



**PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE OLYMPICS IN AUSTRALIA ADDRESS
AUSTRALIAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SATURDAY, 4 MAY 2019**

Introduction

Good morning friends, one and all.

A very special welcome to President Thomas Bach as the first IOC President to attend and address an AOC Annual General Meeting.

President Bach, thank you for making wonderful history with us today.

Friends, please welcome President Thomas Bach.

Please also welcome the Director General of the IOC, Christophe De Kepper, IOC Member in Israel, Alex Gilady, President of the International Equestrian Federation and IOC Member, Ingmar De Vos and other friends from the IOC.

And I repeat my earlier welcome to all of you, the members of the Australian Olympic family.

'Autonomy and Independence' and this year's Address

Ladies and Gentlemen

The theme of this year's 'State of the Olympics in Australia' address is 'autonomy and independence.'

It is fitting, because we are in the presence of one of the great warriors for Olympic Autonomy and Independence, IOC President, Thomas Bach.

No IOC President has, perhaps, ever felt so personally, the consequences of compromised Olympic autonomy and independence.

An Olympic Gold medallist in Montreal, denied the chance to defend his title in Moscow...because politics usurped Olympism.

There are three truths which emerge from the Moscow experience.

The first is that ‘autonomy and independence’ must be the Olympics shield and sword in defence of Olympians of all generations, including a twenty-seven-year-old foil fencer in 1980.

The lesson must be:

That autonomy and independence compromised is Olympism lost.

The second truth is that whilst this moment in Olympic history diminished politics and those who succumbed, it elevated the athletes forced to endure the unfairness... reminding us all that stoicism, grace and dignity in dealing with adversity are Olympic qualities.

The third truth is one not celebrated enough...having competed in Moscow and subsequently, Australia has competed in every Summer Olympic Games.

With our Greek brothers and sisters, we cohabit a pantheon of just two.

This achievement is nourishment and instruction for us all.

Because there is no automatic right to carry the shield or wield the sword I speak of.

Rather, it is an honour, earned by vigilant adherence to the Olympic Charter.

Mindful that the AOC is actually a sub-committee of the IOC, and so bound by the Olympic Charter.

I make this point because one of this AGM’s tasks is to amend the AOC Constitution to further strengthen our very willing compliance.

Amendments which affirm our ‘autonomy’, our ‘independence’, our ‘political neutrality’ and our ‘duty’ to infuse Australian culture with the Olympic Spirit.

Amendments which affirm our duty to use sport to improve the well-being of our ‘first’ and all of our people.

And amendments to recognise the Athletes’ Rights and Responsibilities Declaration proposed by the IOC Athletes’ Commission and adopted by the IOC Session on the 10th of September last year.

The threats to autonomy and independence

Holistically, these amendments further guard the AOC against threats to our autonomy and independence.

In two periods in our history, Australia’s obligation to the Olympic Charter has either been disregarded or not fully understood.

Either way, these are moments of ‘threat.’

The first, was the aforementioned Fraser Government’s advocacy for an Australian boycott of the Moscow Olympics.

Advocacy, which to many in the then Australian Olympic Federation, felt like a crusade of moral intimidation.

A crusade defeated after a deadlocked vote of ‘5 votes all’ was broken by a somewhat unlikely hero: AOF Executive Member Lewis Luxton, an honorary IOC Member and fundraiser for Prime Minister Fraser.

Lewis Luxton’s moments of deliberation are beautifully and at times humorously captured in Harry Gordon’s compelling book, *Australia and the Olympic Games*.

Harry wrote and I quote:

Luxton told the others that he had given the matter great thought, and had earlier intended to vote against going.

That morning Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser had telephoned him at home and lectured him for an hour on reasons why the AOF should not allow a team to go to Moscow.

"The hide of him," Luxton said. "I know his mother!"

He then cast the vote that tipped the balance.

My friends, thank goodness for Lewis Luxton and Malcom Fraser’s mum!

As ever, big history tends to turn on small margins and individual actions.

Which brings me to the second period of threat, which is far more nuanced, quite current and existential.

I speak of efforts to slowly push the AOC into the shadow of political control.

