with this one we see [the] same kids really improving and in that sort of way we can mentor them and encourage them along the way to keep it up and make sure they come back. Hopefully develop a little bit of that lifestyle sort of thing. It's not just an introduction to it or a little bit of an experience.'

Grant — program provider

Beyond surf-specific knowledge, program providers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) sometime had highly relevant Indigenous knowledge that could be shared with surf participants. In the broader context of ocean landscape and lifestyle, Bill (program provider and community member) was able to share bush food and medicine stories with the Indigenous children. Bill recalled moving along the landscape with a group of Indigenous boys before the surf lesson: *'So I think it's not just the surfing, it's the connection also to the land for us. Because I've got a keen interest in Indigenous bush medicine and bush food type stuff ... I'm just walking along those cliffs going, 'there's a bush-spinach, do you want to try it?'*. The surf participants themselves confirmed their increased understanding of *'What you can eat, what you can't eat'* (Josh, surfing participant) regarding native flora. In this way, Indigenous participants were able to develop their understanding of the surf and its surrounds.

In the school-based program there were clear benefits relating to the ability to build relationships through the surfing program. Ray (program provider) explained: *'I've always built relationships with kids and [the surf program is] an area where I can still find that because it's timeless ... you're out there with them and they really hang close. The bigger it is or the more challenging it is, the closer they stick to me. So it's good'*. Several other teachers involved also described how the traditional teacher–student relationships dissolved on the beach, with a female staff member recalling how during walks on the beach with female students she built her understanding of what was going on in the world of these students at that time. This allowed teachers to better cater for and support students back at school and in the community.

Connection with and learning from peers

The Aboriginal population comprised an estimated 2.5 per cent of Australia's total population in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). When this small population is considered against the backdrop of systematic dispossession and governmental policies related to assimilation (Brough et al. 2006) it is probably not surprising that *'a lot of Aboriginal kids are fairly disconnected'* (Bill, program provider and community member). Across sites in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, surf participants reported they were often the only or one of a very small number of Indigenous children at their school. For this reason, the surfing programs were felt to be important for making connections with others and experiencing pride and confidence in their Aboriginality. The importance of this is further supported by previous research noting kinship as an important feature in everyday life (N.Thomson et al., 2010). As noted by Kellie (surfing participant), for her there are no other opportunities to mix with this kind of group: *'Just surf time [is when I see these friends]'*. The implication is that interactions fostered and supported through surfing programs may improve inclusion and enhance feelings of belonging (Cairnduff 2001).



Connection with and learning from community members

The surf programs (irrespective of form or operation) functioned as events that provided a (positive) reason to come together. The South Australian Indigenous Council reported these events attracted community members from across the state, something that otherwise only occurred at funerals and wakes. Previous research has similarly noted that in contemporary Australia, water-based activities (such as swimming, fishing, surfing), even for Indigenous people in suburban Australia, have been identified as opportunities to connect with friends, family and country (Nelson 2009). Events such as surfing programs have the potential to re-invigorate pride and culture (A. Thomson et al. 2010). In addition, it has previously been found that communities with high levels of social cohesion, including participation in community organisations and activities, have better health than those with low levels of social cohesion (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2010).


Helping her son form connections was an important reason that Kate (community member) brought Jackson (surfing participant) to the programs: 'I wanted Jackson to come along just to see — meet different people in the community. It's the best thing about this is just having all people in the community to be here'. For Jenny (community member) it was an opportunity for her daughter to connect with a culture she was interested in but had somewhat limited exposure to due to her family situation: '...she's interested in the culture and likes to know [Aboriginal] words and stuff'. These connections to culture and to community Elders in particular were identified as great 'incidental' consequences of holding targeted Indigenous surfing programs. Belinda (program provider and community member) explained this further: 'Elders are there and stuff like that, it's a real opportunity for the young people to share, I guess, with our Elders. It's more than just surf on the day, and it's more about learning about culture as well ... and having a chat with your Elders and stuff like that ... You also find that the young people are engaging with our older people and even down to small things that you'd probably take for granted, like they'll get the old people their meals and stuff like that. They're really learning that respecting as well and I know that some of the guys that have come before, they'll shake hands with all the Elders before they actually leave and introduce themselves when they arrive. They're learning that real respecting of your Elders and stuff like that. That's a lot down to some of the youth workers, too, that are working with the young people here, and teaching the way that we treat our old people, and stuff like that. So it's really, I guess, good for that, too, yeah.'

It has previously been demonstrated that community Elders are vital in sustaining mental and emotional health for children and young people (Fox et al. 1998). This suggests the potential importance of surfing programs in the sustenance, development and sharing of Indigenous knowledge in these communities.

Finally, programs were also acknowledged as places where 'even the parents, parents of Koori kids get to come together with other parents of Koori kids' (Kath, community member) to discuss a range of parenting issues. Similarly, people like Kate (community member) noted that community events afforded people like her (teachers, social workers, community leaders) an opportunity to check in with people in the community to see how they are going.

Summary of connection with and learning from

The surfing programs connected people in ways difficult to achieve through other means. Being connected has high social, cultural and spiritual significance for Indigenous people (Cairnduff 2001; Nelson 2009; A. Thomson et al. 2010; N. Thomson et al. 2010). Many community members called for greater consideration of cultural aspects in the Indigenous-specific surfing programs. Previous research evidence suggests that interventions that incorporate cultural dimensions are more likely to succeed (Parker et al. 2006).



An acknowledgement of country at the beginning of programs was repeatedly called for. For example, Ross (community member) said: 'Well I guess, you know, at the beginning, just do something that's culturally appropriate. You know everybody is sitting together and still could get acknowledgement or, you know, if there's no Elder there. If there's an Elder there, I mean great, we get to do a welcome to country. So in that sense, you know, just reinforcing to the children, what's the name of the land that we're on, you know, and you are doing something concrete. So that's one of the things I'd like to have. It's really simple'.

An extension of recognising the traditional custodians of the land upon which the programs take place is a consideration of the traditional food sources of the area. Typically, programs offered sausages and bread with soft-drinks. Kate (community member) made the connection with the culture of her community by saying: '...these are salt water people, you should be eating salt water food at every gathering ... because it makes sense. It's — they're talking about the culture but their food is the culture as well and if they're coast people [that's the food we should provide]'.

Summary of connecting with and learning from

- Surf programs provide a way for Indigenous people to (re)connect with country.
- Programs foster connections between participants and program providers that may shape and influence participants' lives within and beyond the sport.
- Participants can form connections with other Indigenous children which are particularly important given the reported levels of disconnection and feelings of isolation (strengthening ties, developing pride, reinforcing culture).
- The opportunity to connect with community members helped reinforce and pass on cultural aspects and also provided the opportunity to seek or offer advice from/to others.
- Community members felt strongly about the need to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and the significance of traditional food sources.

Recommendation for connecting with and learning from

- Connecting with and learning from the ocean, program providers, Indigenous peers and Indigenous community members is a very important aspect of surfing programs and should be acknowledged by program providers, community members and funding bodies. This acknowledgement will reinforce the range of personal and community benefits associated with being 'connected'.
- It is appropriate to conduct some form of acknowledgement of country at events.
- Program providers should consider cultural aspects and the significance of the food provided (such as the traditional foods of saltwater people).

Programs have a variety of aims and perceived outcomes

Through the connections described above, it was reported that participants in the surf programs benefited in several different ways. The aims and perceived outcomes below are presented in order of importance as described by participants and evidenced by the data collected.

Participants learn to be safe and confident in the surf

The greatest explicit aim and perceived outcome related to participants learning to be safe and confident in the surf. This was the primary aim of all programs and was the key reason parents and community members brought their children to programs. Sam (program provider and community member) made a comment that was representative of the views of all program providers: ‘...we’re providing our kids with a chance to be safe in the surf’ and Kate (community member) provided a parental perspective: ‘I want my kids to be confident in the surf in case something happens’. Beyond being self-sufficient in the water, Sam alluded to the value for the wider community: ‘I think by having them capable with boards, I think that adds to their ability to not only keep themselves safe, but to keep others safe as well’. Indeed that scenario played out during the course of this research with a headline in the *Geelong Advertiser* (Hobbs 2010): *Teen hero saves four children from surf near Anglesea*. The story described how a 13-year old surf program participant was hailed a hero after pulling four children, some as young as five, from a rip at Anglesea.

Summary

- The principle aim of all programs and the primary reason that people come to programs is that participants learn to be safe and confident in the surf.
- Children are learning to be safe themselves and also to save others.

