



FENCING HUI 2023

Athletes Commission Report

Summary

- The Commission represents the interests of FeNZ athletes and advocates on their behalf.
- Current Members: Hanna Choi, Sheldon Ogilvie, Anna Charlton and Grant Tweddle.
- Over the past year or so we have:
 - *Contributed* to the development or improvement of FeNZ policies and procedures
 - *Highlighted* issues of concern to athletes and advocated for improvements in FeNZ's operational practices
 - *Assisted* athletes navigate the FeNZ formal disputes and complaints resolution process and provided advocacy and representational support
 - *Promoted* initiatives designed to benefit fencers and enhance their experience.
- Looking ahead key issues and priorities include:
 - *Ensuring* the Commission is a strong and positive voice for athletes of all ages and abilities that is committed to creating a positive, safe and vibrant fencing community
 - *Progressing* the appointment of new Commission members committed to making a positive contribution to the fencing community to replace those of us standing down
 - *Improving* communication and engagement; Between the Commission and the athletes we represent: AND between the FeNZ Board/Regions/Commissions and our athletes, the wider fencing community and the external stakeholders that support the achievement of our goals and objectives
 - *Contributing* to initiatives that will be led by other Commissions and working groups to operationalise the FeNZ Safeguarding Policy and review the FeNZ complaints and disputes resolution process and FeNZ Codes of Conduct
 - *Continuing* to support athletes navigating the FeNZ Dispute and Complaints resolution process
 - *Supporting & where agreed leading* the implementation of initiatives designed to attract and retain participants in the sport – including:
 - meeting the needs of social and competitive fencers
 - addressing the needs and concerns of women fencers
 - providing attractive pathways for athletes that wish to transition into coaching, officiating and other roles
 - supporting the design and implementation of FeNZ's National Development Programme that is targeted at athletes that aspire to achieve success internationally
 - enhancing FeNZ governance and management and resourcing of our sport at national and regional level.
 - *Working* with the FeNZ Board, regions, Commissions, Selectors, and the wider fencing community to reflect on the insights and positive proposals for change arising from this Hui, prioritise next steps and support their implementation.

Our mission & key functions

The 'mission' of the Athletes' Commission is to represent New Zealand fencers of all ages and abilities, to promote safe engagement at all levels and to provide a link between athletes and FeNZ.

Our terms of reference state that the Commission shall:

- *Provide a group of athletes to share their feedback on all aspects of fencing in New Zealand*
- *Provide athletes with a mechanism for ensuring their views on important matters are heard and communicated to the Board of Fencing New Zealand*
- *Be the link between athletes and the other Commissions and the Fencing New Zealand Board.*

The Commission has no decision-making authority. In practical terms it represents the interests of FeNZ athletes and advocates on their behalf.

Our members

Under our terms of reference, the Commission's members are appointed by the FeNZ Board. The Commission should comprise a minimum of 3 members including at least one junior, senior and veteran athlete – one of which is to be the Chairperson.

The current members are Hanna Choi, Sheldon Ogilvie, Anna Charlton and Grant Tweddle.

Looking back – what have we done.

Context: The Commission currently does not have the lead on particular programmes of work in the way that the Coaches Commission, Officiating Commission or Selectors do. Rather we have highlighted issues of concern and recommended courses of action usually through our reports to the Board. In addition, we actively contribute to the development of good practice through input to, and feedback on, policies and initiatives being developed by the other Commissions or individual Board members. We have also provided advice and support to athletes who have raised issues of concern with us, including offering advocacy and representation services at Disputes Panel hearings, if requested.

Development or improvement of FeNZ Policies and Procedures: This has included providing input to or feedback on:

- Commonwealth section policy & arrangements for selection events
- Guidelines for appointment and compensation of overseas tour managers & coaches
- FeNZ Competition Refunds Policy
- FeNZ Covid Policy
- FeNZ Safeguarding Policy
- FeNZ Black Card Policy
- FeNZ Affiliation policy
- The FeNZ International Tournament Pathway document.

Highlighting issues of concern to athletes and advocating for improvements in FeNZ operational practices. This has included:

- Seeking a remedy to athlete concerns about compulsory participation in the National Training Camp that was held in Auckland in January 2023 given the Covid risk
- Providing recommendations to address concerns about variations in national competition formats that have applied to events where there have been less than 6 women entrants
- Highlighting concerns about entry fees for national competitions
- Providing feedback on proposed changes in the timing and format of national tournaments and the introduction of team events, as well as seeking early publication of the national and regional events calendar and associated tournament timetables

- Addressing athlete safety and the promotion of a safe, inclusive and supportive culture
- Supporting a fencer present their case at a FeNZ Dispute Panel hearing
- Highlighting the need to update competition and selection documentation to clarify eligibility requirements
- Meeting with Stephen Peterson and providing input to his State of the Nation Report
- Advocating for the award of NZ Cups for 2021 and 2022 to the eligible fencers
- Proposing an amendment to the FeNZ constitution that would extend voting and officeholding rights to affiliated members who are 16 years of age or older
- Advocating for wider Board and Commission consideration of initiatives to improve women's participation in regional and national events.

