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Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT

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Submitter: ACT Triathlon

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ACT Triathlon's submission to the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation's **Inquiry into Barriers and Opportunities for Participation in Community Sports in the ACT**

Submitted by: ACT Triathlon

Date: 14 October 2025

Executive Summary

ACT Triathlon welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. As the peak body for triathlon and multisport in the Australian Capital Territory, we represent a diverse community of athletes ranging from first-time participants to elite competitors across swimming, cycling, and running disciplines.

This submission identifies critical barriers affecting participation in triathlon and multisport activities, while highlighting opportunities to enhance community engagement in what is one of Australia's fastest-growing sports. Our recommendations focus on infrastructure development, equitable access, safety improvements, and streamlined regulatory processes.

About ACT Triathlon

ACT Triathlon is affiliated with AusTriathlon is the leading organisation dedicated to promoting and advancing the sport of triathlon and multisport in the ACT. Our purpose is to foster the development and growth of triathlon by:

- organising and delivering high-quality triathlon, duathlon, and aquathlon events for our members and the wider community
- collaborating with affiliated clubs and event promoters to facilitate diverse and inclusive events throughout the ACT
- ensuring participant satisfaction and safety in all TACT-delivered or sanctioned events
- cultivating interest and engagement in triathlons, duathlons, and aquathlons across the ACT and surrounding regions
- nurturing a sense of camaraderie, sportsmanship, and community among triathlon enthusiasts
- providing educational resources, training opportunities, coaching support, and encouragement to our association members
- taking all necessary actions to further our objectives and champion the interests of our association.

ACT Triathlon is an incorporated association registered in the ACT. In September 2024, TACT (Triathlon ACT) entered into a 15-month trial of AusTriathlon's whole-of-organisation operating model – based on the Australian Sports Commission's One Management Model.

ACT has joined Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Northern Territory in the model.

The aim of the model is to align governance and operations to enable sustainable growth for triathlon through improving service consistency, operating efficiency and effectiveness.

Under the operating model, the workforce and operations are aligned under a single organisational structure, this includes financial management, communications, marketing, sponsorship and event operations.

For the ACT, the Executive Officer is now the State Services Manager reporting to the AusTriathlon General Manager – Sport Services rather than to the TACT board.

Under the model, all State and Territory boards remain in place and play a key role in contributing to the development of the national strategic plan, representing the interest of local members and ensuring a thriving triathlon community in their State or Territory.

Key Barriers to Participation in Community Sports

1. Access to Facilities and Infrastructure

Aquatic facilities

Current Challenges:

- Limited lane availability at public pools during peak training times (early morning and evening), with not-for-profit clubs competing with commercial swim school operators for space.
- Costs, including dual costs of pool hire for clubs (which is passed on to members) and pool entry for individuals create financial barriers.
- Limited change and locker facilities at popular open water swimming areas.
- Variable water quality of open water swimming facilities risks swim leg of triathlon races being cancelled at short notice.

Impact on Participation: Swimming is the foundational discipline in triathlon and often the biggest barrier for new participants. Limited pool access restricts training opportunities and discourages potential athletes, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or those with inflexible work schedules.

Limited facilities, such as change rooms, showers and lockers for personal items (phones, car keys), at popular open water swimming areas, such as Black Mountain

Peninsula, Henry Roland Park and West Basin (Ferry Terminal) presents potential safety risks to individuals and reduces use of these areas.

The swim leg for most triathlon events is an open water swim, providing access to safe open water facilities is important to increasing confidence in new participants as well as ensuring maximum athlete experience at events.

ACT Triathlon's ability to deliver events which maximise the athletes' experience is critical attracting participants and ensuring future event viability.

Recommendations:

- Equitable access to pool access for not-for-profit clubs during peak times.
- Subsidised pool access programs for registered not-for-profit sporting associations, including removing dual hire and entry costs.
- Infrastructure development at popular open water swimming areas to provide shower, change and locker facilities.
- Implementation of open water quality improvement programs.

