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2016 CANOE POLO IN AUSTRALIA



**Australian
Canoeing**

**Canoe
Polo**

Preface

Long recognised as a thrilling sport, canoe polo captures paddlers of all levels and skills. As a team sport it encourages working together along with solid technical skills. From its high participation in past years, numbers are falling around Australia. In contrast to the rest of the world, where canoe polo is taking off in leaps and bounds as players and spectators take the game to new levels of skill and excitement. Championships are high profile, attracting spectators of thousands and television audiences of millions. In Europe transfer fees lure the best players to change clubs. Australia lags and continues with falling numbers, inadequate planning and little funding. New Zealand is a case in point. In the 1990s Australia provided guidance, advice and technical support to its budding new sport. In 2015, the NZ player base outnumbers Australia by hundreds of players and not surprisingly, outperforms us at the Oceania championships and on the world stage.

This document sets out the current position of canoe polo in Australia.

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1 Introduction

Australia has a long involvement with canoe polo. As the sport evolved into the modern game through 1970–1980s Australia was at the forefront working with Britain, France and Germany to look at the various forms of the game and ultimately to establish international playing rules. We independently developed the several forms of defence and attack that became standard tactics around the world.

In 1982 Victoria boasted 250 players competing in eight grades at three venues each week, compared to around 135 players in 2015. SA and NSW also enjoy high participation compared to today. Factors contributing to the decline include competition from other sports, the availability of playing venues (indoor and outdoor) and an inadequate dialogue with schools and universities.

But there is good news too. The Brothers Canoe Club in Queensland is breaking new ground by working with *Ambrose Treacy College* to establish a six week canoe polo program for students. Over fifty students in grades 4–8 now enjoy canoe polo as part of the school’s physical education program. In Victoria, players at the Geelong Canoe Club have won scholarships from the *Barwon Sports Academy* for specialist coaching for six juniors in strength and conditioning, biomechanics, performance and other areas of athlete development. Canoe polo has good reach throughout Australia with the recent Australian Championships contested by teams from each state and territory, except Tasmania.

With a country population similar to the city of Melbourne (4.1million), New Zealand (4.5million) enjoys over 1,000 players (compared to Melbourne’s 120).

At Thury-Harcourt, France the week long world championships attracted 10,000 spectators each day, and an estimated 30,000 at the finals! The event was televised to an audience of 6 million. In the background, Japan, Poland, Italy and others are working to have canoe polo included in the *2024 Olympic Games*.

Canoe polo has succeeded with the initiative and involvement of many volunteers, players and parents. The *Australian Canoeing* canoe polo technical committee has guided development and continues to give overview and governance. But if the sport is to grow, more is required. This document sets out the current position of canoe polo in Australia.

1.1 Canoe polo in New Zealand

The growth of canoe polo in New Zealand provides an instructive study on what is possible. In the early 1990s Australia assisted NZ to establish canoe polo and set it up for growth. Today NZ’s participation, organisation and performance out-strips Australia. At the time, we provided advice on organising the sport, setting up competitions, attracting players, and accrediting coaches and referees. There continues to be sharing and interchange with our players and coaches.

NZ has done it well. They appointed a dedicated manager to guide and direct canoe polo throughout the country. His persistence, over several years, has created a most successful sport.

The state of NZ canoe polo today:

- 5,000 players (need to confirm this!)
- 5 regions - North (Auckland), Eastern (Hawke's Bay), Central (Palmerston North and Wellington), Mainland (Christchurch), Southern (Dunedin and south).
- 17 clubs
- Competitions
 - *Inter-regional Championships* – four regions, four divisions
 - *National League Championships* – a national series of inter-club competition at different venues around the country. Three divisions.
 - Summer competition – an inter-clubs competition (within each region)
 - Schools championships – 24 schools, six divisions
- a dedicated *New Zealand Canoe Polo* organisation

2 Canoe polo in Australia

Introduced to Australia in the 1950s, canoe polo started in NSW. Quickly taken up, at its peak there were around 500 players by the 1980s. Today, participation is less but it continues with an enthusiastic and successful following. Each state and territory plays canoe polo.

2.1 Organisation

Australian Canoeing is the peak body representing all canoeing disciplines in Australia; it is affiliated with the *International Canoe Federation*. Each state is represented by a canoeing association affiliated with AC. The canoe clubs are the grass roots level of each state association.

The disciplines are represented by technical committees at the national and state levels. There is an AC canoe polo technical committee (AC CPTC) and a corresponding committee in each of the state associations.

