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ESPORTS GOVERNANCE AND SAFEGUARDING IN AUSTRALIA

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1 INTRODUCTION

Esports participation in Australia is expanding across schools, universities and community settings, yet governance remains fragmented and uneven. This commentary sets out how existing national frameworks can deliver consistent safeguards for young participants and competitive integrity for the sector. It situates esports within Australia's online safety regime, including the statutory powers of the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and the minimum-age law for social media, and explains why esports platforms and events should align with those protections.

International examples from New Zealand and the United Kingdom show that formal recognition within sport systems, combined with child-protection partnerships, improves practice and accountability. This commentary proposes establishing a nationally recognised esports governing body linked to Sport Integrity Australia and the eSafety Commissioner, requiring age-assurance, reporting pathways, and moderation standards for organisers and platforms. Prioritising school and community competitions and incorporating health and wellbeing guidance, including safe-listening standards, offers a practical route to credible, safe and sustainable esports in Australia.

2 AUSTRALIA'S ONLINE SAFETY FRAMEWORK AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ESPORTS

Australia's Office of the eSafety Commissioner is a statutory regulator with powers to require platforms to address harmful content and to set enforceable expectations for safer design and practice under the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth) (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2022). In 2024, the Commonwealth introduced a minimum age for social media accounts set at sixteen, obliging services to take reasonable steps to prevent under-sixteens from holding accounts and to implement proportionate age-assurance measures (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, 2025; Parliament of Australia, 2024).

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Esports environments replicate key social-media functions. Competitive play typically unfolds on or alongside services with real-time chat, livestreaming, user-generated content, and peer interaction. National research shows that Australian children and young people experience both benefits and risks in online gaming spaces, including exposure to harassment and unwanted contact, confirming that the harms targeted by online-safety regulation are directly relevant to esports participation (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2024).

Aligning esports platforms and tournament operations with the regulator's expectations would standardise age-assurance, reporting pathways, and moderation requirements across venues where young participants play and interact (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2022; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2024).

3 INTERNATIONAL PRECEDENTS IN ESPORTS GOVERNANCE

New Zealand has embedded esports within its mainstream sport-integrity system. The New Zealand Esports Federation was formally recognised nationally and in 2025 announced adoption of The Integrity Code for Sport and Recreation, aligning esports with safeguarding, complaints, and integrity expectations applied across sport (New Zealand Esports Federation, 2025). This alignment provides schools, clubs, and tournament operators a single set of rules for participant welfare, misconduct processes, and eligibility.

Turning to the United Kingdom, in 2024, the British Esports Federation partnered with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to convene a safeguarding in esports forum and produce guidance for parents, educators, and coaches, strengthening training, risk assessment, and reporting in education-linked competitions (British Esports Federation, 2024).

Together, these examples show that governance is most effective when esports is integrated with national integrity and child-protection frameworks, rather than left solely to voluntary or commercial arrangements.

4 PATHWAYS FOR GOVERNANCE INTEGRATION IN AUSTRALIA

Esports in Australia is presently supported by voluntary associations and commercial organisers rather than a recognised national governing body. Research highlights that reliance on voluntary arrangements leaves gaps in protection and accountability where youth participation is involved (Hutchinson, et al., 2024). A practical solution is formal designation of a national body to administer esports governance and act as the interface with Sport Integrity Australia and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, bringing esports under the National Integrity Framework so that safeguarding, member protection,

competition manipulation, and complaints processes apply consistently (Sport Integrity Australia, 2021).

Integration with the online-safety regime should require organisers and platforms that engage minors to demonstrate age-assurance, clear reporting mechanisms, and effective moderation aligned with expectations already applied to social media services (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport, and the Arts, 2025; Parliament of Australia, 2024). School and community competitions are suitable first settings for implementation, pairing online-safety requirements with the regulator's evidence on children's gaming experiences to ensure proportionate controls (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2024).

Health and wellbeing provisions should incorporate the World Health Organization and International Telecommunication Union safe-listening standard for training and events (World Health Organization, 2025). Where esports intersects gambling-like products such as loot boxes and skin betting, alignment with Australian harm-minimisation materials clarifies responsibilities for organisers and educators (Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria, 2021). Public aggregated reporting by the national body on complaints, outcomes, and compliance, would mirror transparency practice in sport-integrity systems and provide assurance to schools, parents, and participants (Sport Integrity Australia, 2021; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2022).

5 CONCLUSION

Australia has the regulatory architecture to deliver credible esports governance without creating parallel systems. Recognition of a national esports governing body, coupled with integration into Sport Integrity Australia's National Integrity Framework and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner's expectations for online safety, would standardise safeguarding and integrity obligations across tournaments, schools, and clubs. International examples from New Zealand and the United Kingdom demonstrate that embedding esports within established sport and child-protection structures improves accountability and practice. Implementing these arrangements in school and community competitions with proportionate age-assurance, moderation, and reporting, alongside safe-listening guidance, provides a practical foundation for safe, reputable, and sustainable participation.

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