Participants have fun

While enjoyment was generally considered as secondary to building water safety skills, this was also an important outcome of programs. Sam (program provider and community member) explained the rationale and hierarchy of aims: ‘If they’re happy they turn up and if they turn up they learn skills’. Children involved in programs were overwhelmingly positive when asked if they enjoyed surfing. Sample comments included: ‘Coming out here learning how to surf and stuff’s pretty cool’, ‘I think just the surf just brings the fun out of everybody’, ‘It’s fun just to stand on the board all day’, and ‘it’s just like heaps of fun’. Coaches and program providers also derived great pleasure in seeing the children have fun in their programs. Indicative comments from two coaches included: ‘...it’s one of the most rewarding things, is to teach somebody a fun skill’ (Grant, program provider) and: ‘...just the smiles on their faces and their super enjoyment they’re getting of it’ (Duncan, program provider). The reasons participants found it fun generally related to the characteristics of the sessions including the opt-in and opt-out format, inward focus of surfing, ability to connect with nature, and as is discussed in the next section, it provided an escape.

Summary

- Coaches gain enjoyment and satisfaction from seeing participants have fun.
- The overwhelming majority of participants have a great deal of fun at these programs.

Programs offer an escape and/or are diversionary

Program providers, parents and participants all referred to programs as a form of escape for participants and families. Primarily this related to escaping boredom or taking some respite from difficult life circumstances. More than a dozen people across the sites mentioned that programs were valuable because it gave participants 'something to do'. The following interchange between Sally and Gary (program providers and community members) explains the notion of 'escape' from life circumstances and also begins to make the connection between boredom and anti-social / harmful behaviours:

Sally: A prime example yesterday of one family that were there in particular that have actually not been able to be at their home at the moment — have been elsewhere but managed to come to the program, have a great day and forget about what they've been experiencing the last couple of nights type thing.

Gary: Even if it is only an hour, two hours or three hours or four hours ... That's absolutely that we've found — I mean obviously I know again through the drug and alcohol that boredom ticks the brain over to 'okay well what am I going to do now?' Someone comes in with a slab [of beer] under — on the top of their shoulder or have a bit of a yarn to you and say 'yeah have a smoke of that and have a crack of that'. Boredom is massive.

Surfing participant Harry related his experiences in a similar way: 'There's nothing else to really do ... It gets that boring sometimes you just smoke'.

The seemingly logical extension that is highly popularised is if you provide activities for youth, they will stop doing 'bad' things. The body of literature regarding diversionary strategies for anti-social behaviour and self-harm gained strength from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommendations, and has maintained momentum (Cairnduff 2001). It has been argued (with some supporting evidence) that sport and sporting events may be a protective agent against addictive behaviours (related to cigarette smoking, alcohol use, illegal drug use) (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; Cairnduff 2001). Studies have provided positive (but not definitive) evidence relating to the success of sports carnivals in the short-term reduction of alcohol abuse, cannabis use, petrol sniffing and other risky behaviour (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2010). Similarly, sport has been considered as a way of reducing crime and violence by providing alternative role models, relieving boredom, developing self-discipline and improving self-esteem and self-efficacy (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2010).

This popularised (but somewhat under-researched) view was prevalent in this research. An Elder at one site said: '...[the surf program and programs like it] gets them interested and they're not worrying about getting into trouble. That's what it's all about isn't it with children? If they're idle, they'll get into strife' (Keitha). Program providers offered similar comments such as Matt (program provider): 'I think the fact that they're out in the water, they're not doing anything stupid. It wears them out. It tires them out ... So if you can keep them out there for as long as you can, wear them out, get them tired, they're probably not going to go stuff around on the streets at night'. Bill (program provider and community member) offered the following example from his extensive experience as a social worker with non-Indigenous youths: 'Because I know after 30 years — my first lot of kids I took surfing were car thieves and that's all documented. They stopped stealing cars because you can't surf all day and steal cars at night. So there's no question that in terms of crime prevention — I'm a bit more sophisticated now ... [I now focus] a lot more creating a positive peer group that does positive things — [but] in terms of crime prevention there's no question that — I don't know what the research is but, as far as my experience goes, that actually — there's no doubt'. A further extension of this was the suggestion that the 'rush' and challenge of surfing satisfied the needs of participants such that they didn't feel the need to find a 'rush' through anti-social behaviour. However, it must be acknowledged that while the view that sport can act as a diversionary counter to anti-social behaviours was offered by many in the programs, there

was generally a degree of caution associated with it. As discussed in more detail later in this report, the general sentiment was that surfing could 'do good' in this way but it had its limits. Most were happy to acknowledge it was not possible to operate sport programs 'every day, every hour of the day' (Gary, program provider and community member) and that sporting endeavours were not immune from prevailing social issues.

Summary


- Programs offer an escape from boredom or difficult life conditions and serve as a way for participants to physically exert themselves in a positive way.
- A popular belief was that surfing provided an outlet with a similar degree of challenge and 'rush' to anti-social activities.

Participants benefit in a range of other ways

There was moderate to strong support for a range of other program outcomes, including those related to physicality, psycho-social development and content knowledge.

Extensive research demonstrates the individual health benefits of sport. These relate to improved cardiovascular health, reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, reduced risk of some cancers, skeletal development and prevention of stress, anxiety and depression (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; Cairnduff 2001; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2010). Participants, program providers and parents could all describe the physical benefits of programs. Surfing was seen as a healthy pursuit where children could learn to perform physical skills as guided by coaches and their peers. Participants were able to describe and perform techniques such as 'the lizard' and the basics about 'Where to put your feet on the board', 'paddlin', strokes and all that' as well as 'using your body to control the board'. Participants could also track their own development in terms of the surfing skills (could stand up when couldn't previously) but also in terms of their physical capacities (as explained by Bill, program provider and community member): 'They can actually physically see themselves growing stronger by carrying the boards ... we carry our boards across a bridge, go across a river, they can see that they can actually carry their boards now'. The benefits of surfing were also related to performance in others sports: '... surfing compliments a lot of sports and actually helps a lot of kids sport and the kids can see that ... The football players can see their football's getting — the soccer kids can see that they're getting faster and more nimble' (Bill), and vice versa: 'They love their dancing too so I think it all blends in as in balance. You can see how they can balance on a surfboard. Obviously dancing helps them and gymnastics' (Sandy, community member).

Programs were reported to improve confidence and self-esteem. These improvements were directly related to the notion of psycho-social development through mastery of challenging skills. It was widely acknowledged that programs involved challenge for participants — surf and surfing can be 'scary' and 'hard'. However, it was reported the young people involved wanted to be challenged and 'get a kick' out of conquering a difficult skill. Surf coach and program provider Mick described how in the case of one particular boy 'we have been able to watch his self-esteem and confidence grow'. Two teachers involved with the school-based program reported improvements they had observed in this area regarding the girls in particular: 'For the girls especially, this program has increased their self-confidence ... There were girls at the start of the program that wouldn't go out in the surf but they now go'. This result was encouraging given that previous studies have shown less emphasis on sport as an opportunity for



women and girls (Cairnduff 2001). Finally, there was a suggestion the self-esteem and confidence of individuals with respect to body shape was preserved and in some cases enhanced through surfing programs. This is somewhat counter-intuitive given that participants most often wear tight lycra shirts, however, this outcome was reported to be associated with the notion that there is less attention on others' performance (more self-referential) in surfing and that participants are comfortable with the all-Indigenous peer group. The teachers reported less body-shape-related bullying in surf programs than in the school yard and parents such as Kate (community member) made similar comments: '... [my son is] a big boy ... He won't do swimming at school, 'cause of the peer group pressure and 'cause of the size of him for his age. But coming down here, he can be with other like Koori kids and no one's judging him ... all the kids can have a go, no matter what they look like. They feel confident, then they're self-esteem's built up as well I think'.

Programs were also reported to have positive influences on empathy, maturity and social skills. The strongest example came from Bill's (program provider and community member) previous social work with car thieves. Bill relayed he did not consider certain behaviours (like stealing cars) as acts of rebellion. Instead, he presented the case it was really a lack of empathy. He went on to describe in some detail how his car thieves learned some empathy the day Bill had his car stolen and was not able to take them surfing. While this was a fairly extreme example, 'opening peoples' eyes' was certainly something that program providers and community members hoped surf participants achieved: 'I think sport is the main thing for these children. It broadens their mind. Kids have got a different attitude to things' (Keitha, community member). Indeed, the coaches felt they played a role in fostering a positive future for participants, as evidenced by Duncan (program provider): '...we can change something in the direction that they could go and just give them a bit brighter outlook on life'.

These results were in keeping with previous research demonstrating the potential effect of sport on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of participants. Much like the research on the physical benefits of physical activity, research in the psychological domain found evidence of positive emotions (moods) such as contentment, happiness and satisfaction, increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, sense of personal and physical competence, emotional stability, reduction in stress and improved ability to cope with stress, lower levels of depression (volunteers) and anxiety, and reductions in depression risk factor for self-harm and suicide (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; Cairnduff 2001; Dinan-Thompson et al. 2008; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2010). And it was not just participants who benefitted. Cairnduff (2001) notes there are positive individual outcomes for 'non-active' participants (such as coaches, family members) including increased emotional wellbeing. It is also important to acknowledge the relationship between sport and these positive psychological outcomes is reciprocal, in that sport may improve self-efficacy (and other elements) which makes it more likely individuals will participate in physical activity (for further discussion see Beneforti and Cunningham 2002).

