

19/10/2023

The Committee Manager,
Select Committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Game Bid
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the situation the Victorian sports community finds itself in after the unexpected cancellation of the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games (the Games).

The following areas of feedback and comment have been separated into several sections for clarity:

- The Cancellation
- Moving Forward
- Questions and Opportunities

Vicsport is happy to expand upon any point upon request. Please note that the list is non-exhaustive and is not purported to represent the full views of Vicsport's membership base.

Individual members of Vicsport will no doubt provide separate feedback which we encourage to be carefully considered.

The Cancellation

- The tone of the cancellation notice was disappointing – to be told by the Premier that *'it was not a hard decision'* to take the drastic step of cancelling the Games was dismissive of the many athletes, coaches, administrators and volunteers who have been working hard to maximise the benefits of a home event and minimise the social and economic impact that sport and the Commonwealth Games would, and does, generate.

To be clear, the negative impacts of the cancellation are many, significant, and tangible.

- The lack of consultation regarding the cancellation, both with Vicsport as the peak umbrella body and key conduit between State Government and Victorian SSA's (including the affected sports themselves), was alarming and not consistent with a relationship of mutual respect.

It is suggested this continues the theme of unilateral decision-making associated with the Games noted by several Vicsport members. This was initially felt through a lack of consultation with NSO/SSAs relating to venues, with several location decisions made contrary to the views and preferences of affected sports.

- A detailed explanation as to why the event cannot be moved to metropolitan Melbourne where most facilities already exist should be made public.

There is widespread lack of comprehension as to why the Games could not be hosted at several well-equipped world class sporting venues in and around Melbourne requiring little infrastructure spend, therefore coming close to, or within, the original budget.

Clearly, Victorian (and indeed, Australian) sport would have welcomed such a move.

- Reasoning to be provided as to why the commitment to host the Games was made originally in April 2022 and as recently in the budget delivered in May 2023 if sufficient funding was not available via confirmed sources, and there was no confidence in affordable tenders.

Sport could have managed its expectations if provided with indicative information earlier.

Moving Forward

- It is noted that \$2b in funding will still be made available to “permanent new and upgraded sporting infrastructure projects planned as part of the Games”.

Whilst this is a significant benefit to facilities in regional areas, it will not be complemented by a spike in participation and volunteering usually associated with hosting the Commonwealth Games.

These infrastructure developments are not necessarily linked to community level participation in sport, and therefore will have limited community benefit in terms of sport participation. This is because it is of little use having new and upgraded facilities without participants to see them and volunteers to run the activities.

These are participation and volunteer legacy benefits that our members were starting to plan for.

New and upgraded facilities, without participants to use them and volunteers to run the activities, will not provide an adequate return on this investment and will not have community support.

Therefore, Vicsport firmly believes that the mooted \$2b in facility funding should be evaluated in conjunction with increased funding to support an increase in sport participation and volunteering. This investment can be measured and will have true legacy impact on communities – socially and economically.

Further, we recommend that the facility funding should be directed towards greatest community need including community level participation in sport, not just the elite.

The funding originally budgeted for SSA legacy impacts can be used via additional participation funding through ‘Together More Active’ (TMA, or other mechanisms), with a focus on *Sport4Me/Doing Sport Differently* initiatives whereby sports can provide more opportunities for Victorian to get active.

- Extra funding to enhance the SPRP (Physical Activity & Sports Insights) data program and include more sports to assist:
 - 1) sports being educated on good data collection and management processes, and;
 - 2) the insights from the data can be used for better decision making in participation, facilities and governance.

- Vicsport would be keen to lead a vision setting regional sport funding program, working with Regional Sport Victoria (RSV), focused on connecting funding to SSAs who will need to provide the strategy and resources in each sport.

Developing a new vision for 2026 that will deliver the same local community impact at a more balanced investment level – that is, a reimagining of the ‘Active Victoria 2022-2026’ framework to help mitigate the lost impact of the Games.

- Volunteers have been lost from sport at a rapid rate after COVID. Much of the planning to attract sport volunteers was around using Victoria 2026 as an event to encourage people to volunteer in sport in Victoria.