The state associations are:

- Canoe South Australia
- Canoe Tasmania
- Canoeing Victoria
- Canoeing Western Australia
- Queensland Canoeing
- Paddle NSW (an independent organisation, not an association)

The Northern Territory is a part of Australian Canoeing and the ACT is a part of PaddleNSW.

2.2 Participation

Table 1 shows current participation across the states and territories. There is a good spread around the country, however participation is fairly low. On the mainland Victoria is by far the strongest with around 135 players followed by South Australia with 30. Tasmania also has a strong following with 120 players.

Twenty-eight clubs play canoe polo at regular competitions, although only Victoria has an annual interclub championship. Teams from seven schools and two universities join in regular competitions but only one has canoe polo as an integral part of its sports curriculum.

Australian Capital Territory

A small but dedicated group of players out of the Burley Griffin Canoe Club.

PaddleNSW promotes and manages canoe polo in the ACT.

Canoe polo venues in the ACT

Canberra: Lakeside Leisure Centre; Molonglo River

New South Wales

Canoe polo is played in Sydney and Shoalhaven. Sydney is the larger centre with a single division of six teams compared to Shoalhaven with twelve players.

PaddleNSW promotes and manages canoe polo in New South Wales.

Canoe polo venues in NSW

Sydney: Ruth Everuss Aquatic Centre; Penrith Whitewater Stadium

Shoalhaven: Bomaderry Aquatic Centre

Northern Territory

There are separate competitions in Darwin and Alice Springs, with a small but enthusiastic number of players. In Darwin, white water paddlers face special challenges when paddling local rivers, creeks and waterways. Too many crocodile encounters encourage paddlers to take up canoe

polo in the safety of a swimming pool. In Alice Springs, the name of the Central Desert Canoe Club tells us that water might be challenging to find.

Australian Canoeing promotes and manages canoe polo in the Northern Territory.

Canoe polo venues in the NT

Alice Springs: Alice Springs Aquatic & Leisure Centre

Darwin: Casuarina Swimming Pool Centre

Queensland

Queensland has three regions: South East (Brisbane, Boonah and the Sunshine Coast), Cairns and Townsville. There is a competition at the University of Queensland but it is the Brothers Canoe Club that is breaking new ground working with *Ambrose Treacy College*. The college has incorporated six weeks of canoe polo into its physical education program. Over fifty students in grades 4–8 participate in the program.

Queensland Canoeing promotes and manages canoe polo in Queensland.

Canoe polo venues in Qld

Cairns:

Brisbane: UQ Sport Aquatic Centre, Ambrose Treacy College, Springfield Lakes

Boonah:

Sunshine Coast: Lake Kawana

Townsville:

South Australia

South Australia dominated canoe polo for many years both at the national level and with representation in the Australian teams.

Canoe South Australia promotes and manages canoe polo in South Australia.

Canoe polo venues in SA

Adelaide: Westminster School; Patawalonga Creek; Mawson Lakes; Port Pirie Community Swimming Pool.

Tasmania

Bass Strait undoubtedly limits Tasmania's interaction and participation with the other states. But regardless, canoe polo is very active and its participation rivals Victoria. There are two centres, Launceston and Hobart, each with regular competitions and a combined group of around 110 players.

In Launceston, the Tamar Canoe Club has sixty players competing weekly in twelve teams and two grades. There are three schools team in the regular competition.

In Hobart, the Derwent Canoe Club and the Tasmanian Canoe Club have around thirty and twenty players respectively. The weekly competition has four teams. There is also a school's competition incorporating five schools and eight teams.

Canoe Tasmania promotes and manages canoe polo in Tasmania.

Canoe polo venues in Tasmania

Hobart: Clarence Aquatic Centre YMCA

Launceston: Launceston Aquatic Centre; Cataract Gorge

Victoria

Victoria enjoys the largest competition in Australia. The Melbourne competition has 120 players competing in four grades throughout the year. It also hosts a series of regular events. Participation is good but somewhat less than the halcyon days of the 1980s.

There is a regional group in Geelong comprising 15 players training each week, but without a regular competition. Nonetheless, Geelong is setting the pace for junior development with six players winning scholarships to the *Barwon Sports Academy* for specialist coaching in strength and

conditioning, biomechanics, performance and other high performance areas. The recent, very successful U18 men development tour to NZ included four players from Geelong (the other two were from Queensland).

Canoeing Victoria promotes and manages canoe polo in Victoria.

Canoe polo venues in Victoria

Melbourne: Richmond Recreation Centre; Yarra River; Maribyrnong River, Nagambie Lakes Regatta Centre

Geelong: Barwon River; Kardinia Aquatic Centre

Western Australia

Only one club, the *Perth Canoe Polo Club*, is dedicated to canoe polo although several others enjoy recreational games with different rules, different goals and different craft.

