



# HIGHER, FASTER, STRONGER REFORMING SPORTS SCIENCE

*Our plan to protect athletes' health and ethics in sport*

A win-at-all-costs mentality now threatens the sports we love. Unregulated advisors pushing untested supplements have tarnished Australian sport and put athlete health at risk. The Greens plan to regulate sports science will bring in new ethical standards for sports science professionals.

From the doping scandals that have rocked world cycling to the unapproved supplement trials in the NRL and AFL, Australian sport has never suffered from such a crisis of credibility. Unqualified and unethical individuals are working at elite sports clubs, risking the health of the athletes we respect and damaging the integrity of the sporting codes we love.

There is widespread community support for moves towards the accreditation of sports scientists and only the Greens can deliver leadership where the old parties have grown weak at the knees.

## > CLEANING UP SPORTS SCIENCE

Australian sports, including sports scientists, have a history of innovation. However, a win-at-all-costs attitude has led many clubs into murky areas at the fringes of sports science. Regulation and oversight have not kept up with the fast pace of elite sport.

Sports scientists currently operate in a largely unregulated environment, and while many are highly qualified professionals, many others are not.

**The Greens plan for cleaning up sports science will:**

- **an accreditation framework for sports scientists**, that will be national, independent, allow for specialization and include ethical training and standards.
- **ensure medical oversight of all sports science decisions**, by instituting standards that require a registered medical practitioner to approve any decision relating to athlete health and welfare including the use of supplements.
- **limit supplement experiments** by encouraging the use of only those listed as Group A by the Australian Institute of Sport

supplement system. These are safe, legal supplements that produce a useful or timely source of energy or nutrients or have been shown in specific trials to benefit performance.

- **encourage major sporting codes to maintain a register** of supplements used that is made public in order to end the pharmacological arms race.
- **A service for athletes and sporting clubs** to provide up-to-date, confidential and independent advice on the safety and legality of supplements. (See initiative document "Information for Athletes: Independent and Accurate".)

## > ACCREDITATION FOR SPORTS SCIENTISTS

The recent Senate inquiry into the practise of sports science in Australia heard broad support from key sporting and professional bodies for proper accreditation of sports scientists.<sup>i</sup> These reforms are necessary to ensure that any individuals working in high-performance sports science meet acceptable professional standards of competency and care.

The Greens will work with Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA) to develop a national, independent accreditation program that has broad industry up take and support. The accreditation program will set basic minimum standards of appropriate education and relevant experience in a credible sports science role, and will provide a measure of professional assurance to the field. In particular, maintaining these credentials would require adherence to strict ethical standards that would protect the athletes in their care as well as protecting the integrity of their employer.

The Greens anticipate the framework will be tiered, allowing for different levels of qualification and experience to be recognised



in the accreditation. We also anticipate a phase in period and grandfather clause to allow the many already qualified and highly experienced sports scientists currently operating in Australia to transition with the changes.

The accreditation process will be national, consistent and widely adopted. The Greens will work with the sports community, particularly the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), to deliver a standardised accreditation system which requires that sport scientists hold accreditation before being offered employment, and will prevent code-hopping by individuals found to be negligent in previous roles.

Through this professional accreditation program, the Greens will work with Australian sporting bodies to help restore credibility to the games we love. Athletes, managers and sports fans will have the assurance that only qualified, accredited sports scientists are practising at their club.

## > QUALIFIED MEDICAL OVERSIGHT

Australian sports are currently undergoing a period of painful self-reflection. In light of recent revelations around sports supplements, many sporting bodies are now grappling with questions of management and oversight. Reporting lines, complaints processes, and board responsibility are all being examined as ways to protect the interests of athletes.

In addition to the many challenges already facing boards and management, there are the added complexities of sports science, an ill-defined and largely unregulated field. In the face of ineffective governance practices, the Australian Sports Commission recently instituted safeguards requiring proper investigation, supervision and reporting practices in relation to the sports science practices inside national sporting organisations.

While the Greens welcome these moves towards appropriate oversight of sports science, we feel the protection of athlete health and welfare requires more specific measures. The Greens will work with the ASC to establish a clear framework of accountability and authority in which the club doctor would be expected to be the signing authority for all medicines, supplements, diagnostic tests and therapeutic treatments.

Club doctors or medical professionals will have to be consulted where a decision affects an athlete's health and welfare, and board CEOs will have to inform themselves of what is occurring in their clubs.

## > ONLY SAFE AND EFFECTIVE SUPPLEMENTS

Sports supplements are a large and growing industry but there is often very little credible science behind their claims. The Senate Committee heard from Dr Peter Larkins, a sports doctor with decades of experience, who said that "there is an enormous amount of herbs and spices that go into sports teams

just because people think they are going to help". There is not currently the evidence base that supplements actually improve performance or that the performance improvements are worthwhile.

Recent revelations related to the ASADA investigations of supplement use in the AFL and NRL paint a clear picture of the dangers of athletes becoming locked in a pharmacological arms race.

The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) has developed a supplements programs designed to deliver world's best practice in the research, education and provision of sports foods and supplements for athletes and coaches. The program allows athletes to focus on sound use of supplements and special sports foods as part of their nutrition plans, and ensures that supplements and sports foods are used correctly and appropriately to deliver maximum benefits.

The Greens propose that where that where supplements are used within national sporting organisations, those organisations consider adopting a policy allowing only the use of supplements classified as Group A in the AIS Sports Supplement Program.

## > INVESTING IN SPORTS INTEGRITY

For a small investment we can achieve large and positive changes for Australian sport. Funding of \$6 million for the sports supplement information service<sup>ii</sup> and \$925,000 for ESSA to further develop and roll out its accreditation program will be allocated over the forward estimates from July 2014. Changes to Australian Sports Commission guidelines can be made with the ASC's existing resources.

<sup>i</sup> Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, "Practice of sports science in Australia" 2013

<sup>ii</sup> See Greens initiative document "Information for Athletes: Independent and Accurate".