

# Sport and Recreation

Industry Coverage: Sport; Fitness; Outdoor Recreation; Community Recreation  
(including Aquatics)

---

## Industry overview

---

The sport, fitness and recreation industry encompasses a broad network of activity across not-for-profits, volunteer organisations, government bodies and commercial enterprises ranging from large companies to sole traders.<sup>1</sup> It is a complex landscape increasingly interconnected across multiple industries, particularly tourism, education and health, and heavily reliant on volunteers and part-time or seasonal workers.

The industry plays an important role in people's physical and mental health, and social wellbeing. The ageing population and growing obesity across all ages is putting a renewed focus on sport, fitness and recreation activities as being vital to healthy living. Investing in these and broadening participation reach and inclusion, particularly in marginalised groups and diverse communities, is being seen as offsetting huge demands and costs on the health and medical systems. Together with changing consumer behaviour, expectations and participation patterns, these are shifting the breadth of services on offer and the way these are being delivered.

Employment opportunities within the sector are increasing as more people are encouraged to engage in sport and recreation for health, fitness, enjoyment and social interaction. A strong focus on developing tourism across the state will provide further growth opportunities for industry. Government commitment to sport and infrastructure has been a key focus over the past decade, with investments on major sport facilities alone exceeding \$1.63 billion. The development of strategic blueprints and allocation of grants specifically targeting the sport and recreation sector will further diversify the economy and create jobs.

Challenges continue to face industry, including: high staff turnovers; inadequate levels of training and experience; changing skill requirements for both paid and non-paid workers; volunteer support and training; impact of technology and social media; expanse of our state and reach into rural, regional and remote areas; and breadth of user groups participating in sport and recreation activities.

---

## Current and future labour market conditions

---

A 2015 environmental scan conducted by Service Skills Australia, presents an industry characterised by: a younger workforce, with 71 per cent of the workforce being under 40 years of age compared to 48 per cent for the rest of the working population; an equal gender workforce split across the industries; predominantly employed under casual, part time (reportedly 68%) and seasonal contracts.<sup>2</sup>

Voluntary work is an enormous source of social capital and contributes directly to the growth and development of social networks and social cohesion within communities. The sport and recreation sectors rely heavily on volunteers to assist in the delivery of sport and recreation activities. Around 2.3 million people (14% of adults) in Australia work voluntarily in the sector, contributing more than 180 million hours.<sup>3</sup>

During 2010, there were 235,000 volunteers in Western Australia sustaining sport and recreation organisations and providing opportunity for people to have physically active lifestyles.<sup>4</sup>

Increases in population, growth in disposable income and rising health consciousness are some of the key factors which have contributed to industry growth. In 2011/12 sport and recreation industries generated \$12.8 billion in income nationally and employed around 134,000 Australians.<sup>5</sup>

Employment projections for sport and recreation anticipate a 34 per cent increase in employment levels (37,000) from 108,900 people employed in 2015 to 145,900 people employed in 2019. A strong relative growth is projected from 2015 to 2020 for fitness instructors (35%), sport coaches, instructors and officials (24%), sportspersons (23%), sport and fitness centre managers (20%) and a moderate growth in outdoor adventure guides (11.5%).<sup>6</sup>

Tourism Australia predicts continued growth in domestic and international travel markets of more than 5% between 2016 and 2025. The State Government's focus on developing tourism across Western Australia provides growth opportunities for the sport and recreation industry whether through international and regional sport and recreation events or the provision of facilities to support adventure and recreation adventure pursuits. Already a large number of visitors to the state engage in nature-based activities drawn by the pristine, natural environments on offer.

The development of the Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint, highlights recognised investment areas for strategic, sustainable visitor destination growth, expected to benefit communities on economic, tourism and social levels. Outdoor recreation facilities, such as upgrades and maintenance of the Bibbulman Track walking trail and the completion of Munda Biddi off-road cycling trail, have greatly increased the ability of Western Australians and visitors to get active in the state's natural environments.<sup>7</sup>

Between March 2015 and 2016, an estimated 10.3 million domestic travellers participated in a bushwalk, representing an 18 per cent growth. During this time, international visitors to national parks increased by an estimated 13 per cent, with a further 23 per cent international growth in windsurfing, sailing and kayaking participation.<sup>8</sup>

Regional grants, such as the funding of Albany's Great Southern Centre of Outdoor Recreation Excellence to promote vibrant and sustainable growth of outdoor recreation in the region will further drive economic and social benefits to regional areas, growing the need for adequately trained and skilled staff for current and emerging roles.