Canoeing Western Australia promotes and manages canoe polo in Western Australia.

Canoe polo venues in WA

Perth: Beatty Park Aquatic Centre; Swan River

2.3 Schools and universities

The schools and universities are an important recruitment ground for canoe polo. The sport may be integrated into the curriculum, be a separate schools competition or be school teams joining local competitions. In Queensland, over fifty students at Ambrose Treacy College take part in a six week physical education for grades 4–8. The University of Queensland Canoe Club has a comprehensive program of basic skills training throughout the academic year. Tasmania has a regular school's competition and SA is creating opportunities with Westminster School. Not long ago Victoria had six teams from three universities in the Melbourne competition but only one team in 2015.

Schools and universities often have specific requirements that must be addressed. For example, club membership, insurance cover, playing time and pool access may not align with state association expectations, and consequently require some flexibility.

Schools and universities are currently an untapped resource. They love to get involved in competitive sport and the private schools have funding for boats and equipment. However, the competition must involve several schools, be organised and have success recognised (with a trophy).

Refer to Table 2 for the schools and university currently involved with canoe polo.

2.4 Scouts Australia

The outdoor and adventurous nature of scouting is a perfect match for canoe polo. Tapping into scouting's large community could be a real bonus. However, aside from the occasional fun competition, scouting is not a current source of players.

2.5 Players with disabilities

Canoe polo is a great sport for people with disabilities. Its reliance on the upper body allows people in wheelchairs, or those with poor leg mobility, to experience the freedom of paddling and to compete with able bodied players. Over the years several wheelchair players have been quite successful. There has not been a concerted effort to engage with groups such as the wheelchair sports associations or the various disability and sports government departments, which could create a whole new recruitment area. However, past discussions with these groups indicate that there is strong competition from the other sports (eg: basketball, hockey, swimming) to engage disabled athletes.

2.6 Defence services

Over the years several teams from Australian Defence services have participated in the regular canoe polo competitions. The organisation has also maintained its own fleet of canoe polo kayaks, although there were no formal competitions within the organisation. This appears about to change.

Recognising the teamwork and water skills the sport brings to an organisation that depends on teamwork in adverse conditions, in August 2015, the Defence invited tenders to supply one hundred boats, paddles and gear. This is a substantial investment that is likely to see a Defence canoe polo competition develop.

Table 1: Canoe polo in Australia

	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Totals
Regions	Canberra	Sydney Shoalhaven	Alice Springs Darwin	South East Qld Cairns Townsville	Adelaide	Hobart Launceston	Melbourne Geelong	Perth	
Number of players	30	Sydney – 35 Shoalhaven – 12	Alice Springs – ? Darwin – ?	Cairns – ? SE Qld – 60 Townsville – ?	50	Hobart – 20 Launceston – 60 Schools – 40	Melbourne – 120 Geelong – 15	27	419
Number of clubs	1	2	2	7	3	3	8	2	28
Regular competitions		2 x 16 wk seasons		2 x 4 wk seasons	2 x 10 wk seasons	2 x 10 wk seasons	2 x 12 wk seasons	3 x 6 wk seasons	
Other events		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitationals • Mudcake Challenge 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Champs • Interclubs • Qld Champs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia Day • Port Pirie • Invitational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Festival • Tas Champs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interclubs • Invitationals • Cocktail • Summer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interclubs 	
Host AC Summer series?	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	
Schools competition?	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	
Defence		✓							
Hosted Australian championships?	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hosted Oceania championships?	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	

Table 2: Clubs, schools and universities playing canoe polo

ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA
CLUBS							
Burly Griffin CC	Shoalhaven Canoe and Kayak Club Sydney CC	Central Desert CC Darwin CC	Broken Paddle CC Brothers CC Cairns Kayak and Canoe Club Centenary CC Sunshine Coast Canoe Polo Club Springfield Centenary CC	Holdfast Bay CC Northern Districts CC West Lakes LCC	Derwent CC Tamar CC Tasmanian CC	Canoe Factory Club Canoes Plus Racing Team Essendon CC Fairfield CC Geelong CC Melbourne CC Victorian CC Whitehorse CC	Ascot Kayak Club Perth Canoe Polo Club
No of clubs:	3	2	6	3	3	8	2
SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES							
			SE Queensland Ambrose Treacy College University of Queensland CC	Westminster School	Launceston Launceston Grammar Scotch Oakburn College Hobart Guilford Young College Rosny College St Michael's Collegiate School Taroona High School Sacred Heart College	Melbourne Melbourne University Mountaineering Club	
No of schools/unis			2	1	7	1	
DEFENCE							
	Army – Holsworthy Navy – Nowra						

