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# Consultation Draft

Strategic Plan



Paddle Australia Strategic Plan

CONSULTATION DRAFT

*'Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.'*

*John F Kennedy*

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## Strategic Plan



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### ***Strategic Plan Consultation Process***

If you paddle in Australia, you are a part of Paddle Australia (PA). You may not be a member, but you are part of the community that, as the National Sports Organisation (NSO), we serve and represent. PA does not exist in isolation. It consists of six state associations, around 150 clubs and many individuals. Throughout this document, we use PA in this broad sense but also to refer to the national office, relying on the context to distinguish between the two.

A Strategic Plan for Paddle Australia can only be a Strategic Plan for paddling in Australia. The Board of PA, through our CEO, is leading this consultation process and we are seeking your active input.

This document is clearly not a Strategic Plan for paddling in Australia! Rather it is a Consultation Draft that highlights for discussion some of the strategic issues that the Board of PA has identified as being of a high priority for paddling over the next four years. We do not pretend that the issues discussed are the only issues that need addressing. There will be others that arise through the consultation process. These may well become part of the final Strategic Plan.

The Board of PA is very conscious that, as a paddling community, we cannot do everything at once! We will need to prioritise and obviously not everything raised during this consultation process can be included in the Strategic Plan. However, we can guarantee that, whilst it might not be possible to acknowledge your input individually, everything raised will be considered.

The initial consultation period will end in mid-April. Once we have everyone's input and feedback, we will develop a Strategic Plan and send a draft back to all those that have contributed, ahead of the final release.

The Strategic Plan itself will be a 4-year rolling plan. It will be reported against, reviewed and adjusted annually. It is important to understand that not everything that PA and its many stakeholders plan to do over the next four years will be included in the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan will focus on the strategic shifts that we agree we need to make and how we will make these.

The degree to which the agreed strategic shifts will actually occur will inevitably depend on the level of buy-in and alignment that there is not just between the PA, member associations and clubs, but also across the wider paddling community. Change will not occur without the active support of the whole community.

PA will have an Annual Operations Plan (AOP) that will include all the key things we need to achieve during the year to deliver the strategic objectives as well as other 'business as usual' activities, the stuff we just must get done! The AOP will set our deliverables for the year.

We have been 'planning to plan' for some time! There are various references and links throughout this Consultation Draft to reports and other background documents, some paddling specific, some not, but all of which provide helpful insights that will help us make the right decisions. We acknowledge all those that have contributed to this valuable body of knowledge.

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### *Setting the Scene*

Australian Canoeing will officially become known as Paddle Australia in June 2018. This represents much more than a different name and logo. The change signifies greater alignment across the higher levels of the administration of the sport and a change in the direction in which the sport and recreation of paddling is heading.

Much of what PA does is currently under review, with the aim of making significant improvements to the services offered and how these are delivered. Ways are also being examined that will allow Paddle Australia and its member states and clubs, to better engage with the increasingly large and diverse recreational paddling community.

As the focus on health, well-being and social connection increases, paddling, with the right promotion, presentation and development opportunities, will become widely recognised as an activity that perfectly delivers what many are now seeking. Paddling is a unique way to enjoy the natural environment, whether alone or with friends or family, for adventure or exercise, at your own pace or in competition with others. Our diversity is our strength.

Organisationally, we have an opportunity to **lead, connect and grow** the paddling community in Australia. This will take a significant effort from all of us, particularly state associations and clubs, working together to maximise our collective potential.

It will also mean change. As the environment and demands of participants change, we cannot keep doing what we have always done and expect different outcomes. Paddling, like other sports, must adapt. Failure to do so will see what we are now doing becoming less and less relevant. Not only will our offerings need to change, but so too our structures and processes. Our ability to innovate, particularly using new technology, is seen as a key factor in our future success.