Promoted initiatives designed to benefit fencers and enhance their experience: By way of example:

- Advocating for the establishment of a National Development Programme and the appointment of a Director
- Developing a proposal for NZ fencer participation in the World University Games
- Supporting the introduction of team events at national age group competitions
- Drafting an Olympic Solidarity Grant to secure funding for a National Training Camp scheduled to follow NZ Juniors in Dunedin
- Contributing to the development of a further Olympic Solidarity Youth Development grant.

Individual Commission members also:

- Designed and implemented a survey on women in fencing and provided the findings to the Board and wider fencing community to inform the development of the sport (*Hanna*)
- Provided project management services to support participation by the NZ Team at the Commonwealth Fencing Champs (*Grant*)
- Provided advice on improving women's participation in competitions to Fencing North (*Hanna*)
- Represented FeNZ and our athletes as a member of the Athletes Leadership Network (an independent body that engages with NZOC and HPSNZ) (*Sheldon*)
- Developed the National Development Director's Position Description and the Programme's Terms of Reference (*Grant*)
- Led the organization and delivery of a women's training camp in Christchurch (*Sheldon*).

The year ahead – key issues and priorities

Athlete Advocacy: First and foremost, we want to ensure the Commission is a strong and positive voice for athletes of all ages and abilities that is committed to creating a positive, safe and vibrant fencing community.

Commission Refresh – A call to aspiring athlete advocates! Two of our members – Anna and Grant – are standing down. The Secretary General will, therefore, be facilitating a call for nominations for new members to join Hanna and Sheldon on the Commission. In accord with our Terms of Reference we are looking for at least one new Junior and one new Veteran fencer to join us. To ensure a good balance across fencing disciplines, genders and regions and to better share the Commission's workload we have suggested to the Board that we also consider appointing an additional senior fencer. We have also proposed that the Commission members appoint the Commission's Chairperson and confirm who should represent us at Board meetings.

Improving communication and engagement: We would like to improve the Commission's engagement with FeNZ athletes across New Zealand and overseas – if we are going to truly represent our athletes, we need to know your concerns and you need to have a better understanding of what we are doing on your behalf. More generally we will continue to advocate for and promote measures that are designed

to improve communication and engagement between the FeNZ Board, Commissions and regional committees and the wider FeNZ membership. (We welcome any thoughts Hui participants may have).

Safety and Wellbeing: We are committed to supporting the work underway to update the FeNZ complaints and disputes resolution process, and the operationalisation of its Safeguarding Policy and Codes of Conduct.

Athlete Support: We will continue to advise and where necessary support and represent athletes navigating the FeNZ Dispute and Complaints resolution process

Development and Growth:

A sport for All: We share a commitment to the promotion and development of fencing in a manner that meets the needs and aspirations of participants of all ages and abilities. We recognize FeNZ has a responsibility to support fencers that aspire to reach their full potential in national and international competitions. We also recognize that FeNZ needs to accommodate the many participants that gain pleasure and satisfaction from participation in a social or non-competitive context.

Women Fencers: A continuing focus for the Commission will be identifying and advocating the adoption of measures that recognize and address the interests and concerns of women fencers. Women are under-represented in our sport and those that do participate have highlighted a range of issues that deserve to be addressed if we are to grow women's participation in the sport and retain those women fencers that do give fencing a go.

Retention – Other Pathways: We will advocate for and support initiatives to develop and promote attractive pathways for fencers that want to transition into other roles within the fencing community including coaching, officiating and other positions. Without coaches, officials and other volunteers we cannot grow the sport we love.

Athlete National Development Programme: We are committed to advising and working alongside the NDP Director as part of the proposed establishment group to ensure the programme is designed and delivered in a manner that meets the needs of athletes that aspire to achieve success internationally.

FeNZ Governance, Management and Resourcing: Both the wellbeing and the growth of our sport depends on effective governance and management. We are conscious that a small number of volunteers underpin the governance, management and delivery of our sport and that the sport has limited funding available to resource its activities, at both national and regional levels. Stephen Peterson's report has also highlighted the issue of volunteer burnout. If we are to flourish and grow as a sport we believe there is a need to:

- Review our national and regional governance and management arrangements to ensure they reflect good practice and support the achievement of our organisation's goals and objectives as efficiently and as effectively as possible
- Consider what steps we can take to increase our income and resource our FeNZ executive and administrative functions in a manner that lightens the load on our volunteers
- Better recognize and reward the work of our tournament officials and other volunteers.

National Hui Insights & Next Steps: Finally, we are committed to working with the FeNZ Board, regions, Commissions, selectors, and the wider fencing community to take account of the insights and positive proposals for change arising from this Hui, prioritise next steps, and support their implementation.

Athletes Commission
February 2023