3 The global scene

Canoe polo is a relatively new sport, having its first world championships in 1994. Eighteen countries (men) and six countries (women) competed at the inaugural championships but in 2014 it was twenty-four (men) and twenty (women). Over fifty countries play canoe polo. The *ICF Canoe Polo World Championships* is the sports' premier event with divisions for men, women, under 21 men and under 21 women. It is held every two years in a country selected by the ICF through a competitive bidding process. Also every two years, but alternating with the ICF championship, are the *African, Asian, European, Oceania, and Pan-American* continental championships. Canoe polo is a core sport in the multi-sport *World Games* and there is growing support to include it in the world's foremost arena, the *Olympic Games*.

The attendance at the *German National Championships* highlights how big the sport is in Europe. The ~~XXX~~ the championship was held over seven days, with seven fields operating for 10–12 hours each day. There were three mens divisions, two womens divisions and over 75 junior teams competed in under 14, under 16, and under 18 divisions. Closer to home, the New Zealand Inter-regional Championships has 103 games coving senior men, senior women, U21 men, U18 men, U18 women, and veterans over three days.

3.1 Continental associations

The ICF is structured into five continental associations, which are responsible for conducting canoeing sports within their region. The associations are: *European Canoe Association, Asian Canoe Confederation, Oceania Canoe Association, Pan America Canoe Confederation* and the *African Canoe Confederation*. Australia is part of the Oceania region, but would benefit from joining the Asian region. Each association hosts a canoe polo championship every two years.

Oceania Championship

The *Oceania Championship* typically involves only Australia and New Zealand. The championships are successful because they build on the strong relationships and rivalry between the two countries. However, as only two countries are competing, there is not the intensity of competition experienced at the larger championships. Other countries in the Oceania region include: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and smaller countries of the Pacific Ocean. There is little likelihood that any of these countries would compete at the Oceania Championships.

Asian Championship

The *Asian Championship* includes Iran, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Malaysia, Honk Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and India. The championship continues to grow in strength with four new countries joining in 2015. Discussions are in hand about the possibility of Australia and New Zealand joining the region. This would foster a depth of competition similar to Europe and promote growth and development across the ICF categories, and also improve Australia's international prospects.

3.2 ICF World Championship

The *ICF Canoe Polo World Championship* is canoe polo's premier event. Twenty-four countries competed at Thury-Harcourt, France in 2014 over five days (along with 700 athletes, 50,000 visitors and 500 volunteers and a television audience of six million). In 1994 Australia lead the world achieving gold for our men and women and continuing to dominate with gold or silver in both categories for the following two championships. Since then our performance has dropped in 2014 to thirteenth for the men and no attendance for the women.

3.3 World Games

The multi-sport *World Games*—organised by the *International World Games Association* under the patronage of the *International Olympic Committee*—is the pinnacle event in the canoe polo calendar. Held every four years, the competition comprises men and women teams from six countries (eight countries in 2017), invited on their final position in the ICF World Championships in the lead up year. The *2013 World Games*, held at Cali, Colombia, attracted 3,800 athletes from 109 countries competing in thirty-one sports. Australia typically places fifth or sixth for men and women.

3.4 Olympic Games

Canoe polo at the Olympic Games has always seemed unlikely. The fixed quota of medals allocated to each sport determines how many sports compete. And since team sports have several players there is a conflict with the available medals for individual athlete sports, which works against adding new team sports. However, Olympic sports such as soccer, basketball, and water polo demonstrate what is achievable.

The appeal of canoe polo is undeniable; so it's not surprising that over the past year or two there has been growing interest. There is suggestion that canoe polo could join the 2020 Olympics if Tokyo does not resolve the financial and environment issues currently in debate. The head of Asian Canoe Federation said canoe polo will be a demonstration sport in 2020. It is likely too that if Germany's bid is successful for 2024, it will include canoe polo. At the European Championships in Germany (September 2015) the president of the German Canoe Federation said that canoe polo is the fastest growing canoeing discipline world-wide and that it has great Olympic potential. Japan, Poland, Italy and others are working to have canoe polo included in 2024. These discussions are very real. At the moment Duncan Cochrane (high performance manager, AC canoe polo technical committee) is writing Olympic qualification documents at the request of the ICF.

Bolstering the sport's inclusion is its strong women's participation and outstanding spectator appeal (the 2015 world championships in France attracted 10,000 spectators each day). Also, the World Games—a testing ground for sports aspiring to the Olympics— has increased canoe polo countries from six to eight for Poland 2017. New countries are entering everywhere; four joined the Asian champs in October—all with U21 teams. And Lithuania and Ukraine were at the European Championships.