Cycling infrastructure and safety

Current Challenges:

- Gaps in dedicated cycling infrastructure connecting key training routes
- Safety concerns on shared paths and roads, particularly during peak usage times
- Conflict between cyclists and other road users

Impact on Participation: Cycling safety concerns are a primary barrier for new triathletes, particularly women, juniors, and older participants. Cycle lanes are often poorly maintained, resulting in safety risks to athletes. Attitudes towards cyclists on roads increases risk and reduces athlete experience resulting in a reluctance train on ACT roads. The skills and confidence of an athlete to cycle as part of a training group has a direct impact on their ability to participate in triathlon events, particularly draft-legal events which require skills to ride as part of a group.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise completion of separated cycling infrastructure on key training corridors
- Improve lighting and maintenance on cycle lanes and shared paths popular with cyclists
- Implement education programs to improve shared road and path etiquette

Venue access for event delivery

Current Challenges:

- Uncertainty around venue booking confirmation affects event planning
- Prioritisation of commercial operators over community-level events
- Prioritisation of high-performance activities over community-level event delivery

Impact on Participation: Not-for-profit organisations, such as ACT Triathlon, are faced with significant financial and reputational risks when planning events due to the uncertainty around venue booking confirmations and access.

Stromlo Forest Park is an ideal location to deliver community-level events, however access to these facilities for the delivery of community-level events has been limited by the prioritisation of commercial operators. ACT Triathlon must hold its events early in the morning to avoid disrupting the Stromlo Shuttle bus operations (which commences at 9.10am) resulting in races commencing as early as 7.00am. Early race starts has a direct impact on attracting social and new participants to events.

Booking policies at the Australian Institute of Sport discourages the delivery of community-level events on site. State Sporting Organisations are de-prioritised over high-performance activities, with confirmation of booking provided no more than 90 days from event. To maximise participation and keep costs low, ACT Triathlon must make a risk-based decision to proceed with essential regulatory approvals, marketing activities, and event entry processes before securing confirmation of venue bookings. This approach carries the risk of having to cancel the event if the venue cannot be confirmed, which can have negative financial and reputational consequences.

Alternatively, waiting until venue bookings are confirmed before commencing marketing and advertising efforts limits financial exposure, but can result in reduced participation numbers as the lead time for promotion and advertising is shortened. This trade-off between financial risk and participant engagement highlights the challenges faced by not-for-profit organisations to deliver community-level events.

Recommendations:

- Develop a clear, equitable venue access system that gives not-for-profit organisations advanced confirmation for delivery of community-level events.
- Establish priority access windows and offer flexible scheduling to ensure community-level events are not disadvantaged compared to commercial or high-performance activities.

2. Regulatory processes and costs**Current Challenges:**

- Complex and time-consuming event permit processes across multiple ACT Government directorates
- Road closure applications require extensive lead times and coordination
- Inconsistent application of requirements between similar events
- High costs associated with traffic management and road closures
- Uncertainty around permit approval timelines affects event planning

Specific cost impacts

Road Closure Costs:

- Traffic management plans: \$3,000-\$8,000 per event depending on complexity
- Traffic controllers: \$50-\$65 per hour per controller or more for weekend events (typically requiring 8-15 controllers for a standard triathlon)
- Road closure signage and barriers: \$1,500-\$3,000 per event
- For a typical community triathlon using road closures, these costs alone can total \$7,000-\$15,000

Facility Hire Costs:

- Pool hire for event use: \$300- \$400per hour
- Individual pool entry fees: \$7per participant (absorbed by ACT Triathlon for event purposes)
- Stephen Hodge Criterium Cycling Circuit: \$300
- Robert de Castella Cross Country Running Track: \$300

Additional costs

- First aid services: \$800-\$1,500 per event
- Water safety personnel and equipment for swim legs: \$800-\$1,500

Total Event Cost Impact: A standard community triathlon with road closures now costs \$10,000-\$15,000 in regulatory and safety compliance alone, before considering operational costs, timing equipment, or volunteer expenses. This represents a 150-200% increase over the past decade.

