



“Establishing a national organisation to promote play”

A discussion paper from the Board of ‘Play Australia’

The purpose of this discussion paper is to advance a proposal for the development of a national body “representing” play in Australia. The paper has been endorsed for circulation and consultation by the Board of *Play Australia*.

Background:

In October 2010, the Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria (PRAV), an incorporated body that had been in operation for 95 years, formally adopted the name of *Play Australia*. This was the first step in transforming the organisation from one that was largely Victorian to one more reflective of its member representation in every state and territory in Australia.

Play Australia’s purpose is to promote play and support those involved in play. Its primary role is advocacy and its main activities include connecting people involved in all areas of play, facilitating networks of specific expertise in the provision of play, promoting play and providing services to members, including information, advice and comprehensive training. *Play Australia* aims to promote quality design of play spaces and outdoor natural environments and encourage better planning, design and development of play opportunities for all children. *Play Australia* promotes research into the use of playspaces and their value. Through a strong advocacy role, *Play Australia* always seeks to focus attention on the benefits of play.

Play Australia is the national organisational member of the International Play Association (IPA) and is strengthening its role of communication between the international play community and Australian members. *Play Australia* represents the play industry on the Australian Standards Committee on Playgrounds.

There is currently much activity promoting play at local and state levels across Australia. There are numerous professional state and national bodies that are committed to play and support elements of play within their sectors. However, there is limited connection between these bodies/organisations (and individuals) and activities conducted at a national and state level. *Play Australia* sees both a need and an opportunity to get everyone involved in play working together to advocate for play nationally.

In February 2012, having long recognised the need for an effective national organisation advocating for play¹, *Play Australia* began a project to identify the most effective structure for a truly national organisation and to examine ways to add value to the provision of play in Australia.

This discussion paper sets out a proposal for the vision, purpose, benefits, services, governance structure, transition and growth strategy that might guide the establishment of a national body advocating for play.

The Proposal:

The Vision:

Article 31 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child “recognises the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”.

We envisage upholding this convention through:

- A high profile for play in Australia with stronger advocacy.
- An organisation, *Play Australia*, that will be appropriately resourced to support advocacy for play.
- Developing *Play Australia* as a not-for-profit, membership based organisation governed by a voluntary national board that provides the strategic direction for enhancing quality play opportunities across the country.
- *Play Australia's* National Board members being representative of semi-autonomous state and territory play associations established under the rules of *Play Australia* with shared values.
- *Play Australia* becoming an effective national body that has credence because of the breadth and quality of its members.
- *Play Australia* becoming the national organisation providing leadership, development and advocacy of play in Australia.

Purpose:

Play Australia will be the peak national organisation that promotes the value of play and advocates for healthy play opportunities for children and the wider community. *Play Australia* will develop a consistent national narrative and conversation about play, its benefits and its importance in developing healthy and resilient individuals and communities.

The benefits of being national:

A national organisation has the ability to bring together play communities and stakeholders throughout Australia in order to achieve their agreed vision and purpose. Members and interested parties can be reached more effectively with established points of contact in each state and territory. A well organised and effective national organisation can:

- Strengthen the ability of the play community to advocate for and raise the profile of play at a national, state and local level;
- Enhance the advocacy role by having one body to represent the play community to government, stakeholders and potential donors;

¹ 1993 Resolution at IPA conference in Melbourne committed to the establishment of a national organisation.

- Build a philanthropic base through greater capacity and clarity of purpose;
- Expand the provision of excellent training and promote forum and conference opportunities;
- Develop synergies between national, state based and local groups;
- Build momentum and capacity for significant partnerships;
- Coordinate the provision of national and common services across Australia to maximise the impact of limited resources;
- Boost the quality of services and networks for members;
- Increase access between important key networks in all states and territories;
- Build partnerships with existing individuals and key agencies already committed to children's play;
- Enhance the advisory services that draw on experts and expertise nationally and internationally;
- Identify specific research needs that can be better designed and coordinated through a national association;
- Demonstrate a national commitment to play in international forums, and
- Link more people around Australia with membership and activities of the International Play Association (IPA).