The subsequent effect of surf programs on children that parents, teachers, social workers and community members reported was that participants were more likely to carry these positive developments into their lives at school and home. Bill (program provider and community member) emphasised this: 'They're coming home more mature ... it's also the social skill learning like, doing your dishes, doing some things that are making an impact at home ... they're just happier at home'. Dinan-Thompson, Sellwood and Carless (2008) noted that physical activity not only influences behaviours and characteristics of individuals, but the effects are likely to flow on to the wider community.

Finally, surf participants reportedly learnt a range of other skills and content knowledge to enable them to better navigate the beach environment. For instance, programs help develop skills in first aid: ‘...[we do] first aid, some days it’s in force like bluebottles and things like that so we look at how you treat it, what not to do, what to do’ (Ray, program provider). Time is spent on areas like surf etiquette including ‘watch[ing] your language ... be[ing] aware of these other people and what’s the right of way in surfing and what’s not’ (Ray) and ‘where exactly to surf, how to be cautious of one another and a bit of the surfing rules’ (Belinda, program provider and community member).

Summary


- Program participants develop and can self-monitor their physical skills and improve aspects of their physical capacities.
- Participants also develop psycho-social skills related to confidence, self-esteem, empathy, maturity and independence and these were reported to have an impact beyond programs (at school and home).
- Programs also foster an understanding of first aid and surf etiquette which allows individuals to better navigate the coastal environment.

4.5 Concluding and cautionary comments about program outcomes

Despite the significant range of positive outcomes discussed above, it was acknowledged these should always be considered with a degree of caution. Beyond the stated aims of promoting safety in the surf and the development of physical skills, the expectations of what programs are capable of should remain modest. In short, surfing is not a ‘cure-all’.

To begin with, it must be acknowledged that not everyone enjoys surfing. There were young people involved in this research project who did not like surfing at all: ‘I hate surfing ... I like swimming and stuff, but yeah surfing — I can’t stand’ (Harry, surfing participant). Even for those who did enjoy surfing, their experiences were not universally positive. For example Darren (surfing participant) said: ‘I got hit by someone else and got cut here [pointing to leg]’. Surfers ‘wipeout’ regularly, and in crowded sessions this sometimes meant hitting or being hit by others and their boards.

However, the strongest theme to emerge about the limits of surfing programs related to the notion that just because you engage with a surfing program does not mean you will stop anti-social behaviour. In terms of its diversionary capabilities, Dean (program provider and community member) was suitably blunt: ‘...you can’t have 24 [hours a day] / 7 [days a week] sport. You can’t’. He went on to make the point that sport (surfing included) is still associated with anti-social behaviours such as drinking to excess and violence present in broader society. Previous research has noted it is unrealistic to expect that sport and recreation alone will have ongoing impact on risk taking behaviours if not considered within the broader context (Nelson et al. 2010). Further, Dean described how rather than diverting youth away from anti-social behaviours, sport could at times provide a reason to come together to engage in these ways: ‘It’s part of the thing that I was saying before, they can meet up in the shop or at the — in the shopping area district talking about break and entering or doing drugs or alcohol, [or they could just] go to football training and then go and do all that stuff after it. [They can] Use sport as another



avenue to get together ... [groups formed at the shops] could be disbanded through law or parenting or whatever, but [sport] gives them an excuse ... where we can yarn and plan things and whatnot'. In the same discussion Kyle (community member) added: 'I see them doing that and then they're — before you know it the next day you found out what's happened, they've gone and broke into something or done something'. Another example came from respected Elder Joe who noted that in his experience, those engaged with surfing were sometimes more likely to be truant from work: '...they'd go surfing when [we were at work] on a day like today. If the waves are good, 'never mind work, we'll go out'. We had that happen lots of times'.

In several sites, some held the opinion that too much was expected of regular (non-interventionist) sports programs in terms of the benefits to society (particularly in developing 'good citizens'). Some believed the delivery of high quality sport opportunities provide a range of societal benefits, but that issues such as alcohol and drug abuse required specialised partnerships and service to influence positive outcomes. The comment of Dean (program provider and community member) characterised this overall sentiment:

'Like I view sport as an opportunity to increase your health and to be socially inclusive . . . it doesn't mean if you play [sport] that you're going to stop drinking or stop doing drugs. A lot of people think that it does.'

There is potential to develop sport programs, in conjunction with qualified support services, that target benefits beyond the development of physical capacities including those related to health and social inclusion. As noted previously, part of the problem has been that evaluations of many Indigenous programs have been anecdotal, ad hoc and/or primarily financial acquittals (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002; Cairnduff 2001). An extremely significant, ongoing and somewhat unavoidable issue is that the positive benefits of programs are difficult to separate from other intermediary variables (Beneforti and Cunningham 2002). Overall, the caution from previous research (echoed in this project) is the need to remain cognisant of the limitations of using sport as a tool for social issues, as a narrow focus on sport success can limit possibilities of success in other areas and at the expense of other needs (Nelson et al. 2010).

Summary

- Surfing is not a 'cure-all' for addressing social issues.
- Not everyone surfs or likes surfing.
- You can get injuries surfing.

Recommendations

- The delivery of high quality sporting opportunities should be the emphasis of sport providers. Strategic partnerships with qualified support services can be developed to support and measure other agendas (i.e. those associated with broader societal benefits of sport).
- While sport has a wide appeal and the potential to 'cut-through' a variety of social and cultural issues, it should be acknowledged that, as an agent of social change, sport can have limits.



5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Introductory statements

This research project considered the social impact of sport and physical activity on the lives of Indigenous Australians and their communities. It is reasonable to suggest that sport is generally regarded as a worthwhile and wholesome activity that at a general level contributes to increased levels of physical activity thereby contributing to broader health advantages (A. Thomson, Darcy and Pearce 2010). This assertion, though we know it does not work for everyone, is not under review here.

The central concern of this research was the degree to which programs aimed at benefiting Indigenous communities actually provided some benefit and can therefore, with confidence, be considered worthwhile. We have chosen our words intentionally and carefully here.

Measures of program worth and deliverable benefit tend to be framed narrowly (predominantly positivistic and quantitative in nature — reducing programs and participants to numbers and figures) with only modest accounts about how programs are experienced by particular groups and the benefits beyond participation rates and cause and effect health or social outcomes. Notwithstanding the importance of these, we considered them measures that are hard to determine, unlikely to show cause and effect, and that they would provide a seriously impoverished picture of both sports initiatives and the Indigenous communities in which they operate. An approach was developed that drew upon the qualitative traditions of case studies and ethnography and over 3 years and multiple site visits an extraordinarily large quantum of data was generated. These data have enabled the researchers to generate comprehensive narratives of sports initiatives within communities. It is believed to be among the first studies to provide such a wide-ranging analysis.

Methodological considerations

Methodologically, the study was a challenge. Anyone reading this will be familiar with the term 'colonialism'. It was a word that loomed large in our preparations to undertake the study. The members of the communities we worked with are members of multiple societies that, since the arrival of the First Fleet in Botany Bay in 1788, have been routinely disenfranchised and needed to share their country as a 'settler state'. That the original habitants of this nation have endured is testimony to their resilience. Following Milner's (2007) advice, we sought to actively engage with the tensions that can surface when conducting research where race and culture are concerned.

Importantly, within this research we drew upon the work of Martin Nakata (2007). In keeping with the work of Nakata (2007), the approach adopted in this research sought to recognise that Indigenous people have been navigating Western knowledge systems since colonisation and they bring this knowledge and their traditional knowledge to any research or practical endeavour. By engaging with the 'cultural interface' (Nakata 2007), this research identified aspects of contemporary Indigenous learning, capacity building and sustainability and viability issues. Within this project we adhered to a generative framework that prioritised:

- building and maintaining relationships
- approaching communities with an attitude of partnership
- acknowledging and reflecting on researcher personal histories
- adopting a strengths-based approach
- carefully selecting appropriate methods.

To counter the potentially damaging and limiting effects of the cynicism that exists in communities towards programs and projects conducted by research and governmental institutions, this research employed existing networks already respected and trusted by the selected communities (such as the Indigenous Sports Development Officer network), invested in multiple site visits with a stable group of personnel and received strong project leadership and coordination from key partner agencies (such as the ASC). Moreover, the research team remained aware of cultural protocols and common courtesies ignored by some institutions and agencies in the past. For example, the first contact with communities was made through specific Indigenous Council or other representative bodies regardless of what other authorities may have had some claim (such as departments of education and other government organisations). The researchers (along with many Indigenous organisations and individuals) also advocate for research and interventions in Indigenous communities which are strengths-based rather than deficit-focused (Bond 2005; Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008). Strengths-based approaches serve to recognise the existing knowledge, resilience and capacity within Indigenous individuals and communities. To achieve these research goals, a qualitative methodology was chosen as it allows the consideration of context and different ways of knowing.