The ongoing discussion and enquiry does not necessarily translate into canoe polo becoming an Olympic sport. But it does enthuse that AC should keep an eye to global developments and, where practical, promote its structured development and performance in Australia.

4 Targeting growth

The Australian Canoeing 2015–2017 Strategic Plan lays out a framework to achieve its vision for canoeing to be ‘Australia’s favourite water sport’. The plan applies to all canoeing disciplines and recognises four priority areas, referred to as ‘The pillars of our plan’. The pillars are:

- **Participation** – *engage and grow our base*
- **Places** – *ensure access and quality*
- **People** – *lead and guide our sport*
- **Performance** – *excel at every level*

Canoe polo has fantastic potential for considerable growth that would benefit all canoeing disciplines. A concerted effort is needed to identify opportunities and strategies to increase club membership, make inroads to the schools and universities and create development pathways to guide the novice, experienced and elite players.

The world is embracing canoe polo; it’s time Australia did too!

Approaches and opportunities for growing canoe polo, aligned with the AC pillars, are addressed in the following sections.

4.1 Implementation

The ideas, strategies and actions resulting from the pillar approach result in a wide range of impacts that must be implemented. Some may be actioned immediately, but others require further investigation and planning. Each impacts the other so that a holistic, co-ordinated approach is necessary.

Depending on the need, action may be required by:

- individuals
- canoe clubs
- state associations
- Australian Canoeing

The challenge for us all is to take ‘ownership’ of one or more actions and follow up with their completion. AC CPTC will coordinate implementation, but everyone is invited to put their hand up, get involved, and take responsibility for growing canoe polo.

5 Participation

Participation is in decline. Compared to its heyday of around 800 players across Australia, there are now only about 500. Competition from sports such as basketball, football, netball and many others entice people to ‘opt’ in or out as they experiment with different sports. The sports have responded with flexible ways to meet changing demand by making it easier to join in, reducing costs, having good communications and having safe and readily accessible facilities. Club membership is not a prerequisite but instead a ‘come and try’ offered at reduced cost and a limited number of games encourages participation; fields might be set up with equipment so that players can drop in for a game at any time. There is reliable communication and awareness—principally over the internet and social media—and insurance cover takes into account coverage from other providers. The expectation that everyone must commit to a year’s membership to play does not align with today’s mobile sports enthusiasts.

Until recently, schools and universities provided a logical pathway through to the canoe clubs and regular competitions. Reinvigorating these important links is crucial to future growth.

New Zealand provides an example. Many pools throughout the cities have kayaks, gear and fields set up for people dropping by to have a game, or least try canoe polo. Club membership is not a prerequisite but there is an appropriate cost. In Melbourne, Canoeing Victoria uses an ‘Event licence’ to allow new comers three games for ten dollars.

To attract new participants, and ultimately to build club membership, canoe polo must become more accessible.

5.1 Canoe clubs

Canoe clubs are the primary approach for joining a team and entering a competition. Ideally, competitions are club based but in practice a team may comprise players from several different clubs. Flexibility is important.

To set up for canoe polo, a club needs:

- easy access to playing areas (indoors or outdoors)
- come and try opportunities
- regular training sessions
- opportunities for coach and referee accreditation
- communications providing reliable and timely information about training and playing dates, times, venues, requirements
- team boats, helmets and playing tops with club markings and logos
- a sense identification with the club
- flexible (and cost effective) membership

5.2 Schools

The *Sporting Schools* programme is an ASC initiative to have greater sport involvement in schools. It is Australia’s largest school-based sports participation programme to help children foster a lifelong interest in sport. The programme provides funding grants for projects and assistance with delivery of sport-based activities that support the Sporting Schools philosophy and work towards achieving sport participation outcomes. Sporting Schools is set to be the nation’s largest sport-based participation programme nation-wide, available to all Australian primary schools and over 850,000 students.

The program’s intention is to:

- engage more children in sport
- drive children’s passion for sport
- link schools with local club-based sport

5.3 The state/territory level

Each state canoeing association has a canoe polo technical committee responsible for promoting, organising and advancing canoe polo. The committees have a critical grass roots role under which the sport either prospers or stagnates.