It is against this background that Paddle Australia is leading the establishment of a new Strategic Plan for the sport and recreation of paddling. This must be a whole of sport plan with everyone understanding the direction and the part that they can and need to play in the delivery of the plan. Ideally, every state and every club will adopt the final plan and actively contribute to its implementation. If not, the eventual outcome will be less than optimal.

On the contrary, if everyone actively contributes to the development and delivery of the new strategy, the sport and recreation of paddling has enormous potential and a very positive future. The Board of PA looks forward to embracing this future with you.

This Consultation Draft discusses seven themes, one on each page, with a single question, hopefully open question, based on each theme. The aim is to allow those attending one of our workshops to get their thoughts structured around each theme. Those unable to attend are invited to provide comments via email to [planning@canoe.org.au](mailto:planning@canoe.org.au)

We urge you to have your say in the future of paddling in Australia!

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### ***Developing a network that seamlessly connects and delivers services to the entire paddling community***

Sport, like many other areas of life, is being constantly disrupted by new technologies. We can either fully embrace this disruption as a force for positive change, or continue adopting technology in a somewhat piecemeal way, limiting the benefits that it could bring.

In early 2017, AC adopted the principles of a [Digital Strategy](#). This followed a review by independent consultants, Simplicit, financed by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC). The highlight is:

**‘OUR 2020 GOAL IS TO BUILD THE FOUNDATION TO DIGITALLY INNOVATE AND TRANSFORM PADDLING IN AUSTRALIA.’**

One of the keys will be to provide a system that allows clubs to connect more effectively with their members, and potential members. An aim should be to improve efficiency and reduce the workload on volunteers and those involved in the administration of clubs and other organisations.

The expansion of technology in the management of sport and recreation comes, by happy coincidence, at a time when there is a growing group of people paddling with little or no connection to our conventional structures. Technology provides us with a way to engage with these individuals as we have never been able to before.

The network will need to provide clubs, our state associations, paddle groups and others with the relevant tools that connect the whole paddling universe. To achieve this, the various parts of our community will need to work collaboratively to define what each need now and what they envisage needing in the future, the latter being the biggest challenge!

This network will not be built overnight. Planning is critical. It will be important to establish and agree priorities and what the deliverables will be at each stage in the development of the network. A plan can then be put in place that clarifies what will be delivered and by when.

One of the main challenges is to build the system in such a way that flexibility is maintained, allowing changes to be made as the needs of the sport and community change. Lack of flexibility has been the cause of some of the challenges faced by AC and other NSOs in the recent years.

Funding a major project of this nature is a significant challenge for a sport and recreation like paddling. We do not have large sums to invest. We will be looking to work with partners that can support us, being careful as always to retain our rights to the data that will eventually reside within the network. Financing the system will be a major part of the planning process, perhaps limiting the pace at which this essential change can be made.

The development of this network is seen as central to the delivery of nearly all the other strategies identified as priorities. It is seen as crucial to the future success and sustainability of paddling as both a sport and recreation.

**What process do we need to put in place to define the digital requirements of the paddling community, clubs, state associations, Paddle Australia and the other stakeholders, in order the ensure we build a network that is fit for purpose?**

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### ***Creating a genuine and authentic role for Paddle Australia in the lives of our participants***

Many sports in Australia with a strong recreational base such as Athletics, Cycling and Swimming have benefitted from the surge in interest in health and well-being in recent years. They now have levels of 'recreational participation' that far exceed those involved their 'competitive sport'. You don't need a team, you don't need a pitch, you don't need rules or officials. You just need a park, a pool or a road (and a pair of shoes, swimmers or a bike!) and away you go!

Of course, in some sports, the increase in participation is directly reflected in an increase in the number of members. Team sports such as soccer are very boring on your own and a basic level of infrastructure is required to compete. Hence membership levels remain high and a good indicator of participation. The AUSPlay Survey, at this [link](#), released by the ASC in late 2016, provides the most accurate data yet on the actual participation in sports with a strong recreational component. See page 14 for comparisons.