The sports sector is expected to continue growing over the next five years, although at a slower rate than the previous five years.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the sports and physical recreation clubs industry's growth is expected to slow over the next five years, as sport participation continues its long-term decline. However, rising spectator sport participation and ongoing corporate sponsorships are expected to continue driving the industry's growth.<sup>10</sup>

The sports and recreation facilities sector has seen a decline in revenue due to a decrease in attendance and participation in organised sport due to the popularity of other forms of physical activity such as attending gyms, cycling and jogging. This industry sub-sector is projected to grow at an annualised rate of 1.8 per cent over the five years to 2020/21.<sup>11</sup>

Supporting diversity and inclusivity and increasing participation among marginalised groups and culturally and linguistically diverse communities is a key area of focus, particularly around water safety. Community, sport and recreation centres and aquatic facilities are increasingly seen as places to engage these groups, used to establish healthy connected communities, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas.

Recreation facilities are moving towards an integrated service provision model. Having a multipurpose facility, integrating sport, recreation, health and community services, is seen as beneficial particularly for rural and remote regions.

The fitness industry continues to grow although at a slower pace as the market reaches saturation.<sup>12</sup> In 2016, there were 3,356 gym and fitness businesses operating across Australia, with 63.5 per cent revenue attributed to four industry organisations. The fitness industry is forecast to reach \$1.5 billion by 2020/21.<sup>13</sup>

Operating businesses are diversifying business models through the provision of 24-hour gyms and an offering of specialised or unique services such as CrossFit, Pilates, Mixed Martial Arts, High Intensity Fitness, F45 Functional Training and Xtend Barre, with many others continuing to enter the market.<sup>14</sup>

---

## Industry development issues

---

Employment opportunities within the sport and recreation sector are increasing as more people are encouraged to engage in sport and recreation for health, fitness, enjoyment and many personal and social benefits. With this, the number of 24/7 gyms opening across the state has steadily increased. Already 11 per cent of gym members belong to a gym that's open 24 hours a day.

Participation rates in physical activity decrease steadily with age, despite the overwhelming evidence of the health and economic benefits. Increasing and maintaining participation is critical, particularly as population projections indicate the proportion of people aged 65 and above is going to increase substantially reaching over 20 per cent of the total population in 2061.<sup>15</sup>

In 2012, only 43 per cent of adults met the recommended minimum of 150 minutes per week of at least moderate activity. Australia is 7th among developed countries for rates of obesity among people over 15 years of age, with nearly two thirds of adults overweight or obese.<sup>16</sup>

To address this, there is a need for the sector to continue to form strong working relationships with other industries, particularly medical and allied health professionals. For instance, fitness professionals are increasingly collaborating with medical and allied health professionals to deliver evidence based exercise programs for people with managed health conditions. Similarly, the provision of integrated services within one facility provides opportunities for a holistic approach to health and wellbeing.

The affordability of fees and charges are a significant barrier to participation in sport and recreation activities for some people. Initiatives such as the Department of Sport and Recreation funded KidSport and SilverSport programs which aim to increase the participation of children and older adults in sport by offering financial assistance to eligible applicants, is one measure that has been introduced to alleviate this barrier.

Rapid population growth has increased the demand for useable open space, especially in outer metropolitan Perth and some regional centres. Ensuring access to quality, functional open space is a significant challenge.

---

## Workforce challenges and issues

---

### Sport

There is high staff turnover within the sport and recreation industry, due to a variety of factors including low levels of remuneration, the lack of a structured career path and undesirable hours.

Sport employers report large numbers of applicants applying for advertised vacant positions, however, the quantity doesn't always correlate to finding quality applicants with an appropriate level of training and work or volunteer experience.