The state/territory associations need to:

- host regular competitions that provide recreational as well as competitive opportunities
- host club competitions and other competitions
- host the Australian Canoe Polo Championships
- set a high standard of coaching, refereeing, presentation, and management
- engage with schools and universities
- link schools and universities with clubs
- conduct Come and Try sessions
- accept nominations and select state teams
- have flexible fee and insurance structures
- seek out and apply for appropriate government grant applications to develop canoe polo, its players, its equipment and facilities
- encourage and facilitate coach, referee and official accreditation
- flexible membership structures

5.4 Competitions

Well organised competitions that provide a safe and enjoyable time are essential. Poor facilities, inconvenient game times, games that do not start on time, poor uniform standards, and poor refereeing all send people away. Competition ladders that are not up to date, out of date web pages, and poor communications all give the impression of a poorly managed sport. Today's consumer smart population demands a high standard of organisation, presentation, involvement and communication.

6 Places

Having good places to train and compete at are the key. Training on fields set up with regulation goals, a marked out playing area and safe referee paths create a proper game environment that changes the way players work and think. Duplicating the game environment at training influences the way we play in competition.

Ideally fields should be set up and ready to use without too much effort. Venues are mostly shared with others so setup is generally necessary. The trick is to make it quick and easy—goals that put up or taken down quickly by two or three people; playing areas that are standard size and bounded by floating ropes; water access that is safe; referee walkways that allow good coverage; and scoreboards and shot clocks that can be seen by players and spectators.

‘Facilities’ including male and female toilets and change rooms, car parking, boat storage, food and drink services, complete the venue. For championship events accommodation and travel are also considered.

Venues that are readily reached but also safe and easy to use not only give players confidence but also encourage new people to come and give it a go. On the other hand venues that are distant or only available at less than ideal times discourage new and existing players alike.

6.1 Club venues

Clubs are generally located beside a river, lake or sometimes a pool. The ability to set up fields varies widely with often a single goal suspended from a river bank. Facilities can be excellent, because the club caters for many paddlers, but on the water canoe polo may have to compete for space as sprint, marathon, rowing and others congregate around common put-in and hop-out points.

The prime opportunity for clubs is to set aside an area for canoe polo with sturdy goals that can be set up quickly and easy. Floating field ropes and referee paths would be a bonus.

6.2 Competition venues

A competition venue refers to the weekly competition and/or other regular competitions. These need to be a good standard to attract and retain new and existing players. Field set up is a given, but facilities also need to be in good shape. Playing times may need to be negotiated, but where possible should be such that they encourage participation and do not lock out schools and junior players. Costs must be kept low as these are passed on to players.

The opportunity is to establish long term relationships with owners that benefit both the venue owner and canoe polo.

6.3 Championship venues

Some club and competition venues make suitable championship venues. However, championship venues do differ in several ways. They must comply with ICF standards for field size, goal set up, scrutinizing areas, referee paths as well as have good facilities and services. Scoreboards and shot clocks are essential. Spectator areas are needed and electrical and IT services are essential. Usually two or more fields are required. Championship venues may be indoors, outdoors or a combination of the two.

The opportunity is to work with owners to fine-tune the venue to meet the specific requirements of canoe polo. Ideally fields are permanently set up, but if not goals, floating field ropes, scoreboards, shot clocks and the like are stored at the venue. Access to the water, car parking, referee paths, spectator seating or other aspects might be improved to create a more appropriate standard for canoe polo. At present the Penrith White Water Stadium and the Nagambie Lakes Regatta Centre can be set up to international standard.

6.4 Indoors/outdoors

Whether playing indoors or outdoors in pools or on rivers, the venue is a critical part of the sport. There are many factors to consider including the weather, water quality, water access, availability, cost and—in Darwin—crocodiles! In all cases, safety is first. A formal risk assessment is a good way to identify short comings and opportunities for improvement. Identify these and work with pool owners or river authorities to make improvements as needed. Government grants are a good way to fund some of these upgrades.

7 People

Canoe polo is lucky to have had a strong group of volunteers along with staff at AC and the state associations to lead and guide our sport over the years. They are involved in all aspects of the sport; on the water and off the water. Without them canoe polo would not be.

Essential roles met by volunteers in running and managing canoe polo:

- Coaching
- Coach training
- Communications
- Competition management
- Coordinate training programs
- Document policies and procedures
- Equipment specification and purchase
- Equipment storage and maintenance
- Event management
- Field set up
- Funding
- High performance management
- IT
- Financial management
- Training programs
- Membership databases
- Mentoring
- Sponsorship
- Refereeing
- Referee training
- Results compilation
- Schools coordination
- Social media
- Team managers
- Team organisation
- Transporting boats and equipment

The organisation of competitions, championships, athlete and team development around Australia calls on the insight and energy of many people.

