Sun Safe Policies in Sports in Australia – A Desktop Review

The rationale for this desktop review is rooted in Australia's alarming incidence in skin cancer and significant levels of ultraviolet (UV) exposure —a particular pressing concern for individuals involved in outdoor sports due to prolonged sun exposure. Although a range of sun safety policies exist, their scope, implementation, and consistency can vary considerably across different sports, levels of governance (national, state/territory, and community), and organisational structures.

To support the development of uniform and effective sun safety policies, this review aims to identify existing gaps, showcasing best practices, and highlight areas in need of improvement. We have conducted a comprehensive review across a broad spectrum of sporting contexts—including professional leagues, community clubs, and amateur settings—spanning disciplines such as cricket, netball, soccer, swimming, rugby/AFL, surfing, surf life saving, hockey, and rowing. The selection of organisation levels was guided by the System Governance Map of Sport and Active Recreation in Australia, developed by the Clearinghouse for Sport for Australian sports use.

Figure 1. System Governance Map - Sport and Active Recreation

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To assess the comprehensiveness of each sun protection policy, the Cancer Council's 10-step checklist for sporting organisations was used as a best-practice evaluation framework. Each policy was scored out of a maximum of 10, with a score of 7 or above indicating a high-quality policy, scores of 5 to 6 representing medium quality, and scores of 4 or below considered as not meeting the standard. Organisations from which sun safety policies could not be obtained were excluded from the scoring. To enhance the visual presentation of policy quality, a traffic light colour-coding system was adopted: green for high-quality policies, yellow for medium-quality, and red for those that did not meet the standard.

Sun protection policies were initially sourced through website searches. When such policies could not be located online, follow-up attempts were made via telephone and/or email. In this policy review, 186 organisations were reached out, including 18 at the national level, 108 at the state/territory level, and 60 at the community level. Of these, 82 organisations provided sun safety policies—9 national, 62 state/territory, and 18 community—either sourced from their websites or obtained via email or phone requests. Among the state/territory-level policies, 26 were independently developed, while 5 out of the 18 community-level policies were individually developed.

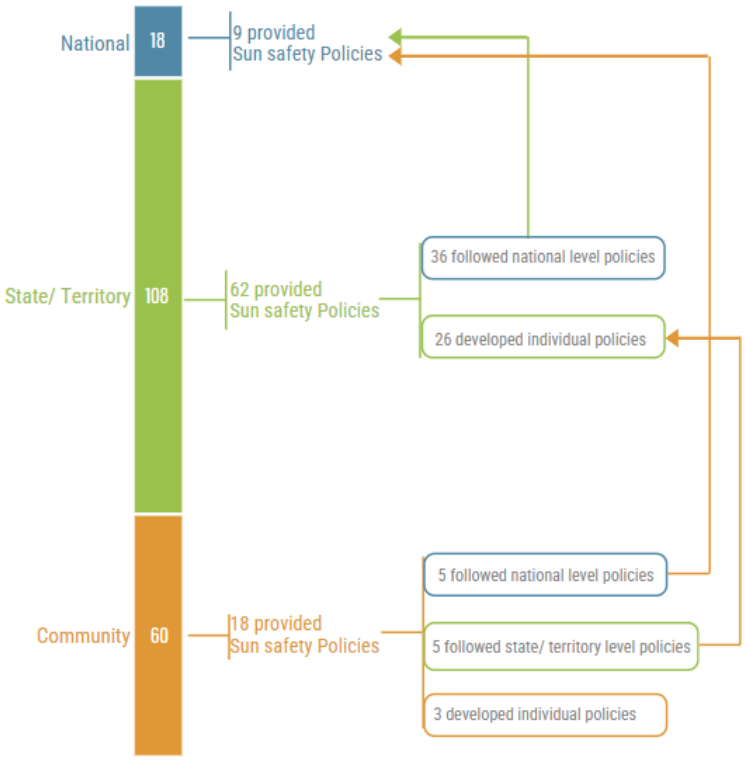

Figure 2. Summary of the number of policies found at the National, State/Territory and Community levels

On average, national-level policies achieved a score of 7.7, with details displayed in Table 1. Approximately half of the organisations contacted either did not respond to our requests or provided policies that primarily focused on heat and extreme weather, with no reference to sun exposure. In some cases, this was due to their events or training sessions being conducted in settings with minimal sun exposure, or because responsibility for sun safety had been delegated to state or territory-level bodies. Among the policies available, most addressed all 10 components of best practice; however, gaps were noted in the areas of sunglass use, coverage during special events, and role modelling.

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In comparison, state/territory-level policies achieved a slightly lower average score of 6.8. Queensland had the highest score (8.1), followed by Tasmania (7.6), Western Australia (7.3), New South Wales (7.0), Northern Territory (6.6), South Australia (6.4), Victoria (6.2), and the Australian Capital Territory (5.7). Across the outdoor sports reviewed, policies for surfing received the highest average score (10.0), followed by hockey (8.7), surf life saving and AFL (8.0), netball (7.5), swimming (7.3), rowing (7.0), soccer and American football (6.0), touch football (5.5), and rugby (4.5). Policies obtained for cricket focused exclusively on heat or extreme weather and were therefore excluded from the scoring. As an illustrative example, sun safety policies collected from organisations in Queensland are summarised in Table 2. Most policies followed national or state/ territory-level frameworks. In terms of quality based on best-practice framework, the majority incorporated key components such as hat use, sunglasses, sunscreen, and shade. However, variation was observed in the inclusion of the remaining elements of the 10-step checklist, with some components absent across several policies.

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Table 1: Overview of National Sun Safety Policies: Availability and Scoring Based on the 10-Step Framework

Organisation	Sun safety policy	Clothing	Sunscreen	Hat	Sunglasses	Shade	Scheduling	Special events	Role modelling	Education	Score
ASC[1]	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
AUS Football League	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	8
Hockey AUS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
Rowing AUS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	6
Rugby AUS	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	3
AUS Rugby League Commission	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7
Surf Life Saving AUS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
Touch Football AUS	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	5
Cricket AUS	N										
Football AUS	N										
Surfing AUS	N										
American football AUS	N										
Swimming AUS	N										
AUS Sports Foundation	N										
Sport Integrity AUS	N										
National Sports Tribunal	N										

[1] *ASC: Australian Sports Commission*

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Table 2: Overview of Sun Safety Policies across Queensland

Organisation	Same with National?	Clothing	Sunscreen	Hats	Sunglasses	Shade	Scheduling	Special events	Role modelling	Education	Score*
Hockey QLD	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
QLD Rugby Football League Ltd	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	6
AFL QLD Ltd	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	8
Netball QLD Ltd	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	8
Surf Life Saving QLD	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	6
QLD Swimming Association Inc	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	5
QLD Touch Football	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
Rowing QLD	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
QLD Athletics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	10
Swimming Brisbane	N, follow QLD	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	5
Sunshine Coast Grammar Swimming	N, follow QLD	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	5

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Organisation	Same with National?	Clothing	Sunscreen	Hats	Sunglasses	Shade	Scheduling	Special events	Role modelling	Education	Score*
UQ Red Lions AFC (AFL)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	8
Sherwood Magpies Australian Football Club	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	8
Uni-Rebels (Touch Football)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	4
UQ Rugby Club	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	3
Burleigh Bears (Rugby)	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	6
UQ (In general)	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	6

**The final score includes the "Sun safety policy" component, which is not displayed in this subset table but remains part of the overall score.*

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