The large number of volunteers relied upon by sport and recreation clubs and organisations presents a number of workforce challenges around attraction, retention and governance.

Despite playing such a large and important role, many volunteers have not undertaken training for their role or are not given enough support. A challenge for the sector is to provide training to volunteers without being onerous on the person's time or too cost prohibitive.

Technology and social media are an integral part of interacting with customers, clients and members who expect organisations to have a digital presence and to engage with them. Clubs and sporting organisations are expected to provide real-time updates to members, who expect a website or Facebook page as a matter of course. This poses a challenge, particularly where much of the workforce is voluntary and might not be digitally literate.

### Fitness

The fitness industry is experiencing an increase in personal trainers employed as contractors by large gym chains. This is changing the skills typically needed by people employed in these positions (greater need for marketing, promotion, and small-

business management to attract and retain clients).

Fitness instructors are increasingly working with a broader spectrum of clients, client needs and limitations, placing a growing need for skills which enable them to deal with and deliver suitable programs to children, adolescents, older participants and those with medical conditions, such as Diabetes Australia's Beat It and Lift for Life programs facilitated by Fitness Australia, requiring fitness instructors to complete related specific education courses.

The quality of graduates has also been an issue for employers with feedback received that many lack work readiness when they are first employed. Longer duration courses are preferred over short courses as they provide the student with more time and opportunities to develop and reinforce their skill development. 'Real' work environments rather than simulated are preferred by industry as they lead to a more work-ready employee.

A common challenge for the fitness industry is the retention of workers due to the physical nature of the work involved as well as differing work hours and relatively low levels of pay.

The type of classes and activities offered in gyms and fitness centres is evolving with consumer interests changing as people seek gyms that are social, fun and accommodate busy, modern lifestyles.<sup>17</sup>

## Outdoor Recreation

Western Australia is a destination point for numerous adventure and outdoor recreation pursuits. It is vital that this growth in outdoor recreation and adventure activities is matched by the provision of quality products, services and facilities that enhance the experience of participants, while keeping participants safe and sustaining the natural environment.<sup>18</sup>

Outdoor Recreation employers Australia-wide are reporting a shortage of trained and skilled staff to meet the growth that the industry is experiencing. In 2013, 43.8 per cent of organisations surveyed reported difficulty in finding staff for outdoor recreation jobs.<sup>19</sup>

Businesses in WA report a lack of availability of adequately qualified and experienced staff, and there are instances of staff being brought over from the eastern states to fill labour shortages.

The seasonality and casualisation of the recreation workforce is a challenge due to the inability to sustain year-round employment. This also makes the utilisation of trainees for the sector more difficult when traineeships range from 12 to 24 months.

There has been a shortage of research undertaken into the size, demographics and workforce development needs of the outdoor recreation industry in WA, providing a challenge to understanding the workforce development needs of the sector.

Risk management strategies are becoming increasingly important in the sector, with a national move towards consolidation of state based Adventure Activity Standards into the Australian Activity Standards for up to 22 outdoor activities. The need for qualified and experienced staff to undergo risk management training is critical to those pursuing outdoor pursuits.

There is a lack of training providers delivering outdoor recreation VET qualifications in Western Australia at the level required by industry to fill labour shortage roles. Large numbers of students are undertaking outdoor education and outdoor recreation courses in senior high school, however, there remains the lack of a training pathway for them to continue outdoor recreation studies at a Certificate III or IV level if desired.

## Community Recreation and Aquatics

The community recreation/aquatics sector reports difficulties in attracting staff to regional and remote areas of WA for roles such as pool manager, centre manager, pool lifeguard and swimming teacher. A lack of swimming teachers in particular could have severe implications when cohorts of children miss out on being taught potentially life-saving water safety skills. There have been instances in the past where regional pools have had to close due to a lack of qualified staff.

Public aquatic centres play an essential role in teaching WA children to swim and participate in water activities safely with 95% of all centres surveyed delivering swimming lessons. Centres need to continue to promote the importance of ongoing participation in swimming and water safety lessons, particularly amongst high risk groups including culturally and linguistically diverse

communities, low socio-economic and Aboriginal communities.<sup>20</sup>

Skills will need to be developed for the community recreation workforce to enable them to communicate and interact effectively with a diverse population.