5.2 Surfing and surfing programs

The central concern of this research was the effectiveness of sports initiatives delivered to Indigenous communities in Australia. Given the partner to the ASC was Surfing Australia, it is important to consider the appropriateness of surfing for this kind of initiative and even the programs themselves. It must be acknowledged that like all sport, not all participants accepted surfing. However, it can be said that surfing should be considered as a good choice for the communities of this project, and the programs generally should be considered as successful.

While there were some strict aspects to the implementation of programs (such as safety protocols, beach behaviour, environmental consideration, coach-surfer ratios), surfing was widely regarded as being more laid back and this was seen as an advantage. In addition, surfing was conducted in some sites as an incentive to encourage school attendance, a way of reducing anti-social behaviour, setting high expectations of conduct and a way of engendering general self-discipline (as demanded by the environmental challenges offered by the ocean). This last point is important as it enabled surf coaches to concentrate on coaching rather than being disciplinarians. The consequential effect of this was, other than on a few occasions, surf coaches maximised time in the water. In other words, the physical effort required during the programs was significant.

5.3 Sustaining programs

Key people

It was apparent that for surfing programs to work (and this could be said of any sporting initiative) there had to be key people driving the programs and this depended on crucial relationships. Key people were not just the providers but also the community members. Those on the program delivery side could be characterised as 'passionate' about surfing and vastly experienced in program delivery. Indeed it could be argued this was significant in helping form relationships with communities. Key people in communities were also crucial although this was sometimes a double-edged sword. Where the key person was a single individual, it meant there was consistency and this could be developed to further the programs. However, it was sometimes the case that this individual was the 'go to' person for many things in the community. This meant they were stretched to the limit and often hard to contact. This meant some events were not as successful as they could have been because of limited communication channels. Moreover, the quality of programs was related to the level of investment available.

Program 'costs'

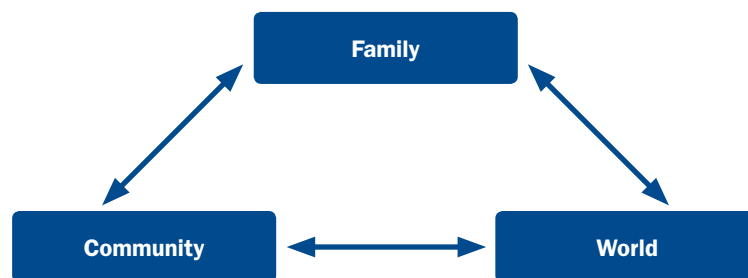
It is important to acknowledge that 'investment' takes many forms and without it programs are unlikely to continue. It would be trite to say programs need financial support but this belies the level of other support required to ensure the success of surf programs, not least of which is the 'gift economy' underpinned by volunteerism. The cost of this gift economy is difficult to calculate. Volunteer support was provided in many ways by parents and friends of parents, members of governing bodies, friends and support workers of coaches and coaches' families. This is not to suggest this group (or any group for that matter) is not deserving of this level of support. Indeed anyone who has worked in youth sport would know it operates on volunteer support. However, as this research project aimed to identify the sustainability and viability issues related to programs, these hidden costs could not be understated.

Beyond these costs, the explicit costs of surf programs can be high but not necessarily prohibitive. Key cost items are equipment, transport, food and drink (especially for camp-based events), employing qualified coaches, and accommodation (for camp-based events). These surf programs were founded on a 'no cost' approach for participants. At a broader level, this approach is not without its critics. Pearson (2007) has argued that welfare dependency has wreaked havoc within Indigenous communities in Australia, and Steele (1990) argues that since the Civil Rights Movement in America in the mid to late 1960s, African Americans have been caught in a similar dependency trap. While there is some merit to these arguments, surfing is not commonly associated with the Indigenous groups of Australia and therefore intervention in the form of funding is justified. Hence a 'no-cost' approach was important.

What is important to note is not the costs *per se*. Rather, the central message here is 'this is what it takes to invest', not just in the program but in the time needed to develop relationships to ensure the programs can endure and not be sporadic or abandoned during the subsequent budget cycle. Important to this is the acquisition of funding application skills. There was a general consensus that these crucial skills, in addition to the skill required to secure ongoing funding, were specialist and often lacking. Added to this, most agencies have relatively short funding cycles (as a consequence of rolling budgets, pre-allocation, public commitments, not to mention any financial crises that might occur). This makes long-term planning and development difficult at times and the current funding model and organisational delivery probably does not facilitate the development of self-reliance. The subsequent recommendation is that programs seek funding on the basis of longer term planning. Of course, this relies on funding agencies supporting and even encouraging long-term funding applications.

5.4 Key outcomes

Generally the outcomes achieved were considered to outweigh any concerns about program longevity or funding issues. It was acknowledged that the positive effects of programs such as these are long-term and often deferred, emphasising the desirability of programs to exist long enough to establish relationships, which requires ongoing investment at all levels. However in the sites where programs had endured, often by accessing a combination of support funds, fund raising, and committed community members, the view was that deferred benefits were realised through the community over time. The benefits were regarded as 'holistic'. This is often a catch all term that means very little, but in the communities that could point to ongoing benefits there was a view the programs enabled an inter-connectedness which is considered central to Indigenous life.



In this way the interconnections fostered in programs were seen as vehicles for other outcomes mostly associated with positive risk taking, reductions in anti-social behaviour and increased levels of physical activity.

Learning

The most significant finding of this research related to the potential for surfing programs to connect participants so they could learn and develop in a variety of meaningful ways. Learning is best captured by the terms used earlier 'connections to' and 'learning from' and again this can be represented schematically. As a mechanism for developing social capital in the form of connectedness, surfing seemed to offer much in this regard. Because surfing in these programs was considered a family event, it brought together groups with a common interest. This enabled bridging social capital to develop. We are conscious to remain modest with our claims here and in doing so acknowledge Bourdieu's (1985) suggestion that social capital is not always widely distributed in social networks and connections. That being said, the surfing programs in this project seemed to enable families to make connections across groups (mobs) that would not have been immediately obvious had the groups not come together in this way. Additionally, it enabled some children who were often isolated at school to connect to other Aboriginal children in a leisure activity.

The web of learning evident in programs is connected in three key ways: connections to community, connections to expertise and connections to country. All three channels provided a viable means for learning through the practice of surfing. Connections in these ways are supported in other research (see for example Cairnduff 2001; Cooper 2010; Nelson 2009) where community was found to be central to Indigenous culture and by extension, to sporting participation. That surfing could provide a conduit for learning in these ways is significant and further demonstrated the capacity of programs to provide opportunities for learning beyond the technical skills of the sport. However, it must be acknowledged it was the technical skills of the sport and the opportunities to try, learn and master them that initiated other learning potential. In keeping with this, the hazardous nature of the Australian surf was a salutary lesson about what risks to take. It would be problematic to suggest this can automatically translate to risk taking around other forms of behaviour, but respect for the ocean was an important aspect of the learning process.

Building capacity

While individual and organisational capacity building varied across the sites, the key factor appeared to be 'up-skilling', particularly in surf coaching. This was seen as significant as it offered the possibility of independence (programs moving towards self-sufficiency). While this has yet to develop across all sites, where it has happened surfing self-determination was a genuine possibility. More broadly, as we indicated earlier, capacity building (as judged by measures proposed by Beneforti and Cunningham 2002) could be regarded as low to medium. Importantly, there are precedents and Cooper (2010) reports that when members of an Island community in far north Queensland acquired the skills to play, umpire and coach softball, intervention from outsiders was reduced to simple monitoring of progress.

Escape, diversion and associated benefits

It is important to note that sport should not be considered as a 'cure-all' for social ills and problems in any community or society. However, there is ample in the literature about the social and health benefits of participating in sport. The relevant caveat is that not all communities respond in the same way to sporting initiatives. In communities represented in this study, there was widespread agreement among senior members that surfing programs generally are beneficial as a diversionary activity that can alleviate boredom in young people which in turn might help overcome self-harm risk, anti-social behaviour and substance abuse. The limits of this research mean we can only report what the community members considered the contribution of surfing to be. As other research has found (see for example Nelson et al. 2010), it is difficult to separate the effects of sporting programs from other intermediary variables. Indeed, it is unrealistic to expect sport and recreation alone to have an ongoing impact on risk taking behaviours if not considered within the broader context.

In addition to the suggested 'escape' benefits, surfing was considered as 'healthy' in that it is vigorous and makes high physical demands. Again it is impossible to suggest surfing is a causal factor in improved fitness because while other research has indicated that sport and physical activity may provide physical, mental and social health benefits, long-term expected outcomes such as decrease in chronic diseases are difficult to measure in the short term (see for example Cairnduff 2001). However, most senior members of communities where surfing was a regular part of community life claimed the physical capacities of their young people improved (in terms of skill, fitness and strength) and this could be attributed to surfing. Moreover, the self-esteem of both boys and girls was considered to have improved and this was attributed to the personal challenge of surfing.