7.1 Engaging and keeping engagement

Finding enough volunteers is the challenge. Avoiding burnout is another! Parents may step forward to support their children taking up the sport, others may get involved because they see a need, some have special skills that they are pleased to share. Others are reluctant to offer but pleased to become involved asked. However, overloading generous personalities with too much work leads to burnout and as we see too often, leaving the role. Spread the workload, put in place a buddy system.

7.2 Recognition

Volunteers engage and assist because they see a need, like to help out, or simply enjoy being involved. They do not work for reward and generally do not expect it. However, everyone likes to have their efforts noticed and certainly a little recognition enthruses and encourages us all.

Some ways to recognise volunteers include:

- *Thank you* – the easiest and most effective way to recognise someone’s effort is to say ‘thank you’! It may be a simple verbal thanks, a newsletter or blog mention, a small gift or some other genuine acknowledgement of a job well done.
- *Remuneration* – volunteers generally do not expect payment, and many will decline the offer when presented. But remuneration is useful to encourage good practice. For example, payment to coaches and referees in acknowledgement of the extra work they put in—but only qualifying for payment if they have the necessary coach and referee accreditation. No accreditation, no payment.
- *Life membership* – life membership at the canoe club, state association or national level provides ongoing recognition and thanks for substantial contributions over a reasonable time.
- *AC Annual Awards* – these awards recognise exception performance at the national level in a range of areas.

- *Hall of fame* – to recognise those players, coaches, administrators and others that have made distinguished contributions. The hall of fame most likely would be an area on the website with a photograph and biography outlining that person’s contribution.
- *State awards* – each Australian state has a range of awards that recognise the contributions of volunteers and sportspeople
- *Order of Australia* – a part of the Australian honours system, the Order of Australia confers the highest recognition for outstanding achievement and service.

8 Performance

Every player—recreational and competitive—wants to improve their game. Some may simply want better boat control whereas others seek to lead the world. Excelling at performance demands committed players, coaches and managers working within a framework to give direction in skills, tactics, fitness, coaching, refereeing, officiating, management and high quality competitions. Representing Australia internationally poses physical and mental challenges as athletes strive to get the best from themselves. It can also impact family and friends.

A lot is expected; particularly in high performance. And unfortunately we see too many players, male and female, drop out of the sport because they feel hard done by or they have gone too hard over several years and have burnt out. A support network that helps players reach their potential, or assist those that miss out on elite opportunities and then keep them involved.

8.1 Recreational players

Recreational players refers to those people who, generally, play regular local competitions but prefer not to train or compete outside of those games. They are our largest group of players but do not receive much attention.

Recreational players:

- enjoy playing regularly
- do not join in training sessions or other competitions
- are not interested in competitive side of the sport (other than winning a local game)

However, they are likely to be interested in skills session if done at the venue and during the time allocated for canoe polo. Reaching out to recreational players and meeting their needs helps build a solid grass roots base on which to build the stronger competitive and structured levels.

8.2 High performance players

High performance players represent their state and country. They are dedicated athletes willing to commit the time and effort necessary to achieve the best from themselves.

High performance players want:

- structured and comprehensive training programs
- access to AIS strength and conditioning programs
- training facilities set up with goals and field boundaries
- accredited coaches
- access to specialist coaches
- financial support
- sponsorship
- high stand competition to build their skills

The path to high performance is well understood. The challenge is to create and implement structured approaches that incorporate paddling and game skills, physical and mental fitness, individual play and team work, travel and networking, and access to advanced athlete programs such as the *Australian Institute of Sport* and various state institutes of sport.

8.3 Youth development

Youth is the sport's future. Particularly if Australia is to be a contender at the Oceania Championships, the ICF World Championships, the World Games, the Asian Championships and possibly the Olympics.

Youth development needs:

- basic skills and technical/tactical skills
- physical and mental conditioning
- development camps – annually around Australia
- development tours to NZ and Europe

A pulling together of the junior and youth developments currently happening in Queensland, Melbourne and Geelong is needed with a long term approach and a clear pathway to high performance.

8.4 Championships

Championships overseen by AC CPTC must be reviewed and their purpose and approach reassessed.

Australian Canoe Polo Championships

The *Australian Canoe Polo Championship* is the peak Australian event. Its intention is to find the best canoe polo state in Australia, for that year. The championship is organised by age group and a trophy is awarded to the winning state.

The categories are:

- open men
- open women
- U21
- juniors
- veterans
- masters
- microjuniors

Australian Interclub Championships

It is time to reintroduce the *Australian Interclub Championships*. A healthy interclubs provides a chance for everyone to represent their club at an interstate competition. The championship is organised by division (not age) so that there is opportunity for seniors and juniors to play together with benefits for mentoring and skill development. The intention of the interclub champion is to find the best club in Australia, for that year. A trophy is awarded to the winning club.

