



## SPORT | Issue No. 29 | *Are Blue Cards really enough?*

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I doubt that there is a person in Australia who is not aware of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Commission has now been sitting since 2013. It has produced hundreds of pages of reports in relation to its case studies. Whilst everyone knows about the Royal Commission many people, and indeed often journalists, abbreviate the name to the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse. That is a subtle but significant difference. The inquiry is indeed into how institutions (churches, schools, voluntary organisations, sports and other organisations) have dealt with this terrible situation of people abusing children.

Some of Australia's biggest and best loved sports including tennis and cricket have been asked to appear before the Royal Commission to explain specific incidents and the response of their sport to the incidents.

Whilst the final recommendations of the Commission are not yet written, what is abundantly clear is that the expectation on organisations to manage and control the risk of this type of thing occurring and the clear responsibility on them to take action to avoid abuse occurring has changed forever.

Sometime ago state governments introduced a concept commonly known as Blue Cards. In very broad terms the requirement is that if you are an adult dealing with children, you need to obtain one of these cards. Some of the exceptions however are if you are under 18, if you are a school teacher or if you are a parent. Essentially, anyone who had been convicted of any serious offence is unable to get a Blue Card.

As most abusers of children have never been convicted and many are parents, there is an obvious lack of effectiveness in the Blue Card regime. That is not to say that it is not a start, but it is not enough.

Sports are now going to have to look at how they manage the risks in this area. My view is that sports must do this not from a risk management point of view but from the perspective of genuinely attempting to protect

vulnerable children in their care and control. How this can be done is a very difficult issue.

Many sports have limited resources and child abusers are clever, cunning and look for opportunities generated by organisational weakness. Australia is a big country and Queensland is a big state. How sports are going to protect children participating all over the country is going to be very difficult. It must start though with a commitment from the Boards of state and national bodies. Education, information, diligence, resources and commitment are all part of the armoury which will assist in combatting this very serious issue.

Tennis Australia has recently announced a hotline that people can ring to make reports and complaints. Whilst that may be a genuine attempt to do something and to show commitment, my personal view is that ringing the police is always a much better start than ringing an organisation.

I suspect that there is not a one size fits all solution to this problem but if this is not a permanent agenda item for all national and state sporting organisations, there is something very wrong.



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