

1.1 Introductory remarks

As a sport, I am confident that we are all supportive of a primary goal of maximising the number of people who orienteer in Australia. The most critical role of Orienteering Australia is to put the structures in place so that we can work effectively with states and with clubs to work towards that goal. There has been a lot of excellent work done in building participation in the last few years, which is why we've been consistently growing participation by 5% or so a year over that time, but we need to keep building on that momentum, which sometimes means stepping out of the comfort zone of doing what we've always been doing.

Much of what is on the agenda at this Conference is directed towards the goal of increasing participation, even if it may not be immediately obvious. Something I hope that we achieve at this Conference, more explicitly than we have in previous years, is to share information about best practices around the country. Many of you are doing excellent work in particular fields in your own state, and what works well in one state has a good chance of working well in others. Other parts of the agenda are about putting the right structures in place to support growth into the future.

Of the utmost importance is that Orienteering Australia and the states work together in pursuit of our key strategic goals. Doing this is the Australian Sports Commission's number one governance priority, but even without the ASC giving us a nudge, it's clearly in our interests too. It is something we are good at compared with some other sports – in the 25 years I've been coming to OA Conferences, I'm struggling to remember a vote where a state put its own self-interest ahead of the national interest. Inevitably, some of the debates at this Conference are going to involve how the money coming into the sport is shared between the national and state level; ultimately, the best solution to this is to grow the sport sufficiently to bring more money into the sport at all levels, but we have issues which we will need to deal with in the short to medium term and I hope that these issues will be discussed in a way which is in the best interest of the sport as a whole.

The Conference will play an important role in exchanging information. For that to work at its best, it is important that state delegates go back to their states and spread the word about what is happening. I'm well aware that many orienteers see Orienteering Australia as a remote body and don't really know what we do. As a national body, we can't be everywhere at once (despite my attempts to do so), so we rely heavily on you as the state delegates to communicate with the broader orienteering population about what we are trying to achieve as a sport.

I look forward to a weekend of productive discussion at the Conference.