The Australian Interclub Championship is a logical step for the State Interclub Championship. The state level championships prepared the clubs and players for the Australian competition.

Interclub championships are organised by division:

- Division 1 – premier level players
- Division 2 – mid level players
- Division 3 – recreational players

Oceania Canoe Polo Championships

The Oceania Canoe Association oversees the championship. Held every two years, the championship is an ICF continental event and organised accordingly.

8.5 Coaching

Accredited coaching programs are essential for developing players and teams. Regular training sessions at the same venue and at the same time set an example and also encourage participation. But too often coaching is haphazard without a formal program or discipline in carrying out the program. The canoe polo coaching course has developed (and continues to develop) over many years to provide an excellent basis for coaches to draw on. Unfortunately, not enough coaches, or

potential coaches, see the value in accreditation and consequently do not seek accreditation, or do not renew their accreditation. The current position is not acceptable because it does not promote and encourage improved performance for players at all levels. Refer to Table 3, Australia wide, we have only nine level 1 coaches and only two level 2 coaches.

Table 3: Accredited coaches

	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Totals
Level 1 coach	1	-	-	5	-	-	3	-	9
Level 2 coach	-	-	-		1	-	1	-	2
Totals	1	-	-	5	1	-	4	-	11

Key points for coaches:

- become accredited
- maintain coaching skills
- set up regular training sessions
- mentor up and coming coaches
- be aware of the coach accreditation framework
- engage specialist coaches to assist when needed
- levels 0, 1 and 2 accreditation is organised at the state level

8.6 Refereeing

A high standard of refereeing ensures a competitive and safe game, which encourages participation and promotes canoe polo. Contentious decisions, half interested, unaware of the rules and without uniform, the disinterested referee sets a poor example that deters others. Players, parents and spectators all look to the referee and are encouraged to participate if refereeing is seen to be of a good standard and in control.

The Australian canoe polo referee policy introduced at the 2015 Australian Championships, Nagambie sets out accreditation requirements. The number of accredited referees is given in Table 4. A good start, but more is required.

Table 4: Accredited referees

	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Totals
AC level A	1	-	-	-	6	-		-	7
AC level B		-	-	2	2	-	1	-	5
AC level C	1	-	-	2	1	-	7	1	12

Key points for referees:

- become accredited
- wear referee uniform
- keep up to date with the playing rules
- mentor up and coming referees
- be a role model
- enjoy being a referee
- levels A, B and C referees are assessed at the Australian Championships each year
- level C referees may also be assessed at state competitions

9 Financial support

A range of funding is available to canoe clubs, state associations and national bodies. Funds are available from AC, the different levels of government, business and individuals. Some funding is specific on how it is used, some less so. Some is directed at registered organisations, others may apply to individual persons. It is the responsibility of the clubs, state associations and the national body to seek out, apply for, implement and be responsible for funding.

Before applying for funding, the first step is to determine what needs to be done and what amount of funding is needed.

Funding can be used to:

- purchase boats and paddles
- improve club fields and facilities
- improve championship venue fields and facilities
- introduce canoe polo to schools
- health and fitness programs
- travel for individuals
- general funding
- promote healthy lifestyles

9.1 Australian Canoeing

Funding from AC is available from time to time through its government or corporate sponsorships. Where available, these funds are direct through AC CPTC for canoe polo.

9.2 AC canoe polo technical committee

The AC CPTC annual levy on players is returned to the sport by way of grants. Grants are available for the following:

- *Equipment* – for example, goals, floating ropes, score boards and shot clocks for establishing permanent playing fields. The grant is not available for purchase of boats and paddling gear. (However, AC has available a start-up fleet of plastic polo kayaks to assist with getting new players onto the water.)
- *Athlete skills* – for specialist development not met by local coaches, clubs, and states
- *Team skills* – for specialist development not met by local coaches, clubs, and states
- *Development tours* – assistance with funding of overseas development tours

9.3 Government funding

Federal, state and local governments have a range of grants encouraging participation and growth across a range of activities. For example, schools can apply to the federal government's \$100 million *Sporting School's Programme* aimed at getting children fit and healthy and involved in sport earlier in life. There is funding to encourage clubs to link with schools, funding to improve facilities and funding to promote and encourage tourism.

9.4 Private funding and corporate sponsorship

Apart from government grants, there is a range of corporate sponsorships and philanthropy grants available. Approaching and succeeding with these financial opportunities requires well-presented business cases to 'sell' the sports needs and identify benefits to the provider.