5.5 Limitations and future research

Early in the research process, it was clear that quantitative methods (essentially reducing complex social practices to a set of numbers) would not be appropriate for this project given the nature of the research questions, the characteristics of the chosen sites, and the history of Indigenous communities with research and governmental institutions. The use of qualitative methods (attempting to offer nuanced insights) within this research has been justified elsewhere in this report. However, it must be acknowledged there are limitations associated with the methods employed in this research.

The sample size in this research was much larger than commonly found in comparable qualitative studies. While the considerable cohort and number of research sites allowed identification of themes across programs it may have inhibited a more nuanced consideration of specific cases. Future research may adopt more in-depth case study approaches focusing on fewer sites and specific individuals within those sites.

The non-Indigenous status and university affiliations of both lead researchers may have extended the length of time it took to build significant rapport. Given that rapport building is fundamental to generating quality data in studies such as this, we would encourage future research to engage Indigenous researchers where possible. The use of community intermediaries was planned for in this project but given time constraints did not occur. Engaging quality intermediaries could potentially achieve the dual goals of enhancing data quality and developing capacity for individuals and communities.

The lack of great volumes of underpinning research was a limitation for this project. The relative dearth of qualitative empirical research examining the experiences of Indigenous people in sport meant much of this project was exploratory in nature and many of its findings were necessarily modest in their claims. Future research should continue to expand and build upon the results of this project.

Finally, while multiple data collection methods were employed in this study (including observational and field note data) there was a high reliance on self-report data. Participants were asked to share their beliefs, perceptions and experiences as part of this research. It is widely acknowledged that people will present themselves in ways they are most comfortable (such as presentation bias). This project sought to counter this issue by asking only for voluntary participation, assuring anonymity for participants, checking with multiple sources, asking about readily verifiable information as certain points and by establishing strong rapport before interviews. Despite taking these steps, there still remains the possibility individuals have provided information that is not an accurate representation of previous events. While this will always remain an issue (even in positivistic research) researchers may include greater observational components in future projects and seek to build rapport over even longer periods of time.

5.6 Concluding remarks


The findings of this project are wide-ranging and the consolidated list of summaries and recommendations are provided in Appendix D and E. For programs to be viable and sustainable they required investment. This investment came in the form of key people to drive program organisation and operation, cash funds (to purchase equipment, employ surf coaches, purchase food and provide transportation to the site) and 'volunteer' support (in the form of a gift or hidden economy). Beyond these factors, the key finding of this study related to the potential for surfing programs to connect participants with each other and with other program elements. Surf programs provided a way for Indigenous people to (re)connect with country, foster connections between participants and program providers, form bonds with other Indigenous children and unite community members to reinforce and pass on aspects of culture.

Through viable and sustainable programs that fostered the important connections described above, surfing programs were found to achieve several other outcomes including supporting participants to be safe, confident and courteous in the surf, developing individual and organisational capacity, offering an escape from boredom or difficult life conditions, and developing psycho-social skills related to confidence, self-esteem, empathy, maturity and independence. While all these effects were fostered, observed and/or reported to be developed within the surf programs, all were found to impact the lives of participants and communities well beyond the program boundaries.



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Appendix A: Experiences from the field

There were a great number of lessons learned by the research team during this project. While it is more appropriate to provide detailed discussions of these insights in empirical research forums (such as journals), it is worthwhile briefly mentioning some of the key discoveries and recommendations in this report.


Building and maintaining relationships

Indigenous Australians have been the subject of much research in a variety of domains. Similarly, this group has also been the focus of much government discussion and intervention, both historically and more recently. The issue for contemporary researchers and government agencies is that much of this past is viewed negatively by the communities involved. The history of researchers 'working on' rather than 'working with' communities and the impression of government officials in city attire, shaking hands and getting photos without providing any tangible benefit or legacy has left many of these communities with the feeling that they have been used by these groups.

Moreover, there is a degree of cynicism in Indigenous communities regarding 'outsiders' who want to access these sites. The colloquial term sometimes used to describe institutions and agencies such as universities is 'seagulls' because they fly in, take what they want, defecate on everything, and fly out. Examining this further, since European settlement of Australia, Indigenous Australians have experienced dispossession of land, destruction of culture and language and disruption to family caused by past government policies which involved the forcible removal of 'half-caste' children from their families (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008; Reynolds 2000). This history of colonisation and the resultant government policies have not only left a legacy of physical, emotional and social ill-health for Aboriginal families (Atkinson 2002) but also a legacy of often unspoken and unacknowledged attitudes amongst non-Indigenous Australians towards Indigenous people that disempower and disadvantage (Nelson 2009). Not surprisingly, Indigenous families are often suspicious of what might be termed 'mainstream' services or researchers.

The researchers were, and remain, cognisant of these issues in the design and conduct of this project, and this was of even greater relevance given the specific history of one of the sites. The community representatives of this site expressed they had felt 'used and abused' by a partner organisation that 'hijacked' one of the community's surfing events. It was only after some frank discussions including a clear elaboration regarding our proposed methods and our demonstrated commitment to establishing and maintaining relationships that this community agreed to be involved. Similarly, the need for research processes that centre on building relationships and connections has been advocated in the Indigenous research literature (Chino and DeBruyn 2006; Dunne 2000).

One of the key steps taken in this project for gaining access to communities was the utilisation of the Department of Regional Australia, Local Council, Art and Sport network of Indigenous Sport Development Officers (ISDOs). The ASC, along with other state and federal governmental agencies provide funding for a network of sport development officers throughout Australia who are responsible for planning, developing and facilitating the implementation of programs, projects and training opportunities for Indigenous people in sport and recreation. These practitioners are highly skilled, with position descriptions generally requiring high level qualifications in sport administration, coaching, officiating and or physical education teaching. ISDOs are also required to have a demonstrated ability to communicate sensitively and effectively with Indigenous communities and a working knowledge of the Indigenous culture of their respective regions. Importantly for this project, all ISDOs were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders with an understanding of the issues affecting Indigenous societies and the diversity of circumstances found in their allocated regions. This does not mean they have a familial history in their



allocated region, but it does mean they already had a long and generative history in the sites we were interested in and who had agreed to participate. By accessing, gaining approval from, and travelling to sites with, this group we were better equipped to negotiate the potentially complicated social and political circumstances. ISDOs were also the ones generally responsible for instigating and arranging the first meetings with Indigenous Councils or Elder representatives in each site (as discussed further in the next section).

The development of mutual trust between researchers and Indigenous people or communities is critical for gaining an authentic view of how Indigenous people see their world. This occurs through time invested in relationships and mutual sharing of stories, particularly stories about family (Kickett-Tucker 1997). An important aspect of this project was multiple site visits by a relatively stable group of personnel made up of ISDOs, researchers and staff from the ASC. Indeed, this project required the research group to travel great distances on a variety of occasions to be present at events where no 'actual' data collection occurred. Some institutions and agencies would consider these activities wasteful. We would argue, however, that the establishment of the researchers as 'part of the landscape' enabled us to gain access to and actually recognise the importance of, people and moments that would otherwise have been inaccessible or gone unnoticed (see Rossi et al., in press).

Finally, the strong coordination and project management by the ASC was, and continues to be, a source of the program's success. As the peak body for sport in the country, the ASC brings further legitimacy to this project in the eyes of the sporting community. The skilled ASC staff were able to coordinate site visits and project accountability by managing the multiple partners (University of Queensland, Surfing Australia, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, ISDOs and communities) in a way no other partner could do (from a position of authority and leadership). The presence of a strong and well-positioned partner is an aspect we consider crucial to any future models of viable operation.

Attitude of partnership

As discussed at the beginning of the previous section, the research team for this project was very mindful of the broad and specific histories of these sites and the potentially negative attitude that might be encountered and would need to be overcome for the research to progress. Indeed, we were keen to acknowledge we were, and continue to be, guests in their land (or country) and need to be cognisant of the cultural protocols and common courtesies ignored by some institutions and agencies before us. For this reason, in addition to the measures described in the previous section, the project team made a real effort to approach communities with a genuine attitude of partnership. This had implications for entry protocols to communities and in developing the research methods.

While ISDOs involved in this study were Indigenous and may have had some familial connections, they were often not direct descendants of the people in their allocated region of work. On the advice of the ASC and ISDOs, in each site our first meetings were with the Indigenous Councils or representative bodies. In this forum, we explained our reasons for wanting to be involved in the site and to gain input from the community on project design. We met with these bodies of authority within the community irrespective of other authorities which may have been accessed in their place (for example, in some sites we could have gained access to participants with some legitimacy via departments of education or through local government providers). It was necessary to gain authorisation from the Indigenous community first. To legitimately form authentic partnerships, it was appropriate to liaise with these other bodies, agencies and/or institutions.

