



PARACANOE PROGRAM

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Recruitment Plan

National Level



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Introduction

In 2009 the International Canoe Federation (ICF) launched the Paracanoe Development Program in an effort to expand the sport of canoeing to include people with a disability. Leading to the increased provision of opportunities for people with a disability at the club, regional and national levels, opportunities for AWD's were further enhanced through the inclusion of paracanoe in the Paralympic Games, commencing with Rio in 2016.

Given the inclusive nature of the sport and subsequent opportunities for participation at both the grass roots and elite levels, it is in the best interests of the sport to now commence development of a comprehensive recruiting strategy.

Like many Paralympic sports, paracanoe finds itself in a position whereby very little is known about the sport, with this lack of knowledge / awareness extending across areas such as:

- Sport specific modifications / adaptations.
- Classification (Paralympic Pathway).
- Available opportunities and pathways.

Unfortunately, this lack of knowledge / awareness is often a significant limiting factor in terms of participation as potentially suitable participants will rarely take the time to proactively investigate the suitability of a sport they know little about.

In addition to this, many existing canoe clubs are reluctant to embrace AWD's as they are either naive to the benefits that it may represent to their club, or they have been provided with inaccurate information as to the impact that inclusion will have on them.

It is this lack of knowledge about the sport, as well as these misconceptions possessed by the clubs, that are limiting the development of the sport of paracanoe.

Whilst the implementation of a simple and consistent national marketing and promotions program (brochures, posters, etc) will assist in combating some of these misconceptions, this initiative alone will not be sufficient in attracting people (participants and volunteers) to the sport and retaining them in the longer term. As stakeholders, we must commit to a pre-determined program of paracanoe recruitment / engagement sessions, targeting strategic areas and locations as identified in the state / territory specific '*Structure and Pathways Plan*', and ensuring national consistency in the planning, delivery and follow-up of these sessions.

Having identified suitable structures and pathways that will support the development of a sustainable national paracanoe framework in each state / territory, we must now focus on developing a clear and structured plan that determines exactly how we will go about engaging with, and recruiting, participants and volunteers.

The purpose of this '*Recruitment Plan – National*' is to identify a consistent process for planning, delivering and following up on these sessions. Ideally, this process will provide a flexible template that can be replicated in each state / territory, and will ensure that the messages being communicated to both the clubs and the community are consistent and in-line with the direction being set by Australian Canoeing.

Classifiable Athletes

The purpose of the classification system is to minimize the impact eligible impairment types have on the outcome of competition. The ICF system of classification aims to place athletes into classes according to how much their impairment impacts on the core determinants of success in canoeing.

Similar levels of functional ability are classed together to provide as fair as possible competition. The classes include a broad range of disabilities and as a result there may some paddlers who are at the higher level of function who may be at less of a disadvantage in their class.

When developing the *'Recruitment Plan – National'*, it is imperative that we have a solid understanding as to who it is that we are actually trying to recruit and retain, and therefore what exactly constitutes a classifiable athlete.

It should be noted that the primary purpose of this 'Recruitment Plan – National' is to identify classifiable athletes to whom the intended pathways are available and suitable.

Whilst paracanoe is an opportunity that is suitable to a wide range of participants with a wide range of abilities, it is primarily targeted towards athletes who have some form of leg, trunk or arm (or combinations of) impairment.

In order to be eligible to compete in paracanoe as an athlete with a disability, it is not sufficient simply to have a disability. Specific and objective testing is used to determine whether a person's disability results in sufficient limitation of their ability to perform the core elements of paracanoe, and this is often referred to as the minimal disability criteria. Only authorised classifiers are able to determine whether a person meets the minimal disability criteria for a particular sport, however below is a rough guide to the criteria for paracanoe.

The ICF recognises three (3) sport classes for paracanoe, with these being LTA, TA and A.

LTA – LEG, TRUNK and ARMS (IVF 5 & 6 Point Paddler)

The LTA class is for paddlers with a disability who have functional use of their legs, trunk and arms for paddling, and who can apply force to the foot board or the seat to propel the boat.

Eligible LTA paddlers may typically have a minimum disability equivalent to one of the following:

- Amputee
- Neurological impairment equivalent to incomplete lesion at S1
- Cerebral Palsy Class 8 (CPISRA)

LTA paddlers must meet minimum disability requirements, which is as follows:

The minimum physical disability is a full loss of three fingers on one hand, or at least a tarsal metatarsal amputation of the foot, or the permanent loss of at least ten points on one limb or fifteen points across two limbs when assessed using the Functional Classification Test as set out in the Classification Application Form for Physical Disabilities and the ICF Classifiers Instructors Manual.