Services: What Play Australia will do:

Play Australia will provide services through a national office and local branches (this is what is envisaged over the longer term). Local branches may be recognised at either state, territory or (in the interim) at regional level.

National responsibilities – advocacy, coordination and constitution:

(Note: The role of the National Office is to work with a national and international focus and to undertake those functions that can be more effectively done at this level than at state, territory or local levels.)

- Advocacy nationally and internationally, particularly to the Federal Government;
- Networking and coordination: bringing people together for a common purpose across Australia;
- Working with strategic partners to develop innovative approaches and initiatives to promote play across Australia;
- Maintaining links with the International Play Association (*Play Australia* is Australia's national member of IPA);
- Facilitating IPA advocacy and, membership communication responsibilities (including input to the General Comment on the child's right to play);
- Represent the play community on national bodies;
- Support national governance arrangements and the constitution;
- Establishing partnerships with key stakeholders in the play community at the national level
- Obtaining national funding;
- Research facilitation and support;
- Undertaking national projects for clients and partners;
- Information gathering and dissemination;
- Promoting information on training, forums and conference opportunities around the country and overseas;
- Ensure a strong relationship with local government across Australia is achieved and maintained;
- Providing services to members online and in person where appropriate, and
- Managing the national website.

Local branch responsibilities:

(Note: The role of local branches is to work with a local focus and to undertake those functions that can be more effectively done at state, territory or regional level than at a national level.)

- Advocacy locally, including to State Governments;
- Networking and coordination: bringing people together for a common purpose within states and territories;
- Representing the play community on state and territory bodies;
- Provide representatives to national bodies;
- Supporting and managing local governance arrangements; establishing policy and strategic direction with appropriate representation;
- Establishing partnerships with key stakeholders in the play community;
- Access funding resources locally;
- Initiating, facilitating and supporting research in consultation with the National Office;
- Information gathering and dissemination; providing opportunities to collaborate and share information - 'cross pollination' of sectors;
- Provision of training, forums and conferences;
- Providing sector specific support;
- Undertaking projects for clients and partners locally, and
- Providing services and programs to members within their jurisdiction.

Governance:

In this proposal *Play Australia* would be:

- One national organisation, *Play Australia* (IPA Australia), that is the legal entity and registered as an incorporated body;
- Governed by a voluntary national board and local branch committees, and
- Membership based.

Constitution:

The current constitution of *Play Australia* will be revised to reflect the changes outlined in this proposal.

National Board:

The National Board will:

- uphold the constitution
- be voluntary in nature
- have 7 – 9 elected members that will be representative of local branches
- include a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer among their number
- be able to conscript additional members to the board for their skill base
- establish voluntary standing committees as required
- appoint a national CEO who will be a member ex-officio
- establish a national secretariat.

Local Branch Committees: (state, territory or regional)

It is envisaged that local branch committees will oversee the development of play in their own jurisdiction and will be bound by the objectives of the *Play Australia* constitution, its statutes and regulations. It is anticipated that most activity will happen at a branch level. Local branch committees will:

- uphold the constitution
- represent and support their play constituency
- advise the National Board of *Play Australia*
- be recognised and have their powers set out within the constitution
- be voluntary in nature
- have up to 12 members representative of the broad array of sectors involved in play (e.g. local government, early childhood, play space design, education sectors, manufacturers, risk assessors, health and policy)
- include a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer among their number
- be able to conscript additional members to the committee for their skill base
- establish voluntary standing committees as required.

The present board of *Play Australia* believes that the current model of operation in Victoria and applicable to PRAV for 97 years has worked well and could be applied in local committees throughout Australia.

Once changes to the current constitution are adopted a *Play Australia* (Victoria Branch) will be formed which will run in a similar manner to the current operation, though it like the other branches, will not be a legal entity. The Victoria Branch Committee will undertake the responsibilities outlined above.