Examples include:

The Australian Sports Commission’s suggested ‘partnership’ with the AOC to select the Summer and Winter Games Chefs de Mission.

A suggestion incompatible with Rule 27.3 of the Olympic Charter that:

"NOCs have the exclusive authority for the representation of their respective countries at the Olympic Games..."

There is no more senior representative of the AOC in our Olympic teams than the Chef de Mission, meaning we must retain exclusive authority for their appointment or election.

Second, attempts to align the programs of the AOC with the incompatible programs of others.

It matters not to the AOC that the Australian Government through the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) focuses its funding on sports with most medal chances, because this is a philosophy we reject.

Think on these facts:

- the AOC's participation in the 2017 Asian Winter Games where 17 of our 30 athletes were from sports and disciplines which the AIS does not fund;
- the AOC's funding of Biathlon, Curling, Ice Hockey, Skating, Bobsleigh (including Skeleton) and Luge which the AIS does not fund; and
- the Australian Team for the 2018 Olympic Winter Games including a majority of sports and disciplines which the AIS, again, does not fund.

Friends, also consider:

- the AOC's participation with a "full team" in the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires and the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020;
- the AOC's participation in the 2019 Pacific Games in Samoa; and
- our funding of Fencing, Handball, Karate, Modern Pentathlon, Wrestling, Sport Climbing and Synchronised Swimming.

To be clear, in the ever-increasing fog of the 'sports and government relationship' our duty is thankfully clear and certainly bright:

It is to support Olympic participation by all 40 of our member Olympic sports.

Third, we must be mindful that attempts to lure the AOC to receive Australian Government funding brings its own consequence: Namely, that an organisation in receipt of government funding is an organisation exposed to Ministerial direction – that is the real politic, as we experienced in 1980 when the Prime Minister withdrew funding to our Team.

And fourth, we must be wary of the potential conflicts of interest for members of the AOC Executive and Athletes' Commission courted to sit on Boards of organisations adhering to different Charters and so with different purposes.

Whilst the AOC is respectful of the AIS's current request for representation from the elected AOC Athletes' Commission on the new appointed AIS Athlete Advisory Committee, the AOC would regard such representation as straying too far from our own purpose thus creating possible conflicts of purpose and so interest.

The AOC's support for athletes having a strong voice is as solid and determined as the athletes' support is for the AOC to remain fiercely autonomous and independent in our adherence to the Olympic Charter.

So, in respect of the new AIS Athlete Committee the AOC says two things:

- Strength to its arm in the pursuit of its own purpose;
- Independently, the AOC must also continue to pursue our own specific goals.

Sometimes the wise and prudent choice for two travellers is to wish each other well but not to share the same road.

Mindful, that one compromise makes the next compromise easier, the one after that easier still and so on and so forth...a series of incremental steps towards a future where absolute Olympic values are rendered malleable.

Thankfully, the AOC is strong enough to say 'no' to this future.

Strong enough precisely because we say 'yes' to more virtuous opportunities permitted and encouraged by the Olympic Charter.

And strong enough because ours is a positive agenda delivered by financial muscle and the capability it brings.

Financial strength

On this point, I report the Australian Olympic Foundation's net assets have grown from \$109m at the commencement of 2001 to \$160.9m at 31 March 2019.

This is after total distributions to the AOC during this period of \$119.4m.

The composite return for the Foundation is 8% per annum versus the targeted objective of 6.3%.

All of this means the Foundation's finances are strong and growing.

Mr President, as I reported to you personally, changes to the Trust Deed of the Foundation in April 2018 also means the Australian Olympic Foundation's capital and ongoing distributions is secure.

Indeed, they are protected by our finest, the Life Members of the AOC, activated as Guardians of our financial independence.

It means the AOC funds its activities independent from Government and free of outside pressures of any kind sending a very powerful message:

To those with eyes on the Foundation — avert your gaze — all we have and all we are is for Olympism.

Sponsorship

On sponsorship, I advise that AOC revenue is derived from two sources — the IOC's worldwide Olympic Partner Program (TOP) and Australian Olympic Team partners.

This year, we welcome:

- Allianz as a worldwide Olympic Partner; and
- Danone Murray Goulburn as an Australian Olympic Team Partner

Contracted sponsorship/licensing for the 2017-2020 quadrennium stands at \$61.8 million against a target of \$62.5 million.

