



October 2020

Oceania Squash Federation Report to WSF

Back in December 2019 The Oceania Squash Federation was looking forward to a busy year of activity both on and off the court. The competitive calendar included the World Junior Championships to be held in Australia, the Oceania Masters and the Oceania Junior Championships, along with all the national and regional events of the member countries. No-one could foresee the dramatic turn of events that unfolded in 2020 with the Coronavirus pandemic and the impact it had throughout the world.

The unprecedented lockdown and border closures effectively shut down sporting events across the globe with many clubs in the Oceania region going into hibernation for several months. For Oceania that meant all international competition was postponed or cancelled and most domestic competition was put on hold. As well, a number of planned coaching and referring activities also had to be cancelled. Fortunately, the situation is beginning to improve and we are now seeing squash activity starting to return to pre Covid levels throughout the region.

One benefit of being a cluster of smaller island nations in the South Pacific has been the effective management of our borders. As a result of strict border controls our Oceania members have escaped the ravages of the pandemic unlike places like the UK and USA. However, the economic impact has been huge our smaller countries like Samoa, Fiji, Cook Islands, Norfolk Island, Vanuatu, Tahiti, New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea – all of whom are heavily reliant on tourism for their livelihood.

Australia, and in particular the state of Victoria, has been hard hit and border closures between Australian states has had a dramatic effect on the country. New Zealand experienced a relaxation in lockdown measures, but a resurgence of cases saw those measures tighten up again with restrictions on movement and increased vigilance at the border.

Several of Oceania countries have been largely unaffected by pandemic. PNG had around 200 cases while some countries like Samoa and Vanuatu have had zero cases. Without doubt, it will be many months before boarder restrictions ease and travel between our member countries resumes.

The pandemic has dramatically reduced both domestic and international travel, which has led to job losses, reduced incomes, particularly in the tourism and travel industry. The lockdown also meant the cancellation of events at all levels on the squash calendar and other sporting codes. Fewer events also resulted in reduced sponsorship and funding from gaming and community trusts as well as corporate sponsorship.

In Australia and New Zealand sporting organisations were able to access special funding from government and territorial authorities which provided a lifeline to many clubs. The support provided by our governments demonstrates the importance of sport in the community. Recreation is vital to the

health and well-being of our communities and it has been great to see our governments getting behind these support programmes.

While there has been little or no contact between our members over the last few months it is hugely important for us to maintain the community “spirit” amongst our members. Participating in Oceania events and activities provides a unique opportunity for members to interact and share in the unique character associated with the Oceania region. OSF did manage to introduce an online, free-of-charge referee’s course, with the assistance of Squash Australia, which was taken up by a number of countries with two now having completed the course.

More recently, it appears that squash around the region is getting back to normal. Anecdotally it seems that tournament numbers are up and clubs appear to be active and busy. As restrictions are lifted the mood has become very positive with more and more people keen to take up sporting pursuits, which is encouraging.

Looking ahead OSF is committed to getting the competitive calendar confirmed for 2021 and rescheduling the cancelled the 2020 coaching and refereeing courses. The organisation is in a sound financial position and plans to provide some affiliation levy relief to its members in the coming year. OSF has, with the support of Australia and New Zealand, proposed a remit to the WSF AGM this year to allow non-member nations to participate in World Teams Championships on a one-off basis. We believe this a unique opportunity to promote squash to non-member nations, in the host region, for a world championship event.

Like many sporting organisations around the world, OSF will be holding a virtual AGM in December this year. While not the ideal scenario for an AGM, we sincerely hope that it will get us over the barriers imposed by the pandemic this year. OSF has also undertaken and completed a constitutional review which will be put up for adoption at the 2020 AGM.

We look forward to 2021 with enthusiasm and anticipation hopeful that we return to some sense of normality.

Jim O’Grady
President
Oceania Squash Federation