There were some significant consequences this attitude of partnership had with respect to the research framework. Typically, universities, partner organisations and funding agencies expect a well-defined, highly structured set of research protocols before any engagement with subjects. This format would run counter to the attitude of partnership taken in this study which needed sufficient flexibility and reflexivity


to respond to community needs and priorities. That is not to say the research was not well considered or rigorously debated in its conception; the overarching framework took several months to agree on, with input from The University of Queensland, the ASC and Surfing Australia. Research in Indigenous communities has moved beyond prescriptive research guidelines to using Western research methods as 'a tool box' from which they [those involved in research] can take whatever methods are deemed appropriate to Aboriginal knowledge production' (Humphery 2001, p.198). The end result for our study was a broad framework that could capture program sustainability and viability, as well as accommodate the specific requests of our partners (each site). The final procedures and specific foci were negotiated with communities during and after our first contact with them. It was necessary for us to provide guidance and probe carefully to assist the representatives of these communities to consider what they wanted to investigate regarding the impact of these programs for the participants.

Finally, the anti-racist approach adopted in this research recognises that Indigenous people have been navigating Western knowledge systems since colonisation and they bring this knowledge and their traditional knowledge to any research or practical endeavour (Nakata 2007; Rigney 2001). Nakata (2007) argues that intellectual dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, while complex, allows for a shared space where 'we all have to give up something in order to reach common ground, mutual understanding and a re-shaping of thinking' (p. 113). This research has thus been approached with a view there are spaces at the interface between Western and Indigenous knowledge that provide opportunities for new insights and ways of understanding. This necessitates acknowledging the equal value of different forms of knowledge (Max 2005). In this research participants were involved in the specific design of the project, the collection of data, and the analysis of emerging themes alongside the research team, reflecting this commitment to partnership in knowledge production.

Acknowledgment and reflection regarding researcher personal history

As researchers, we need to be aware of the ways in which the knowledge and practices of Indigenous people can be viewed negatively, or at least as inferior, when compared to the knowledge and practices of white Western medicine and education. During this project, we were particularly aware of the sensitivity required and the need for ongoing self-reflection and critique of our (usually white, Western) assumptions. A situation exemplifying the need for such reflection was with respect to 'lateness' in one of the sites. On a number of occasions, the community was 'late' to the programmed surf sessions. The prevailing 'Western' assumption might be that the community did not value the surfing session or they had a lack of respect for the provider of the session. However, our interactions with the ASC, ISDOs and others indicated there may be a range of reasons for late or non-attendance that have nothing to do with the community's perception of the quality of the program (such as events of community upheaval such as deaths). Indeed, the remote or regional status of the site meant that transport was often problematic. Finally, there is also a sound body of empirical evidence suggesting that research with Indigenous people may need to avoid linear, time-oriented formats of Western science as this can potentially limit community participation. The subsequent recommendation has been for researchers to engage in a more participatory process where open communication develops and mutual goals can be established. Consequently, instead of automatically problematising the lateness of the community, we sought to problematise our view of this phenomenon in a number of different ways (i.e. in relation to reports of others, previous research, and from direct community reports).

Much of this reflection resulted from our attitude of partnership. We approached this research as 'allies' working with Indigenous communities which necessitated critical self-reflection on our own positions of privilege to work collaboratively and respectfully. More specifically, the research team would meet before, during and after each visit to discuss findings as well as the research process itself. These discussions variously included researchers and partners involved in the research as well as those who were not directly involved. Through this process of self and group reflection as well as through regular discussions



with Indigenous community members, underlying assumptions and/or beliefs became more visible to the non-Indigenous researchers and were able to be contested or understood through an Aboriginal lens (Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008). This high degree of reflexivity ensured that subsequent site visits and data analyses were (and continue to be) always informed by what has gone before.

Strengths-based approaches

The researchers, along with many Indigenous organisations and individuals, advocate for research and interventions in Indigenous communities which are strengths-based rather than deficit-focused (Bond 2005; Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008). A strengths-based approach recognises the existing knowledge, resilience and capacity within Indigenous individuals and communities and starts from this place, rather than viewing Indigenous people from a position of being 'poor'. In the case of our study, we sought to examine the network of relations and interactions that did exist (such as between surfing participants and program providers) rather than focusing on what was missing or absent in each community (such as by focusing on dysfunctional family relations).

While on one level it is irrefutable that Indigenous people may experience poverty and a lack of material resources, the danger with this deficit perspective is that researchers may (often unconsciously) then equate these statistical reports of lacking with individuals and assume that Indigenous people themselves are lacking (Bond 2005; Cowlshaw 2003; Nelson, et al. 2010). Bond (2005) articulates this in her statement that 'Aboriginality, I thought as an Aboriginal person, was about pride, strength, determination and survival — survival of our people, our communities and our cultures. Why then does Indigenous health discursively reverberate around the inadequacies, impairment and hopelessness of our people, families and communities?' (p. 40). Rather, from a strengths-based paradigm, Indigenous people are encouraged to articulate their view of the world and identify their needs from their perspectives. This is not without its own problems, however. We have found even Indigenous participants often find it easier to focus on the problems or weaknesses in their communities than considering the strengths (i.e. they often use the language of deficit) or indeed articulate positive feelings of good health which are grossly over-exaggerated (Cowlshaw 2003). For this reason, it was necessary to carefully consider the methods used to foster a strengths-based approach.

Carefully selected methods

In conducting this research we attempted to use Western research tools as well as the knowledge gained from local community members to help inform the overall project. As indicated earlier, a qualitative methodology was chosen as it allows the consideration of context and different ways of knowing — important within an anti-racist approach. More specifically, this research used several information gathering tools which sought to value lay knowledge and the contextual factors impacting on participation in sport and other behaviours.


One method used was semi-structured interviews. These took the form of one-on-one and group yarns. Semi-structured interviews are based on the premise that (to paraphrase George Kelly 1955) the best way to know what someone is thinking is to ask. Of great importance for this project were the organisation of the discussions and the nature of the talks. While some interviews were conducted one-on-one, the majority were in group settings. A practical example of the value of this group approach emerged early in the research project. On the way to one of the sites the ISDO (with whom we were travelling) was speaking on the phone to one of the participants we were going to meet. The ISDO was doing much reassuring about the conversational and non-threatening nature of the upcoming interview and when the call finished, the ISDO relayed to us the participant was checking to see how many

'researchers' were going to be in the meeting and if the situation was perceived to be too threatening for the participant, he would have left before we arrived. It was only after the ISDO reiterated there were only two people attending, and that the ISDO would also be present, that the participant agreed to stay. In the meeting, the tone of the discussions and the flow of the interview had to be carefully monitored and directed by the researchers. While the researchers have honed their skills through training and years of experience, the general recommendation is that everyday language should be used and be conversational in nature, with consideration given to the many conventions of semi-structured interviews (see for example Patton 2002). It was also important, as mentioned in the previous section, to frame questions and direct responses from a strengths-based position.

The interview settings were given much consideration in this research. All interviews occurred at times and in locations most comfortable and convenient for participants. While we made plans and attempted to put structures in place, the practice of conducting interviews in the field required much flexibility and fluidity on the part of the researchers (Patton 2002). An example of this was a group interview we were conducting at one site. The children participants were informed, in the midst of the interview, their breakfast was ready and they promptly ran off — the end of the interview is not always of the researcher's choosing. Similarly, it is also worth to note that 'western' expectations of the conduct at group conversations or yarns need to be muted. Those who form the groups at the commencement of the conversation session may not be the same people at the table (or around the fire) at the end. This fluidity represents the ebb and flow of how such yarns take place. Also it is not uncommon for members of the group to leave and return at a later time. This is neither disrespectful behaviour nor demonstrative of lack of interest. It is indicative of the multiple roles of our participants. More than this however, sometimes a story can be left for someone else to tell with others returning later to embellish, improve or correct the story. In spite of the research complexities of this negotiated form of communication through community, it was highly insightful and a far more authentic way to collect and understand the views of the community members or representatives. This has required careful manoeuvring, sometimes during and sometimes after the interviews, regarding securing informed consent (an aspect considered later in this section).

Another approach has been to use photographs and video materials. The use of visual methods and particularly photographs is a relatively recent phenomenon in educational research, although photography has a long history of making social commentary through its powerful images (Harper 1994). Photo elicitation is the process of inserting photos into interviews and arguably producing different kinds of data (Harper 2002). Using photo elicitation in interviews has also been advocated as a useful and valid tool for research involving marginalised groups, particularly when the researchers are 'outsiders' (as in the case of this research) (Liebenberg 2009). Photo images in this project were used as both 'text' (how Indigenous people read their social worlds) and 'context' (the landscape) (Orellana 1999). Photographs also acted as a tool for facilitating a more relaxed interview since eye to eye contact did not need to be maintained.