And for the future we have secured \$21.5m million in 2021 to 2014, \$6.9 million in 2025 to 2028 and \$3.8 million in 2029 to 2032

All of which means we are in excellent financial health and our current and future capability is independently significant.

Australian Teams

Since Sydney was elected to host the 2000 Olympics in 1993, and the financial security that brought, the AOC has neither sought nor received Australian Government funding.

That seminal moment also inspired the AOC's policy change to select all those athletes who qualify under their sport's Olympic qualification system and are nominated by their National Federation.

This is why Australia always fields one of the largest teams from one of the smallest populations.

To this end, consider the Australian Teams we have and will support.

For Barcelona 1992, before this change, we were the 8th largest team.

Since then:

- We were 3rd in Atlanta;
- We were largest in Sydney;
- We were 2nd in Athens;
- 5th in Beijing;
- 4th in London; and
- 4th in Rio.

Further, over the 2017-2020 quadrennium, the AOC has and will send 8 teams to the:

- 2017 Asian Winter Games;
- 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games;
- 2018 Winter Olympic Games;
- 2018 Youth Olympic Games;
- 2019 Pacific Games;
- 2019 ANOC World Beach Games;
- 2020 Winter Youth Olympic Games; and
- 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo with 480 athletes plus support staff.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is, teams totalling 812 athletes.

The way this has been achieved, the fact of these achievements, and that we can consistently replicate them is a magnificent feat owned by every person in the room.

In more exciting news, the AOC welcomes a decision by the Olympic Council of Asia to invite Oceania nations to compete in the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

With 35 sports and 10,000 athletes, the Asian Games is second only to the Olympic Games as a global multi-sport event.

There is a cap of 10,000 athletes for these games so there will be decisions about which men's and women's team will compete, but our place is confirmed and that is terrific news for Australia.

Olympism in the community

I also report on the enhanced role we are playing in our community.

The AOC launched its biggest ever community programme - Olympics Unleashed - in September 2018.

Olympics Unleashed takes Olympians and athletes aspiring to compete in Tokyo 2020 into classrooms so students hear what they have learned during their own personal journey.

In Queensland, 75 athletes have joined the program and 400 Queensland schools registered to participate.

In just 6 months 35 athletes have visited over 250 schools reaching more than 40,000 Queensland primary school students.

Some of Queensland's most isolated towns have registered to take part in Olympics Unleashed, with Olympians reaching remote schools in Birdsville, the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York.

Since launching in NSW, more than 200 schools have registered from all regions of the State.

The AOC intends to deliver Olympics Unleashed nationally to reach a staggering 1.5 million Australian students across 9,400 schools.

This is a terrific investment we are proud to make.

In the Community

We have also increased the engagement of the Olympics in the community with 'Olympic Educator' teacher advocacy, 'Olympic Day' celebrations, the 'Pierre de Coubertin Award' for sportsmanship and 'Indigenous Programs.'

All of which places the AOC in lockstep with the IOC's Agenda 2020 road map.

An Australian candidature for 2032 Olympic Games

The Feasibility Study into the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games commissioned by the Councils of South-East Queensland (SEQ) is worthy of serious consideration by the Queensland and Australian Governments.

SEQ is well positioned to make a compelling case, but only if there is significant improvement in the region's transport infrastructure, including rail.

This is not something that is Games' driven. If not fixed, there will be gridlock well before 2032!

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, I conclude this year's 'State of the Olympics in Australia' address with these words:

We are a proud and successful expression of the Olympic spirit because of you and your commitment to our autonomy and independence.

Our autonomy and independence makes us strong. Long may it be so.

Thank you, President Bach. And thank you friends one and all.

Thank you.

JOHN COATES AC
President
Australian Olympic Committee

1980 Moscow Olympic Games - Australian boycott



The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Fraser, AC, CH, GCL, Prime Minister; The Hon. Robert James (Bob) Ellicott AC, QC, Minister for Home Affairs (and Sport); and, The Rt. Hon. Doug Anthony, AC, CH, FTSE, PC, Deputy Prime Minister.