Impact on Participation: Increasing costs has contributed to commercial triathlon race providers, such as Elite Energy Events, no longer scheduling events within the ACT. As a result, ACT Triathlon delivers the majority of triathlon and multisport events within the ACT. Event delivery costs have resulted in:

- Increase entry fees (increasing barriers for lower-income participants)
- Reduce event frequency (fewer participation opportunities and loss of community engagement)
- Increasing reliance on major sponsorship and grant funding

For context, delivering triathlon and multisport events to the ACT community presents significant financial risk to ACT Triathlon. As a not-for-profit sporting organisation, these costs are making event delivery prohibitively expensive compared to sports with lower regulatory burdens and risks ongoing viability of community-level triathlon events within the ACT.

Recommendations:

- Streamline multi-directorate permit processes through a single point of contact
- Develop standardised templates and pre-approved courses for recurring events
- Provide subsidies or fee waivers for community-level sporting events delivered by not-for-profit organisations
- Establish government-funded traffic management services for approved community sporting events delivered by not-for-profit organisations
- Establish clearer timelines and service standards for permit approvals
- Create a tiered permit system based on event size and complexity, with reduced requirements for small community-level events
- Implement multi-year permits for established annual events to reduce administrative burden and costs

3. Cost of Participation

Current Challenges:

- Significant equipment costs, including road bike, helmet (mandatory), wetsuit and triathlon specific clothing
- Club membership, coaching and venue access fees
- Race entry fees

Impact on Participation: Triathlon is perceived as an expensive sport. For instance, a basic road bike can cost upwards of \$500, and a wetsuit and triathlon suit can cost upwards of \$100 each, entry fees to community-level events can range from \$50-200 depending on type of event and distance, and while athletes do not have to be members of ACT Triathlon to participate in events, association, club and coaching fees can be in

excess of \$500 per year. These costs particularly impact participation among young people, low-income families, and culturally diverse communities.

While grant funding can assist in developing programs to provide opportunities to reduce financial barriers to triathlon, the ongoing annual costs impacts sustained membership and participation, particularly in economic conditions which limits discretionary spending.

Recommendations:

- Establish government-funded equipment loan programs through community centres and schools
- Subsidise come-and-try events to eliminate entry costs for first-time participants
- Develop partnerships with retailers for discounted beginner equipment packages (negotiate 20-30% discount schemes)
- Reduce regulatory costs (as per Section 2) to enable lower entry fees across all events

4. Inclusion and Diversity

Current Challenges:

- Perception that triathlon is only for the highly fit or elite athletes
- Under-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Insufficient adaptive equipment and modified programs for athletes with disabilities

Impact on Participation: Triathlon participation does not reflect the diversity of the ACT community. Without targeted inclusion initiatives, the sport fails to benefit from the full spectrum of community participation. This results in missed opportunities to foster community participation, improve health outcomes, and grow the sport's membership base. Furthermore, lack of diversity can perpetuate stereotypes and limit innovation within clubs and event delivery.

For athletes with disabilities, the lack of readily available adaptive equipment, trained support personnel, and accessible venues further restricts involvement.

Recommendations:

- Ensure all publicly funded event and training facilities adhere to accessibility standards, enabling equitable access for athletes with disabilities and members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

- Establishment of cross-sport initiatives which provide collaboration opportunities to design and deliver sporting events and activities to under-represented groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disabilities.
- Establishment of programs to train coaches and volunteers in cultural competency and inclusive practices, ensuring sensitivity to different backgrounds and needs.