It is proposed that Vicsport work with RSV and Volunteering Victoria to replicate and enhance the Sport Volunteer Project of 2022/2023. This volunteering strategy will be part of a vision setting strategy that Vicsport is well placed to lead in collaboration with key state partners.

This will include coaching sport clubs to attract, retain and train volunteers - a new project would add an element of sport volunteer recruitment and enhanced coaching work in the regions, with LGAs and webinars.

- Sport requires funds to distribute to affected sports efficiently without the need for overly officious grant applications.

If grant applications are required, SRV should consult the sector deeply (with Vicsport playing an important role) regarding criteria and process.

Vicsport’s underlying philosophy here is that sport is best placed to advise where priority spending is required in the sector, rather than government departments.

Any grant program should be simple, easily accessible and based upon the stated strategic needs of the sports themselves linked to the loss of the Games.

Sport really does not need more bureaucracy in this post-COVID rebound period where resources are already reduced.

Questions and Opportunities

- Will career transition support be provided for those employees affected by the cancellation, especially those who have left secure employment to pursue Games opportunities?
 - *Can a skills matrix be developed at a sector level to then redeploy critical talent back into the sector to achieve the newly defined 2026 Vision?*
- Is compensation and/or other support planned for any sports organisation which has entered into commercial agreements related to the Games which are now negatively affected (i.e. reduced commercial value to partners)?
 - *Can Vicsport lead a state-based collective that reviews these commercial agreements and identify where the outcomes can still be delivered on behalf of all Commonwealth sports in the state?*
- There is a disproportionately negative impact on those smaller sports which can afford the loss of opportunity least – i.e. table tennis, badminton, coastal rowing, etc. who viewed the Games as key to their strategic objectives of boosting local participation numbers.

- *These sports are the types of sports Vicsport brings in to the state based collective. What can we achieve together as a collective that we could not achieve alone?
Will they be compensated for the lost generational opportunity to showcase their sports?*
- There is a huge impact on SSAs and NSOs who may have taken funding and budget decisions (i.e. location/number of High-Performance staff and related resources) with 2026 in mind. There is also impact on peak bodies, events businesses, regional town business who have planned events, equipment and already made financials commitments to resources.
 - *Are they going to be compensated for potential financial losses which may result? (i.e. redundancy payments, relocation expenses, etc.)*
- Is the Games cancellation going to negatively impact on CGA/ASC funding to NSOs and SSAs?
 - *If so, how will this be replaced if the cancellation of the Games leads to reduced High Performance funding for Victorian sport?*
- There is significant reputational damage to Victoria as a destination of choice for peak sporting events – ongoing impact on attracting lower-level events (Asian, Pacific, Olympic quals, etc.).
 - *How will this damage be repaired?*

In Summary – General Themes

1. It is disappointing, surprising and unacceptable for the decision to cancel the Games without consultation with those most affected - that is, sport itself.

The State Government is asked to reflect upon this, and the tone of the announcement.

2. Funding needs to be directed by the sports and regions themselves. Strict adherence to building facilities which have not benefited from participation and volunteerism boosts may not be the optimal use of funds.
3. Any grant program should be co-designed with the sector and simplified.
4. Funding is required, not only for the regions, but for sport in general, who has lost the uplift that the Comm Games would have achieved.
5. Vicsport sees itself as well-positioned to lead the work of developing a renewed 2026 Sport Strategy in Victoria and providing insights and advocacy on behalf of SSA's to ensure best use of re-directed funds.

Vicsport is best placed to lead a coordinated sector-wide strategy to paint a different vision to 2026 that will achieve as many of the goals articulated in the Commonwealth Games submission as possible.

6. Serious questions exist regarding compensation for funding likely to be lost due to the cancellation from various sources such as CGA, ASC and commercial partners, as well as personal losses suffered by affected employees.
7. The impact of the reputational damage to Victoria as a preferred destination for sporting events requiring government subsidy must be acknowledged and acted upon.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer this important feedback which is provided in the spirit of goodwill and co-operation as the Victorian sporting sector seeks to mitigate the damage caused by the cancellation of the Games.

Yours sincerely,

The Vicsport Executive & Board

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