The anti-racist approach extended beyond the basic collection of data. There were steps taken in the analysis of these data to ensure the research placed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the centre of the analysis and focused on their lived experiences. In doing so, it was important to recognise that interpretation of the photos and other data is situated and partial. Rather than claiming to know the truth about this group of Indigenous young people, we borrow from Rhydwen (1996), who states 'I claim no special insight and write simply about my observations, my experiences and my interpretation of interactions with Aboriginal people' (p. viii). It was important therefore to be wary of analysing the data in abstract ways devoid of their context. To prevent this, and to increase the collaboration between the researchers and community members, an extended version of 'member checking' was incorporated into this research. Participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure the accuracy of what was recorded (traditional member checking), but beyond



this, participants were also given the opportunity to change their mind about what they said and could engage in stimulated reflection about the material in the previous interviews. Selected people from each site were also involved in considering and debating the accuracy and underlying meanings of the themes that began to emerge in the initial stages of analysis. Following anti-racist research methods, the development of reciprocity and trust in relationships extends to the active inclusion of participants in the process of the research.

As required by the university, this project was subject to rigorous scrutiny with respect to its ethical conduct through a formal ethical clearance process. This process gives great consideration to issues such as the rights of participants to refuse participation or to withhold information and the procedures for gaining informed consent before participation. While these were given their due consideration in this project, there were other matters of equal importance. In this research process, participants were asked their permission and perspectives about taking their information and sharing it with others in research contexts. While written text is often the most pragmatic form of representation for academic requirements it was not the most suitable for the participants. Many researchers now assert the necessity for different forms of representation for different audiences and the need for care in translating, representing and disseminating information to Indigenous participants in research (Kickett-Tucker 1997). So while boards of ethical clearance (university and government) are rightly interested in what researchers are going to 'do' to participants, anti-racist research must consider with equal diligence, how participants will be 'represented' in the research.

Summary of experiences

This project has already experienced 'some success'. An indication of this is the 100 per cent success rate for the involvement of selected sites and the 100 per cent success rate for the involvement of selected participants. This is worthy of note given a fundamental characteristic of the project is that sites and individuals are free to refuse participation or withdraw at any time without penalty.

While this could not be considered to be a strictly health-focussed project, a further indication of the project's success (or at least appropriateness) is the degree of fit with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research (National Health and Medical Research Council 2003). These guidelines are considered to be the 'gold standard' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research and the key values and ethics of reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity were considered in the design of this project. Similarly, this project is in keeping with calls for evidence-based practice, engagement and partnership with Indigenous Australians, and coordinated and sustained approaches advocated in governmental documents (Council of Australian Governments, n.d.).

This section of the report has outlined an approach to working with Indigenous communities that has been successful in a range of sites. While the theme of this section is that one size does not fit all, there are some guiding principles outlined that government agencies and sporting bodies should consider when attempting to engage in similar activities and/or in similar settings.

Some might consider the degree of planning, scale of community engagement, level of personal reflection, and extent of repeated site visits advocated here to be overkill or even wasteful. The counter argument we make is that these components are necessary for even the most basic of outcomes and to ignore them or cut corners would be a false economy. Of course, the discourse we propose is about relationship building and this has implications for the timing and funding of projects. In short, sustained effort is needed in terms of the investment of time, personnel and funding. The anticipated result of this investment is a project that achieves outcomes for researchers (such as quality data and trustworthy accounts), sporting bodies (such as more effective use of funds long-term and higher quality programs), and partner communities (such as communities and individuals should benefit from more effective programs, a better understanding of the impact of these programs on the lives of the participants, and from capacity built through participant engagement in the research process).

Recommendations regarding the conduct of research in Indigenous sport settings:

- There is (understandably) a degree of cynicism in the Indigenous Australian community regarding programs and projects conducted by research and government institutions. To counter this, researchers, sporting bodies and government agencies should consider the following:
 - Make use of existing networks already respected and trusted by the selected communities (such as the ISDO network).
 - Invest in multiple site visits with a stable group of personnel.
 - Strong project leadership and coordination is needed from key partner agencies (such as the Australian Sports Commission).
- It is recommended that researchers approach communities with an attitude of partnership and be mindful of entry protocols for communities. Making use of existing networks (such as ISDOs) will assist with this. First contact with communities should be through specific Indigenous Council or other representative bodies regardless of what other authorities may have some claim (such as departments of education and other government organisation). Engaging sites as partners in the design of the project as well as the collection and analysis of data requires funding bodies and other partners to be assured in non-traditional ways about the rigor and value of the project.
- It is recommended that researchers (and any other category of people working with Indigenous projects) engage in meaningful and ongoing personal and group reflection. Reflection can be enhanced by engaging with Indigenous participants, other researchers and other partner organisations, all of whom may or may not be involved directly in the project. Scheduling time for reflection at regular intervals (i.e. before, during site visits, immediately after, and in the weeks after site visits) is important and it is possible for individual and group reflections to be recorded and drawn upon in subsequent research design and reflective activities.
- It is recommended that projects in Indigenous settings be strengths-based (i.e. reject the deficit model). Participants will generally need some assistance and coaching if they are to approach their responses from a strengths-base (i.e. participants often find it easier to speak in the language of deficit).
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Appendix B: Viability and sustainability questionnaire

Surfing Australia HR representative

- How many people have been employed in this position over the past 5 years?
- What is the length of time the current person has been in the position?
- What total funding is available for each of the programs (i.e. including staff salaries etc.)?
- Where does the funding come from for these programs (i.e. funding sources)?
- What is the period of time over which funding is secured?
- What proportion is from grants (government and non-government)?
- What is the operational budget for each of the programs?
- Do programs have other revenue streams?
- Does Surfing Australia have a succession plan for surfing in this community? This may be categorised into intermediate steps: initial discussions have occurred, planning has started but a final plan has not been agreed upon, a plan has been developed and is awaiting community endorsement, plan developed and endorsed by the community, existing plan has been reviewed etc.
- Are there any documents that detail this plan?


Current surfing officer

- What is the length of time you have been in this position?
- What events have you held over the past year (times and frequency and in relation to school holidays, sporting seasons etc.)?
- What events do you have planned for the coming year?
- How has the attendance been at the previous events?
- Is there anyone from the local community that assists with the programs? (Who are they? How do they assist? When have they assisted? Are they paid or compensated in any way?)
- What is your operational budget?
- Where does your budget come from?
- Do you have any additional revenue streams (i.e. funding through sponsorship, donations etc.)?
- What is your educational background (i.e. qualifications)?
- What previous job experiences have assisted you in your current position?
- Have you received any additional training since being in this position?
- Check for any indication of cultural awareness training, management training, teaching skills, coaching or official accreditation etc.
- Please rate (high, medium, low) the local community's capacity to run the surfing program in your absence in terms of:

- sporting know-how
- administration
- management of activities / teaching
- experience
- reliability
- motivation
- What are the key agencies in this community (such as community leadership groups, health clinic, school, police etc.)?
- Please describe your working relationship with each of these groups (such as confidence in their capacity and cross-talk)? This may include a rating of: negative relationship, no relationship, partially productive relationship, fully productive relationship, don't know/unsure. It may also include a description of the nature of the relationship: occasional sharing, regular meetings, sharing resources, joint projects etc.
- Please rate the quantity of equipment you have in the Surfing program (such as insufficient, sufficient).
- Please rate the quality of equipment you have in the Surfing program (include: need for repair, replacement etc.).
- Please rate the quantity of facilities you have access to.
- Please rate the quality of facilities you have access to.
- Do you keep participation records for your program? (If we can access this information we can complete the rest independently.)
- What is the total number of participants you have had for this program?
- What was the total number of participants for your most popular day?
- What was the total number of participants for your least popular day?
- What is the proportion of males vs females?
- What is the age range of participants?
- What is the average age of participants?

Community representative

- Have you assisted in any way with the surfing program?

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- In what ways have you assisted?
 - Do you feel that you work well with the Surfing Officer?
 - Have you ever been paid or compensated for helping?
 - Regarding the surfing program, are you satisfied with how regularly it is offered?
 - Are you satisfied with the types of activities provided?
 - Are you satisfied with the timing of the program (i.e. when it is offered)?
 - Are you satisfied with the level of community engagement (i.e. training and engagement)?
 - Overall how satisfied are you with the surfing program (including cultural sensitivity, stability of personnel, etc.)?
 - Please rate (high, medium, low) the local community's capacity to run the surfing program in the absence of the Surfing Officer in terms of:
 - sporting know-how
 - administration
 - management of activities / teaching
 - experience
 - reliability
 - motivation.
 - Are you aware of the total Indigenous population size in this community? If yes, what is it?
 - What proportion of youths in your community are involved in the surfing program?