Other sports have sought to find different ways to engage with these recreational participants but, by and large, have had difficulty providing the right offerings. Perhaps the challenge is that they, like us, come at the issue from the perspective of a structured, club-based sport, focused mainly around competitive activities.

It is no surprise that almost always the first question from those that have been involved in our 'conventional' structure is 'How can we get these recreational participants to become members!' The answer, if we believe any of the research that has been hitting the wires over the last decade, is that our conventional membership offering is simply not what they want!

In 2013, *'The Future of Australian Sports – megatrends shaping the sports sector over coming decades'*, commissioned by the ASC and CSIRO, gave some great insights into the way sport was changing and would continue to change. This [link](#) takes you to the Report.

In 2017, Sports Consultancy Repucom, supported by the ASC, undertook a piece of research aimed at 'Understanding and Identifying Opportunities in the Recreational (Paddling) Market'. They landed on five areas that they suggested were worth further work:

- Engage through information such as information hub / explorer app
- Connect through (introductory) courses using 'fun' themes and delivering through multiple channels
- Build retail brand awareness
- Facilitate the sharing of experiences and networking through key channels
- Provide assurance through quality endorsement

A summary of the findings is at this [link](#).

**How do we go about creating a genuine and authentic role for Paddle Australia, state associations and clubs in the lives of all participants, and where does the responsibility rest?**

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### ***Reflecting a positive, shared brand, culture and values that make everyone want to be 'a part of paddling'***

There will always be more that draws us together than pulls us apart. The way we behave needs to reflect that whilst in taking advantage of the diversity that is paddling we may do quite different things, we come together as one, united paddling community.

As a community, we need to reflect that our diversity is our strength. Whether an athlete competing at the highest level of our sport, or a recreational paddler that enjoys the health and social benefits of a club or meet up group, or someone that simply enjoys exploring the beautiful waterways that Australia has to offer, alone or with family and friends, we are all first and foremost, paddlers.

We have agreed to a change in our corporate name(s) and logo(s). This will help to ensure that the various parts of our organisation at state and national level are seen as connected. However, our consumer brand, which will influence how the community sees us, needs to go further. We simply need to be seen as one.

Organisations are driven by different things. Our aim should be to be a values-driven organisation, with the values of groups that are a part of the community exactly aligned with those of the community that we serve and represent. Our values should be consistently reflected at every level, with everyone playing a part in articulating what we are and what values we share.

The first step is to agree on those things that we collectively stand for and then to ensure all we do is consistent with those things that we have agreed. This will likely to manifest itself in different ways in the different parts of our different organisations. In a community the size and diversity of paddling, this will be a long journey!

Significantly, it is how we collectively reflect these values as a community and how our brand, aligned with these values, is promoted, that will influence the people that are considering joining us. Does what they see align with their own values? Do they want to be 'a part of paddling'?

This interest in aligning with our brand and values will not be limited only to individuals. Increasingly, partners and sponsors are seeking to align with organisations that are either 'similar' to their own or that can help bring about a particular shift in perception. In this respect, the establishment of clear values makes the establishment of strong commercial relationships more likely.

There are many things that the Paddle Australia Board consider relevant to the national organisation and how it should function. We have set ourselves the aim of being 'high performing' in all aspects of our business. We will be setting our performance targets with this mantra in mind for the next four years.

**What are your thoughts about the values that, as the paddling community, we want to reflect and how should we collectively go about defining an agreed position, recognising it will be difficult for everyone to be engaged in the process?**

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### ***Building a sustainable structure that maximises the prospects of success of paddling in Australia***

If we are to change, we will need free ourselves up to focus on different things. Already the efforts to promote, develop and advocate for the sport at state and local level are impacted by the time consumed in management, administration and compliance. Our efforts should be on reducing the time spent on those things that don't move the sport forward and that volunteer committee members generally don't sign up for!

We do have some systems and processes that, whilst they have served us well, need to change if we are to deliver better outcomes across the paddling community. Our network must serve to reduce the administrative burden at all levels of the sport.