TA – TRUNK and ARMS (IVF 4 Point Paddler)

The TA class is for paddlers who have functional use of the trunk and arms. They are unable to apply continuous and controlled force to the footboard or seat to propel the boat due to significantly weakened function of the lower limbs.

Eligible TA paddlers may typically have a minimum disability equivalent to at least one of the following:

- Bilateral around knee amputation, or significantly impaired quadriceps
- Neurological impairment equivalent to a complete lesion at L3 level, or an incomplete lesion at L1
- Combination of the above such as one leg with around knee amputation and one leg with significant quadriceps impairment
- Classification by the international sports federation for paddlers with cerebral palsy (CPISRA) as eligible to be in CP Class 5

A – ARMS ONLY (*IVF 1 – 3 Point Paddler*)

The A class is for paddlers who have no trunk function (i.e. shoulder function only). An A class paddler is able to apply force predominantly using the arms and/or shoulders. These athletes will likely also have poor sitting balance.

Eligible paddlers may typically have a minimum disability equivalent to at least one of the following:

- Cerebral Palsy Class 4 (CP-ISRA); or
- Neurological Impairment with a complete lesion at T12 level, or an incomplete lesion at T10

Whilst it is not essential to have an in-depth understanding of the classification process or classes involved in paracanoe, it is beneficial to have a grasp of the common characteristics and / or traits associated with each class. This will enable the provision of more accurate information (albeit initial) for potential participants and their families, and ideally avoid misleading athletes as to their eligibility.

Recruitment Strategy – Planning

It is important that we take the time to carefully plan the sessions that are designed to promote awareness of the sport and recruit new participants to paracanoe. Whilst this does not need to be a lengthy process, it will be beneficial to know the following:

- ✓ Exactly which areas we are targeting, when and why;
- ✓ The level of knowledge present in the pre-selected regions about paracanoe (likely to be minimal at this early stage);
- ✓ Which organisations we need to establish links with (as they have access to potentially classifiable athletes);
- ✓ Suitable dates for delivering the proposed sessions – can we link in with other activities / sessions being run (multi-sport days, expos, etc).

Location and Timing

The location of the various sessions (club engagement sessions, community engagement / awareness sessions and come 'n' try days) will be determined in consultation with the relevant stakeholders in each state / territory. Their assistance will be required in the delivery of the sessions, and any potential participants that emanate from these sessions will ideally go on to participate in structured programs being delivered through existing canoe clubs. Clearly then, the delivery of these sessions needs to be in, or close to, an area which has pathways in place / opportunities available to support continued participation.

The timing of these sessions is also relevant, as we do not want to be exposing potential participants to a sporting opportunity and then explaining to them that there are currently no structures in place to support further / ongoing participation.

Ideally, these sessions will commence as soon as we are confident that we have the necessary support structures in place within a given location (venue, equipment, expertise, etc).

It is envisaged that the goal of recruiting participants (ideally classifiable) to the sport of paracanoe will best achieved by following a consistent process of:

1. Club engagement, *followed by*;
2. Community engagement / awareness, *followed by*;
3. Come and Try sessions.

Recruitment Strategy – Process

Club Engagement Strategy

Despite their involvement in, and knowledge of, the sport of canoe, it should not be assumed that existing canoe clubs will have a sound knowledge of paracanoe and the associated benefits / opportunities. Consequently, the development and implementation of a comprehensive club engagement strategy (and associated resources) will serve to educate clubs about the sport, emphasise the opportunities available in the sport, highlight the possible benefits for a club stemming from the support and provision of a high quality paracanoe program, and dispel any rumours / inaccurate perceptions that may exist in regards to providing opportunities for AWD's.

Following the delivery of the club engagement strategy, it is to be expected that some canoe clubs may still be reluctant to support the development of a paracanoe program, at which time further development of the sport in that particular region may need to be delayed (there is no benefit in generating interest in a sport for which there are no opportunities available).

Alternatively, it is considered likely that some canoe clubs will embrace the opportunities and pathways being made available in the sport, and commit to supporting and facilitating the provision of the relevant opportunities. In this instance, the next step in developing the sport, 'community engagement and awareness' can commence.

Community Engagement / Awareness Strategy

Given that its public profile is still quite low, it is expected that there will be a considerable lack of knowledge and awareness amongst the general community in regards to paracanoe and the opportunities that it provides. With that in mind, and following the successful implementation of the club engagement strategy within the identified regions, it will be beneficial to develop a community engagement / awareness strategy (and associated resources) for delivery in the corresponding regions, with a view to providing participants with a better understanding of the sport and the target markets to which it is most suitable.