5. Volunteer Capacity and Sustainability

Current Challenges:

- Increasing regulatory and administrative burden on volunteer-run clubs and State Sporting Organisations
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers, particularly for event delivery
- Limited access to training and professional development for volunteer coaches and officials

Impact on Participation: Volunteers are the backbone of community sport and without sustainable volunteer structures, delivery of events and programs becomes unsustainable. As with many sports, ACT Triathlon is experiencing a decline in volunteer engagement due to time pressures, increased administrative and compliance requirements, burnout and overreliance on small groups of volunteers, and lack of clarity around regulatory requirements.

Furthermore, triathlon coaching accreditation fees vary between \$325 (foundation level) and \$2,575 (performance level). For coaches, these fees represent an additional barrier to volunteer participation and engagement.

Recommendations:

- Provide administrative support services to assist volunteer-run sporting organisations, including ensuring services are available outside of business hours.
- Simplify compliance and regulatory requirements for community sporting clubs and organisations and ensure they are easily accessible.
- Strategic focus on development of volunteer personnel that is sport-agnostic, particularly for administrators and Board members.

6. Sport Organisation Categorisation and Grant Funding

Current Challenges:

- Categorisation system favours established traditional sports
- Shift away from multi-year base operational funding has resulted in difficulties employing administrators
- One-off grant funding limits the ability to embed events and programs to enable them to become operationally viable.

Impact on Participation: The changes to ACT Sport & Recreation's State Organisation Support Program has had a significant impact on ACT Triathlon. The focus of the categorisation process on membership-based sports, meant event-based sports, such as triathlon which does not require membership to participated contributed to ACT Triathlon losing its triennial funding which underpinned its ability to engage a full-time Executive Officer to support the delivery of community-level events and programs.

The financial risk resulted in the decision by ACT Triathlon Board to enter into a trial of AusTriathlon's whole-of-organisation operating model – based on the Australian Sports Commission's One Management Model.

While the model has delivered some benefits, critical issues around the sustainability of community-level events, the tension between club membership and event participation, and the project-specific grants which limit the ability to embed events remain. For example, in 2024 ACT Triathlon received funding under the Club Enhancement Program (CEP) to deliver a kids specific triathlon event at the Australian Institute of Sport (with the objective of re-enlivening the Weetbix Kids' Tryathlon). While the event was delivered successfully with over 150 participants, the terms of the grant means ACT Triathlon is unable to apply for funding through the CEP to deliver the event in 2025. The event is not yet financially viable to be self-sustaining, and therefore, ACT Triathlon must attempt to seek alternative grant funding streams or not deliver the event. This has a direct impact on exposure and participation of young people in triathlon.

Recommendations:

- Review sport categorisation system to ensure equitable treatment of multi-discipline sports, emerging sports, and event-based sports which focus on participation over membership
- Reinstate ability to access operational/base funding for recognised state sporting organisations (minimum \$30,000-\$50,000 annually based on participation levels)
- Implement multi-year funding agreements (3-5 years) to enable strategic planning

- Establish multi-year event grant funding which is focused on community-level events (separate from major event grants) to build sustainability and viability of these events.
 - Reduce administrative burden through simplified, consolidated grant applications, including providing grant writing support and templates for volunteer-based organisations.
 - Provide grant writing support or templates for volunteer-run organizations
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Conclusion

Triathlon represents a unique opportunity to engage the ACT community in lifelong physical activity across three disciplines. The sport develops fitness, resilience, and community connection while being adaptable to all ages and abilities.

By addressing the barriers identified in this submission and seizing the opportunities outlined, the ACT Government can significantly enhance participation in triathlon and multisport activities. This will contribute to improved community health outcomes, increased social connection, and reinforcement of the ACT's reputation as Australia's most active community.

ACT Triathlon looks forward to working collaboratively with the Government to implement these recommendations and welcomes the opportunity to provide further information or participate in consultation processes.

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This submission prepared by ACT Triathlon, 14 October 2025