

AOC Members To Undergo Mandatory Child Abuse Checks

The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has revealed that all coaches, staff, and officials will be undergoing a mandatory Working with Children Check before they are allowed to become members of the nation's team for Rio 2016.

[John Coates](#), the AOC President, remarked he has introduced the policy for protecting all members of our Olympic teams and creating a child-safe environment after concerns by revelations at the [Royal Commission into child sexual abuse](#). The commission recently announced that Swami Akhandananda Saraswati, a former religious guru of a Mangrove Mountain ashram, allegedly had sex with under-age girls. The commission will hold a public inquiry into the response of the guru to allegations of child sexual abuse in the 1970s and 1980s. The hearing in Sydney will begin on December 2.

Coates added working with Children checks are mandatory in order to properly safeguard our athletes and uphold the behavioral standards required of an Australian Olympic team member.

The sporting federations of Australia are now expected to make sure that all sport officials who are nominated for selection for Rio 2016, and all subsequent Olympic teams have undertaken the check. This rule also applies to all headquarters officials and anyone who has not gone through the vetting system will not be eligible for selection.

It was revealed by the Australian Olympic Committee that Coates had consultations with the United States Olympic Committee and the British Olympic Association on the matter, as well as Chair of the Royal Commission, The Hon Justice Peter McClellan. Coates said we have been working with the US Olympic Committee and British Olympic Association who have vigorous policies in regard to the safety of children and added we will be introducing similar policies in our team agreement to protect all members of our team. Coates went on to add that it has been suggested to him that this is a bigger problem in American sport than [doping](#).

The move also gets prominence after there were allegations of inappropriate behavior and language towards a junior female swimmer were made against senior Olympic swim team official Greg Hodge. Hodge is under investigation after it was alleged that he kissed a female junior swimmer on the cheek at a Canberra state championship event. Hodge has now retired from his role as head coach of the West Coast Swimming Club. It was also reported by Australia's *Sunday Telegraph* that Olympic coach Michael Palfrey is facing serious allegations of inappropriate behavior towards teen girls on pool deck.

Former coach Tim Lane alleged that a male teenage swimming student was encouraged by Palfrey to improve his time by telling him he could 'spend a night with one of his older female athletes' (who was nearby) and 'do whatever he wanted to her'. The accusations made against Palfrey were described as "*unsubstantiated*" by Swimming Western Australia chief executive Darren Beazley.

In another development, Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates has remarked that doubling bans for drug cheats that will leave all sports identities with nowhere to hide. Coates said the federal Parliament needs to pass the amendments to bring the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority into line with the World Anti-Doping Agency. WADA is doubling bans from January next year for athletes using performance-enhancing drugs from two to four years.