By collaborating with local services and organisations to promote and implement the community engagement / awareness strategy in the identified regions, it is anticipated that we will be able to gain access to applicable networks / individuals. In doing so, we will be in a position to communicate to them information about the sport and the pathways available, facilitating the generation of interest in the sport whilst also enabling this information to be further distributed to potential participants.

Come and Try Sessions

Following the successful delivery of the various engagement strategies, the next logical step is to deliver come 'n' try sessions aimed at introducing potential participants to the sport of paracanoe. It will be of great benefit to liaise with participants from the previously run professional development session to ensure that relevant information is disseminated through their networks with suitable participants being encouraged to attend.

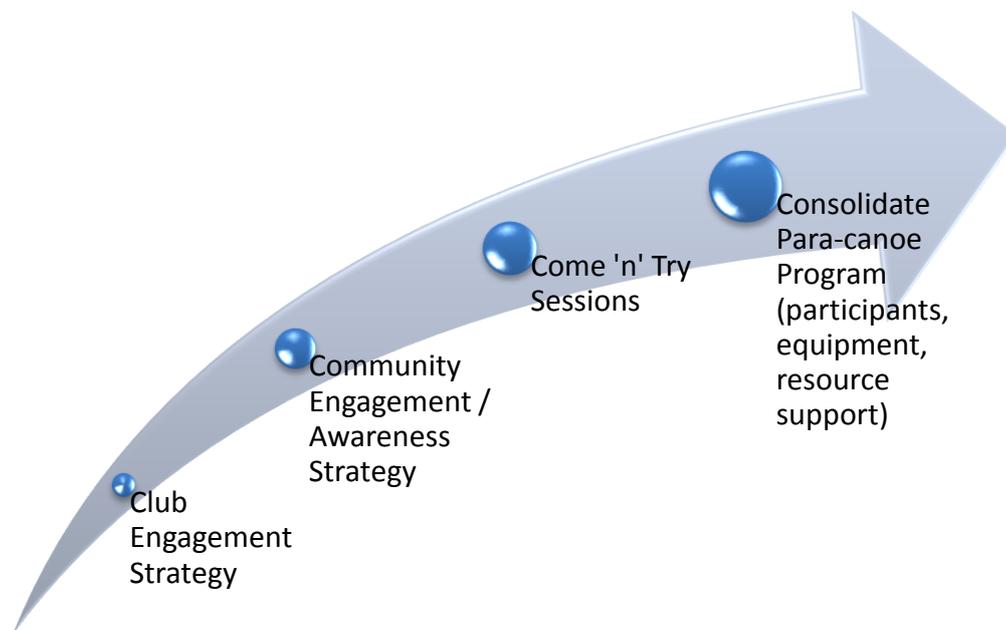


Figure 1 - Recruitment Strategy - Process

Implementation

Assuming that the correct processes have been carried out in the planning stages, it is imperative that the delivery of the resulting paracanoe sessions is of a high standard. The intention is to clearly demonstrate that this is a competitive and rewarding sporting option with clear structures and pathways, and a sport which encompasses a high level of athletic prowess and ability. Some potential athletes may only desire participation in paracanoe at a recreational level, whilst others will want to know that there is the opportunity for them to train hard and progress to the highest level their ability will allow.

First impressions are critical, and we must communicate an organised and professional image in these initial instances to ensure we recruit and retain athletes and volunteers.

Sustainable Development

Like most sports, the standard of competition evident at the elite level of paracanoe is constantly increasing. Australia needs to be doing more to attract greater numbers of classifiable athletes to the sport, as well as providing talented individuals with the structures, pathways and resources necessary to support successful performances on the world stage.

It is crucial to note that sustainable development is not dependent on elite athletes. Rather, greater participation at the grass roots level combined with creditable and transparent pathways, leads to sustainability within the sport.

Hand-picking classifiable athletes and trying to make them into talented athletes is simply not a long-term solution in any sport, so we must develop and implement systems and processes that have the capacity to independently attract participants (ideally classifiable athletes) to the sport of paracanoe.

Athletes displaying elite characteristics and the potential to perform at the highest level are likely to be derivatives of sustainable structures and well-developed pathways, and will often identify themselves through their performances and progression within these structures and pathways. Once identified, it becomes the responsibility of the Paralympic Preparation Program (PPP) to ensure that the athletes have access to the resources necessary to support elite level performance.