Appendix C: Social capital semi-structure interview guide

- What school do you (your children) go to?
- How did you (your children) find out about the surfing program?
- How far did you have to come to get to the surfing program?
- What other things did you have to do to make it here today?
- How long have you (your children) been involved in the surfing program?
- Had you (your children) ever surfed before being involved in the program?
- What do you (your children) like about the program?
- What do you (your children) gain from being involved in the program (physical skills, sense of community, connection with Aboriginal heritage)?
- Do you think you (your children) will continue to surf beyond the program?
- Tell me about the people that you (your children) know in the surfing program?
- had you met them before the program?
 - how well do you know them?
 - what do you like about them?
 - what don't you like about them?
 - have they ever helped you?
 - how well do you trust them?
 - how well do you think others trust you? Compare with other settings
 - had you seen/met people in the program (such as Mayor, FaHCSIA rep, MINGALETTA representatives) before the culminating surfing event?
 - how well do you feel you know each of these?
- How well supported do you feel in relation to the program and the other participants?
- Have you ever helped others out (or been helped by others)? This might include picking up the children of other parents.
- How comfortable do you feel in the program? Compared to other sports? Compared to school? Compared to at home?
- How much do you feel a part of the program? (Attachment and belonging)
- This is an Indigenous program, what is your family background (i.e. what region are you from)?
- What do you know about your Aboriginal history/culture etc? (for example, language, dreaming stories, etc.)
- Are your children involved in any other programs (sporting or otherwise)?

Forms of capital:

- Have you gained any qualifications through being involved in this program?
- Has your use/knowledge of Aboriginal language changed through this program?
- Have you used surfing in any other areas of your life (such as in drawings, school projects, songs etc.)?
- Previous questions about fellow participants and their families.
- Previous questions about council, government and surfing officials.
- How similar do you think you (your children) are to other members of the surfing group?



Appendix D: Combined summaries

Indigenous culture

- There is diversity of Indigenous culture (in that it is dynamic and ever changing) and communities have somewhat complicated micro and macro politics associated with them
- Many characteristics are ascribed to Aboriginal people and in the context of this research it was the natural talent of children that was emphasised by participants

Surfing program — models and conduct

- There is great variety in terms of how programs operate, however, there were some common elements across all programs. These included strict surfer-to-coach ratios, opt-in opt-out structures and avoidance of controlling coach behaviours.
- Key people had diverse backgrounds, a passion for surfing and/or a passion for Indigenous participation
- Consistency in program personnel was critical to success and was most effective when the management team was a small group and not a single provider
- Annual budgets ranging from \$3500 to \$30 000 are sourced from government bodies (such as state departments of sport and recreation, local governments and justice organisations) as well as Indigenous Councils and groups (Land Councils and Cooperatives), the surf industry (surfboard riders, manufacturers) and sporting bodies (national and state)
- These organisations and groups help fund the purchase or hire of equipment, employment of surf coaches as well as transport and food
- The reliance on short-term external funding is a key issue for programs because it is time consuming and perceived as being dependent on 'loose' and changing criteria
- A range of other organisations provide support for programs including government departments and organisations, Indigenous groups, media, the surf industry, parents and friends, as well as sporting and youth support organisations
- There is a 'gift economy' in virtually all programs with personnel, equipment and transport costs being absorbed by individuals and other organisations
- A number of factors determine the timing and frequency of programs. Factors considered include community preferences, available funding, positioning of other sports, the timing of the school year and the prevailing season.
- Attendance at programs was generally very strong but did tend to fluctuate somewhat unexpectedly
- Lateness was an issue at some programs as it had perceived financial and learning impacts
- Programs make use of a variety of beaches that are generally patrolled and have safe conditions for beginner surfers
- Transport is a major factor for families who do not live within walking distance from safe parts of the coast. While some programs offer limited transport support (buses) most participants get to programs via private cars.

Surfing program — outcomes

- It often takes a long time for the positive effects of surfing and programs to be revealed
- Programs have holistic aims and outcomes (beyond improvement in surfing)
- There are opportunities for individuals to develop professional capacity, and there are noteworthy benefits associated with these advancements.
- There are opportunities for organisations involved in programs to develop professional capacity, and there are noteworthy benefits associated with these advancements

Connecting with and learning from

- Surf programs provide a way for Indigenous people to (re)connect with country
- Programs foster connections between participants and program providers that may shape and influence participants' lives within and beyond the sport
- Participants can form connections with other Indigenous children which are particularly important given the reported levels of disconnection and feelings of isolation (strengthening ties, developing pride, reinforcing culture)
- The opportunity to connect with community members helped reinforce and pass on cultural aspects and also provided the opportunity to seek or offer advice and assistance from and to others
- Community members felt strongly about the need to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and the significance of traditional food sources

Programs have a variety of aims and perceived outcomes

- The principle aim of all programs and the primary reason that people come to programs is that participants learn to be safe and confident in the surf
- Children are learning to be safe themselves and also to save others
- Coaches gain enjoyment and satisfaction from seeing participants have fun
- The overwhelming majority of participants have a great deal of fun at these programs
- Programs offered an escape from boredom or difficult life conditions and served as a way for participants to physically exert themselves in a positive way
- A popular belief was that surfing provided an outlet with a similar degree of challenge and 'rush' to anti-social activities
- Program participants develop and can self-monitor their physical skills and improve aspects of their physical capacities
- Participants also develop psycho-social skills related to confidence, self-esteem, empathy, maturity and independence and these were reported to have an impact beyond programs (at school and home)
- Programs also foster an understanding of first aid and surf etiquette which allows individuals to better navigate the coastal environment

Concluding and cautionary comments about program outcomes

- Surfing is not a 'cure-all' for addressing social issues
- Not everyone surfs or likes surfing
- You can get injuries surfing

Appendix E: Combined recommendations

Surfing — General / Outside of programs

- Surfing should continue to be considered as an appropriate sport for use with Indigenous communities.

Indigenous culture


- Any program needs to take into consideration the diversity of Indigenous culture and how communities operate and should seek appropriate guidance

Surfing Program — Models and conduct

- These elements of surfer-to-coach ratios, opt-in and opt-out structures and avoidance of controlling behaviours should continue in programs to facilitate self-determined forms of motivation.
- Programs should aim to create small working groups with fairly stable membership
- Extended funding support for programs should be provided, which can be achieved by adopting operating models such as the local government Council-operated program that lists the surfing program as a budgeted items that contributes to the Indigenous outcomes it desires
- Collection of meaningful data (such as well-constructed interview and survey protocols) over and above simple participation statistics is important
- To achieve meaningful outcomes, programs need continuity and should not be one-offs. Programs should seek funding on this basis
- This also requires funding agencies to include program longevity as a possible criteria upon which funding may be awarded
- The recommended strategies to avoid frustration regarding lateness include consulting communities in deciding program dates, advertising agreed dates early and widely and remaining flexible in session structure and start time.
- Transport costs most likely represent the greatest barrier to participation in programs and adopting surfing as a lifestyle pursuit. Programs should consider the transport options most suitable for their area.

Surfing program — outcomes

- Because it can take a long time for the effects of programs to be felt, longitudinal tracking by program providers is required to provide ongoing evidence in support of programs
- Funding should also be provided across longer time frames so as to provide a greater platform to generate positive outcomes
- The capacities of individuals are not automatically enhanced through surfing programs. Careful planning and strong encouragement/support from program providers is required to develop the capacity of individuals. This may be in the form of targeted recruitment for coaching programs, providing regular feedback to community members and actively gauging interest of community members to be involved in aspects of program provision.

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- Like individual capacity building, organisational capacity building requires careful planning and strong encouragement and support. This may be in the form of engaging in surfing programs as professional development, aligning organisational policies and goals to program outcomes, and leveraging community connections.

Connecting with and learning from

- Connecting with and learning from the ocean, program providers, Indigenous peers and Indigenous community members is a very important aspect of surfing programs and should be acknowledged by program providers, community members and funding bodies. This acknowledgement will reinforce the range of personal and community benefits associated with being 'connected'.
- It is appropriate to conduct some form of acknowledgement of country at events
- Program providers should consider cultural aspects and the significance of the food provided (such as traditional foods of saltwater people)

Concluding and cautionary comments about program outcomes

- Rather than emphasising the peripheral things that sport can do, programs which do not explicitly and purposefully pursue other agendas (such as through strategic partnerships with health services) should be primarily considered with respect to the value of sport for sport's sake
- Despite the wide appeal of sport, its perceived ability to 'cut-through' a variety of social and cultural issues and its potential to provide broader social benefits, it should be acknowledged that sport has its limits

Recommendations regarding the conduct of research in Indigenous sport settings:

- There is (understandably) a degree of cynicism in the Indigenous Australian community regarding programs and projects conducted by research and government institutions. To counter this, researchers, sporting bodies and government agencies should consider the following:
 - Make use of existing networks already respected and trusted by the selected communities (such as the ISDO network)
 - Invest in multiple site visits with a stable group of personnel.
 - Strong project leadership and coordination is needed from key partner agencies (such as the Australian Sports Commission)
- It is recommended that researchers approach communities with an attitude of partnership and be mindful of entry protocols for communities. Making use of existing networks (such as ISDOs) will assist with this. First contact with communities should be through specific Council or other representative bodies regardless of what other authorities may have some claim (such as departments of education, governmental bodies etc.). Engaging sites as partners in the design of the project as well as the collection and analysis of data requires funding bodies and other partners to be assured in non-traditional ways about the rigor and value of the project.

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