Too often, we are duplicating things that could and should be done once and simply shared. Often the outcome is better than something drawn up in isolation. The development of a shared network is a good example of an initiative that, if properly planned, will be to the benefit of all.

There are many areas where we can become more efficient. Governance, technology, marketing and sponsorship, finance and human resources are all areas where shared services can reduce administrative time and cost. There are some simple steps we can take. Already, PA has started sharing policies and key documents with member associations. Building a similar a 'resource bank' for clubs would be a relatively easy step, especially given that many of the resources already exist.

The compliance requirements on our structure continue to increase. For some years PA, as one of the conditions of funding by the ASC, has been required to meet a set of Mandatory Sports Governance Principles, which can be found at this [link](#). More recently, some member associations have been required to meet some or all of these Principles as a condition of their funding from the state government. Clubs also face increasing requirements. We must work collectively to ensure that we are able to focus on outcomes that benefit the sport.

The network we are building has the potential to deliver a commercial return to paddling. As more of the paddling community are engaged and we better understand their wants and needs, so commercial partners will start to take interest, themselves seeking to engage to promote their wares. We can look to provide products and services to the community through this network.

The current membership arrangements have been in place for some years. They do not however, reflect the current constitutional arrangements. Clubs pay affiliation fees to states based on the number of members in that club. There is a perception, perhaps as a result, that the individual is a member of Paddle Australia. This is not the case. In fact, the individual is a member of the club, the club is affiliated to the member association and the member association is in turn affiliated to PA. This should be reviewed, especially as we all engage increasingly with individual paddlers.

**What are the key challenges to the sustainability of paddling in Australia and how can these be most effectively addressed?**

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### ***Providing opportunities for all those wanting to join us, whatever their age, background or ability***

We already have some of the best developed education programs for introducing new participants and helping them develop their skills. The challenge is to find more ways of engaging more people in these programs.

It can be argued that we currently undervalue our offering in this area. Changing priorities are seeing people more willing to pay for professional services. Education and training is one such service, particularly where there is a health outcome on offer. The commercial model for the delivery of paddle education programs needs to be reviewed with the aim of encouraging commercial providers to engage in the system.

The research from Repucom indicates that many people are drawn to paddling later in life. We need to ensure that we are properly servicing this market, where the drivers can be slightly different. Cost is less of a barrier; time and convenience are more significant. It is in this area of the market where there is much to learn from other activities that have seen major changes recently. Cycling would be one of the more obvious examples where there is a significant equipment cost but the health and well-being benefits are well recognised (setting aside the dangers of riding on the road!)

At the same time, we need to develop more opportunities for young people to become involved in paddling if we are to maintain our share of a very crowded and competitive youth market. We have products designed for this market but our delivery of these is patchy. Schools are clearly one route, and the ASC Sporting Schools initiative has produced great results for some sports, often those that can be played in or near the schools themselves.

We do tend to call things that generally result in the same outcomes by different names! This does not help when developing collateral, support systems or promoting our offerings to the market. We should work towards consistent products in the interests of efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Convenience is significant when people are making choices about how they spend their time. With congestion becoming a significant issue, especially at weekends, paddlers will be seeking more local opportunities. A lack of water will see large parts of the community unable to get involved.

Access to water and facilities will remain a key issue for paddling as we battle conflicting interests. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that paddling is better recognised and is 'at the table' when discussions on access are taking place. This will require active engagement with local and state governments, water authorities and other statutory bodies. Engagement in these areas falls largely to state associations and clubs. There is a role for Paddle Australia to play in the development of suitable collateral and documentation to support them.

### **What are the priorities areas for increasing participation in paddling and what roles should the different organisations be playing?**

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### ***Promoting and supporting pathways for those seeking to be the best they can be in their chosen area***

Pathway is perhaps a less than ideal term when it comes to paddling. Given the diversity of our activity, for us it is about connecting people to the next opportunity and supporting them to take it. At any stage, there may be multiple options. The pathway is not always linear!