Membership Categories:

In this model all members will be members of *Play Australia* and there are four categories of membership:

- Organisational Members
- Individual Members
- Life Members
- Affiliated Members

All members and affiliated members will be subject to the provisions of the *Play Australia* Constitution.

International Play Association (IPA):

Play Australia (IPA Australia) is recognised by the IPA as its representative branch in Australia.

The role of *Play Australia* (IPA Australia) is to:

- Provide opportunities to input to IPA initiatives and policy direction as required;
- Contribute to and support the development and running of a sustainable effective international association;
- Facilitate communication between the international play community and Australian members;

- Facilitate communication between the IPA and Australian members;
- Disseminate information from IPA and on matters of play in the international arena to members;
- Facilitate international networks and contacts, and
- Facilitate opportunities for Australian members to meet (or hear present) visiting international colleagues.

(Note: It is timely to formalise the two way relationship with the IPA. This includes clarifying how we represent Australia, how we communicate between the organisations and our commitment to delivering this to the Australian members, how we elect representatives, how we collect information from the membership and communicate it back to the IPA. Clarifying these governance systems will strengthen our capacity to get the best from the relationship for Australian members and for play.)

Funding:

It is recognised that securing adequate funding to support a national body will be a significant challenge for the new organisation and that new funding sources will be required in order to develop and sustain it.

Funding will primarily be sourced from the following:

- Membership and affiliated membership
- Philanthropy (*Play Australia* has, and will continue to use its Deductible Gift Recipient [DGR] status)
- Projects undertaken for clients and partners
- Training
- Forums and conferences
- Government support

The National Office will secure funding from each of these sources in order to conduct its activities. A proportion of all fees from membership will contribute to the running of the national organisation but the majority of this funding will be distributed to local branches.

Local branches will be responsible for establishing any additional funding for their operational activities. All aspects of funding will be consistent with the aims of the national organisation.

Partnerships:

Partnerships and alliances will form a key part in achieving the *Play Australia* vision. *Play Australia* will forge strong formal partnerships with like groups in the play community. It is anticipated that these links will lead to synergies in advocacy, structure and function, joint fundraising to support specific projects, partnership research activities, forums and conferences.

Transition and growth:

Transition to the full establishment of the national body as outlined in this discussion paper will take a significant amount of time.

Some of the steps anticipated include:

- Circulation of the discussion paper
- Consultation with existing members and stakeholders

- Feedback on the ideas presented
- Further consolidation and review following feedback
- Drafting a final proposal for structure and governance
- Re-writing the constitution of *Play Australia* and undertaking the process for its adoption
- The establishment of the new governance structure. It is possible that an Interim National Board would be established until national membership grew and each state had a branch
- The appointment of a CEO and the establishment of a secretariat
- Formalising partnerships, and
- Operationalizing the constitution, including framing the statutes and regulations.

The growth of *Play Australia* will go hand in hand with growth in local branches. The National Board and secretariat of *Play Australia* would work closely with members and partners to facilitate increased fund raising, member numbers, advocacy, and the other activities.

Priorities for *Play Australia* include:

- developing and executing a national public advocacy strategy to promote the benefits of play and to build the position of *Play Australia* as the national leader on play;
- facilitating significant research that demonstrates the public health benefits associated with quality outdoor play, as well as collecting and disseminating international research;
- the development of innovative customer-focused membership services and benefits;
- the development of a Play Charter as the tool to engage potential partner advocates for play;
- the provision of excellent training services to meet the various needs of the sectors involved in facilitating play;
- the provision of excellent member services that provide information and advice through a comprehensive web based resource and individual consulting;
- building sufficient resources and infrastructure to sustain a *national* focus on play, whilst attracting resources from within states and territories to support local play based activity and adequately funded operations;
- build Australian support and membership of the International Play Association, and
- develop a strong relationship and partnership with the Federal Government.

Play Australia
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