Aquatic clubs are currently facing a number of issues relating to the provision, distribution and access to aquatic facilities throughout the Perth metropolitan areas. As the majority of facilities are developed and managed by local and state government authorities, there is a need for policies and strategies to assist facility planners, facility managers, sporting associations and clubs to work together to ensure adequate provision and access to facilities, and to increase community participation and utilisation.

The costs associated with delivering training to regional and remote areas is a challenge for training providers, with the YMCA, Royal Life Saving Society, AUSTSWIM and other Perth-based organisations running block training courses across the state for roles such as pool operator, pool lifeguard and swimming teacher.

High industry turnover creates an opportunity for implementing engagement strategies to ensure qualifications, registrations and accreditations are renewed and maintained.

---

## Current Training Council areas of focus

---

Improved workforce capacity through an increase VET training delivery in Certificate III and IV level qualifications for the outdoor recreation industry to support a growing adventure tourism sector.

Industry has requested that support and monitoring is needed to ensure the high levels of sport and recreation VET in schools activity is meeting industry requirements and is to an appropriate industry standard.

Industry has requested FutureNow to explore the possibility of capturing information related to the pathways chosen by students as they exit vocational education and training and enter higher education.

FutureNow will monitor the impact of skilled migration reforms on industry.

FutureNow will continue to gather information related to occupations experiencing labour shortages in the sport and recreation industry through its Industry Advisory Group and broader stakeholder network.

FutureNow will support the schedule of training package work being undertaken by Skills Service Organisations and advocate stakeholder feedback to guide training package development over 2017 and 2018, particularly in the areas of equine safety and outdoor recreation.

## References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 4148.0 Employment in Sport, Australia, 2011. Table 4: Sport occupations by State of Usual Residence. Released 22 October 2013.
2. Service Skills Australia, Environmental Scan 2015, Sport Fitness and Recreation.
3. Department of Sport and Recreation website, <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/support-and-advice/research-and-policies/policies/volunteers>.
4. Department of Sport and Recreation website, <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/support-and-advice/research-and-policies/policies/volunteers>.
5. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Sport scores goals for Aussie economy. 24 October 2013.
6. Data derived from employment level tables in SkillsIQ Sport and Recreation Industry Reference Committee Four Year Workplan, September 2016.
7. SD6 Strategic Directions for the Western Australian Sport and Recreation Industry 2016-2020.
8. SkillsIQ Sport and Recreation Four Year Workplan 1 July 2016 – 30 June 2020.
9. IBISWorld Industry Report X0028 Sports in Australia, August 2016.
10. IBISWorld Industry Report R9112 Sports and Physical Recreation Clubs in Australia. December 2016.
11. SkillsIQ Sport and Recreation Industry Reference Committee Four Year Workplan, September 2016.
12. IBISWorld Industry Report R9111 Gyms and Fitness Centres in Australia. November 2016.
13. SkillsIQ Sport and Recreation Industry Reference Committee Four Year Workplan, September 2016.
14. IBISWorld Industry Report R9111 Gyms and Fitness Centres in Australia. November 2016
15. SD6 Strategic Directions for the Western Australian Sport and Recreation Industry 2016-2020
16. Service Skills Australia, Environmental Scan 2015, Sport Fitness and Recreation
17. PerthNow. WA's new exercise crazes muscle in on \$1.3b gym industry. January 23, 2017 Accessed from: <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/western-australia/was-new-exercise-crazes-muscle-in-on-13b-gym-industry/news-story/428a2060025399841b56d7e2a7c0cbab>
18. SD6 Strategic Directions for the Western Australian Sport and Recreation Industry 2016 - 2020
19. Outdoor Council of Australia & Service Skills Australia, 2013, 2013 National Outdoor Sector Survey
20. Royal Life Saving Society of WA and the Leisure Institute of WA Aquatics. Bigger Better Safer 2014 – 15 Western Australian Aquatics Industry Report
21. Department of Sport and Recreation. Aquatic Sports Strategic Facilities Plan. Perth and Metropolitan Region. November 2012