Obviously, the athlete pathway is key. Good work is already being done here. The Canoe Sprint Athlete Development Pathway at this [link](#) is one example. We should be aiming for similar outlines in each discipline and then looking at what the transfer opportunities look like! Clearly there is much to do but a good start has been made.

Current athletes likely see the end of the pathway as the World or Olympic Podium, preferably the top step! But the journey doesn't and shouldn't end there. Athletes that achieve at this level, and many that achieve at lower levels, are often lost because we fail to plan for how we retain and engage them beyond their competitive careers. This is an opportunity and an obligation that we must plan for in the future.

We rely very heavily on volunteers to deliver our sport. Often, we see the load falling to just one or two people on whom we become reliant. Without support, even the most committed eventually burn out. The key is to ensure that the load is shared and this means having more people willing to step up.

Word of mouth is the best way to build a workforce. The first thing we must do in recruiting new volunteers is to make sure that we are looking after the ones we already have. We need to work in and across disciplines to train, recognise and reward volunteers, officials and coaches, promoting local, national and international opportunities, always recognising the contribution that people make and continue to make to the sport.

Coaching presents us with some significant challenges. The coaching pathway is just as important, some would argue more important than the athlete pathways. We need to ensure relevant, sports-specific programs are in place at all levels. This will be a key element of the strategic plan.

We are the custodians of the sport today. A key part of our role is to ensure that it will be in good hands tomorrow. From today's athletes will come the leaders of tomorrow. Their engagement in shaping the future is therefore critical. PA has reconstituted the Athletes Commission and is committed to engaging the group in all key decisions.

**What are the barriers to progressing in paddling, whether as an athlete, coach, official or administrator and which are the most critical to address?**

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### ***Developing our competitions into events that demand attention and involvement***

At one level, we are a complex sport. We need timing equipment to measure performance accurately, systems to hold boats on the start line, people judging at gates and referees controlling our matches!

We need to build, maintain and develop relevant technology to support events; develop the knowledge and capacity amongst volunteers to use and manage the technology; and ensure that we have systems that ensure proper 'transfer of knowledge' between events, supporting those charged with running our key competitions.

Responsibility for this falls to our Technical Groups, providing technical input and advice as well as a remarkable level of operational support. In this area though, there is scope for the groups to work much more closely. The current danger is that we end up planning in isolation. This sometimes results in athletes making decisions between events in two disciplines when they would benefit from doing both. If we want to better support our major events, we need to plan collaboratively.

Our competitions, in some disciplines, are exciting to watch yet we have failed to attract either live or remote audiences in any numbers. The exposure of our sport and our outstanding athletes is limited. We must promote and build the value of our events, both for participants and spectators, raising the profile of and interest in paddling, all benefitting from increased participation.

We should not look at the marketing of our competitions in homogenous way, but rather play to the strengths that each offers.

Slalom, Wildwater and Freestyle are restricted by the venues at which they can be held. Thus, live audiences, at least in the short term, will mainly be from the local area. Cost effective promotions and links with partners should allow us to engage these markets and excite people about coming along. Live stream and other broadcast systems need to become a constant feature of the major events in some, and ideally all of these disciplines. This means organising the events in such a way that resources can be shared, allowing cost effective coverage.

The limited venues, coupled with a global climate that encourages those from the Northern Hemisphere to migrate south for the winter, provides us with a great opportunity to become the 'winter destination' for these paddlers. This provides our paddlers a unique and inexpensive opportunity to pitch themselves against the world's best. These events also start to have a significant economic benefit which many sports have been successful in monetising.

Sprint, Marathon, Ocean Racing and Canoe Polo all have their unique strengths. Some have the option to be staged in different venues, close to centres of populations and transient audiences. As a sport we should also consider our position in relation to betting. During the plan period we need to start actively exploring these options.

### **Where should we focus our efforts in terms of event development to raise the profile and public interest in paddling?**

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*'The best way to predict the future is to invent it.'*

*Peter Drucker*