EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND
The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) Athletes’ Commission undertook a survey of Australian Olympians and aspirants for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in 2021, following an IOC Athletes’ Commission initiative to explore the different ways of how athletes can express their support for the principles enshrined in the Olympic Charter.

The AOC Athletes’ Commission recognises that non-discrimination is one of the founding pillars of the Olympic Movement.

The Olympic Charter states in Fundamental Principle 6 - “The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national and social origin, poverty birth or other status.”

The AOC Athletes’ Commission reflected on the balance between an athlete’s right to freedom of expression and an athlete’s responsibility to respect the rights of others by not discriminating as well as refraining from political demonstration in competitions, competition venues and ceremonies.

These elements are captured in the Athletes’ Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities, which was endorsed at the IOC Session in Buenos Aires on October 9, 2018. The Athletes’ Declaration was driven by the athlete community, involving a global survey of Olympians from 190 countries and more than 120 sports disciplines.

The IOC’s Rule 50.2 specifically states - “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.”

The AOC Athletes’ Commission wanted to hear the views of Australian Olympians and Tokyo 2020 aspirants.

THE SURVEY
The AOC Athletes’ Commission sent a survey containing twenty-three (23) questions to all Australian Olympians and Tokyo 2020 aspirants, seeking their views on Rule 50.2.

The questions canvassed a range of subjects from athletes’ rights to self-expression, methods of self-expression, athlete experiences, impacts on athlete performance or experience, athlete priorities at the Olympic Games and awareness of Rule 50.2.

The survey group was also broken down into the decades in which the Olympians competed to get a sense of whether perspectives have changed over time.

The survey received a total of 496 responses. There was an even split between male and female. The method included open-ended, close-ended and Likert Scale questions.

SURVEY RESULTS

Self-expression at the Games
The majority of those surveyed believe that under some circumstances, athletes should be able to express themselves at the Olympic Games.

Most of those supporting freedom of expression were also concerned that any expression should not impact on other athletes’ performances or overall experience at the Games.

The survey indicated that some 39.91% believe in self-expression depending on the circumstances, 19.16% believe in self-expression in any circumstances while 40.93% felt the Games were not a place for athletes to publicly express views.

Contemporary athletes aspiring for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games formed the biggest group of respondents to the survey followed by Olympians from the 2000s, then the 2010s.

There was a clear trend that shows a higher proportion of present-day athletes believe that the Games are a platform for self-expression when compared with Olympians from earlier eras.

Athletes from the 2010s held that view most firmly – with 47% believing in self-expression depending on the circumstances, 34% who believe in self-expression in any circumstances and only 19% believing the Games were not a place for self-expression.
By way of contrast, more than 60% of Olympians from the 1960s and 1970s believed the Games should not be a stage for self-expression in any circumstances.

More than 80% of all respondents said a protest on the field of play would detract from the performance or experience of athletes. This leaves a minority that clearly have passionate views and believe that the field of play is an appropriate place to express those views.

With the field of play or podium considered an unsuitable forum for protest by the majority of Olympians, other options canvassed included a designated area in the Village, media conferences and interviews, social media and the use of physical symbols or subtle measures.

It should be noted these alternative options were largely explored by those who believed in forums for expression at the Games, not those who opposed such expressions.

**Discrimination in Sports**

On the key subject of discrimination, 55% didn’t believe it existed on the field of play in their sport, a further 20% were unsure while 26% believed there was discrimination on the field of play.

Race, religion, gender, sexual preference and disability were identified as the main types of discrimination.

Female athletes were more likely to observe that there was discrimination on the field of play.

**Understanding Rule 50.2**

Some 80% of athletes felt that they understood their rights and responsibilities in relation to Rule 50.2. However, only 40% of athletes understood of the consequences of breaching the Rule.

Knowing that there were consequences for breaching Rule 50.2, 10% would still consider protesting on the field of play or on the podium, with a further 20% saying that they may protest under some circumstances.

**SUMMARY**

There is a wide divergence of views – from those who believe there is no place for self-expression at the Olympic Games, through to those who would still knowingly breach Rule 50.2 in spite of being well aware that there would be consequences.

Views have changed over time with contemporary athletes more strongly believing in the right to express their views at the Games.

The majority however believe the field of play and medal podium should be off-limits for protest as these could detract from the performance or experience of fellow athletes. Alternative options such as social media or media interviews were preferable.

There is confusion about the consequences of breaching Rule 50.2.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE IOC AC**

- Athletes should be provided opportunities to express themselves in forums away from the field of play and podium.
- There should be clarity about what is permissible in these alternative forums.
- There should be a framework for how Rule 50.2 breaches will be assessed and applicable sanctions.
- Athletes would support a moment of solidarity at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.
- Athletes would like the opportunity to express themselves or engage in discussion with fellow Olympians in a forum within the Olympic Village.
- Athletes would like access to IOC education programs in the Village.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE AOC EXECUTIVE AND TOKYO 2020 TEAM EXECUTIVE**

- Athletes would like access to AOC education programs pre-Games on Rule 50.2, particularly in relation to self-expression on social media and in interviews.
- Athletes would like the AOC to provide education opportunities in relation to Indigenous history both in the Olympic Village and outside of Games time.
- Consideration should be given to the type of guidance, counselling and support the AOC would offer an Australian athlete who expresses views in a way that breaches Rule 50.2 and subsequently faces sanction for their actions.