BACKGROUND

Review of the Combat Sports Act 2013

In March 2018, the Minister for Sport directed the Combat Sports Authority (the Authority) to undertake a review of the Combat Sports Act 2013 (the Act). The review was triggered by the Deputy State Coroner’s findings and recommendations arising from the Inquest into the death of professional boxer David Browne and to conform with the statutory five-year review of the Act.

To assist the review, the Authority undertook widespread public consultation including holding six public forums across NSW. Further, more targeted consultation has since been held in regard to matters of health and safety of combatants.

The Authority released the Review of the Combat Sports Act 2013 report in 2018 which proposed a two phased approach to reform. The first phase focussed on
recommendations for immediate action. The second phase proposed 21 future actions on issues that in its view require further targeted consultation with industry and other stakeholders to determine their potential impact on combat sport in NSW before a final recommendation is made. These future actions primarily relate to combatant health and safety issues including many of the Deputy State Coroner’s recommendations.

The NSW Government agreed with the Authority’s two-phase approach. The Government supported the majority of recommendations for immediate action. These formed the basis of the Combat Sport Amendment Bill 2018 which commenced in late February 2019.

The recommendations for immediate action that the NSW Government supported in principle will be considered with the future actions as part of phase two of the reforms.

This consultation paper provides details on the matter of Rapid Extreme Weight Loss (REWL)/weight cutting and weigh in reform and provides a series of questions for discussion by industry participants.

**ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

1. **Dangers of Rapid Extreme Weight Loss (REWL)**

The practice of REWL to enable fighters to compete in the lowest possible weight class has become commonplace across several combat sports. This has typically been achieved through dehydrating combatants to enable them to qualify for the weight class of a contest while fighting at a heavier weight on the day of the event.

This practice has seen combatants in NSW and elsewhere experiencing both temporary and permanent health effects including hyperthermia, blindness, neurological malfunction, hypo- and hypertension, thyroid failure, kidney failure, seizures, muscle breakdown (rhabdomyolysis), internal bleeding, brain damage, heart attack and even death as suffered by Western Australian Muay Thai combatant Jessica Lindsay in 2017.

Regardless of subsequent rehydration, REWL has been shown to increase the risk of serious injury to combatants during bouts through:

- Decreased
  - Energy and stamina
  - Coordination
  - Muscle control
  - Concentration
  - Capacity to make decisions
• Increased
  o Risk of acidosis and cramping
  o Vulnerability to concussion.

Weigh-ins are often held the day before the contest and in extreme cases have seen fighters drop 10-15% or more of their body weight in water before rehydrating. Weigh-ins held on the day of contests have resulted in fewer consequences of extreme dehydration but may lead to worse consequences resulting from combatants being dehydrated during bouts.

Medical literature indicates that medical consequences are seen at dehydration levels of 2%. 5% of body weight loss due to dehydration is considered to be moderately severe. Consequences can become even more exacerbated if electrolyte levels (salts, etc.) are kept low to maximise weight loss.

The literature also indicates that rehydration cannot be completed within 24 hours, as it takes longer than this to absorb liquids into body tissues – especially if electrolyte levels are low. The use of IV fluids of more than 100mL in any 12-hour period is prohibited by the World Anti-Doping Agency code.

A recent Western Australian Combat Sports Commission review of REWL has led to a strategy aimed at preventing weight cutting of more than 5% in the preparation for a contest and states explicitly that this “should be done through good nutrition and exercise, not by dehydration”.

Jurisdictions around the world have taken steps to reduce and eliminate REWL including either the proposal or enactment of:
• Requiring weigh-ins to be held within 1-3 hours of the start of the contest (e.g. NCAA, Olympics);
• Measuring combatants for dehydration at weigh-in and preventing dehydrated combatants from competing (e.g. Western Australian CSC strategy);
• Prohibiting multiple weigh-ins and catchweight fights (contests outside of standard weight classes) to ensure that combatants do not compete in weight classes they cannot qualify for (e.g. Western Australian CSC strategy);
• Reducing the number of weight classes to give combatants fewer weight targets to chase (Brazilian MMA AC);
• Requiring that combatants weigh in over multiple days approaching the contest with maximum weight levels at each weigh-in (e.g. California SAC);
• Requiring that combatants maintain the weight class’ maximum weight for a period of weeks leading into the contest (e.g. ONE Championship –
8 weeks); and
- Prohibiting combatants from competing in weight classes they have been previously unable to make weigh for (e.g. Alabama AC).

**Combat Sports Authority Recommendation/Future Action**

The *Combat Sports Act 2013* permits the Authority to make rules with respect to weigh-ins. Additionally, clause 29(2) of the *Combat Sports Regulation 2014* requires that the weigh-in is held ‘in the 24 hours before the scheduled start of the contest’, or at the time set by the promoter in the period approved by the Authority. The Authority’s review proposed that this matter should be subject to consideration:

Future Action 15: That the Authority conduct further targeted consultation… to review weigh-in requirements under the Act and in particular the implications of weight-cutting on a combatant’s health and safety.

**Questions**

1. What has been your experience of combatants undertaking REWL to cut weight? Is this a common practice among combatants you have worked with or faced?
2. Are combatants sufficiently aware of the dangers – particularly the long-term dangers – of REWL/weight-cutting to give informed consent to undertake it? What education should combatants be required to complete to ensure that they can give informed consent?
3. If one combatant chooses to undergo REWL to fight one or more weight classes below their weight at the time of the contest and another fights at the weight class that they are in at the time of the contest, would this contest be fair? If not, how could mismatches such as this be prevented?
4. Should combatants be prevented from undertaking dehydration regimes as part of weight-cutting? If so, how could this be achieved?
5. Should weigh-ins be conducted within three hours of the contest (as in Olympic competition) to reduce the use of dehydration as a technique to make weight? Should they be permitted up to 48 hours beforehand to permit better rehydration before the contest? Would changes worsen contestants’ health outcomes by permitting deeper dehydration or by causing combatants to enter contests while suffering from dehydration?
6. If a combatant fails to make weight at a weigh-in, should they be prevented from attempting a second weigh-in before the fight? Should they be required to fight at a higher weight class in future? Should catchweight fights be prohibited?
7. If weigh-ins are to be conducted prior to the contest, should the process be required to include specific gravity urinalysis to prevent dehydration as a technique to make weight?
8. If weigh-ins are to be conducted on a day prior to the contest, should combatants be required to undertake a second weigh-in on the day of the contest and be within a set percentage of the class weight limit to prevent dehydration as a technique to make weight?

9. Should weigh-ins be conducted over a number of days or weeks to ensure that fighters are able to sustain the weight-class limit over a period of time?

2. Procedures and Regulation of the Weigh-In

Current requirements of the weigh-in process are outlined in Part 8 of the *Combat Sports Regulation 2014*:

25 Attendance of combat sport inspectors, other persons and police officers at weigh-in

(1) The Authority may authorise a combat sport inspector or other person to attend a weigh-in for a professional combat sport contest to view the weigh-in and undertake the following duties:

(a) checking and recording each combatant’s weight,

(b) entering details of the weigh-in into the medical record book of each combatant,

(c) entering information in the approved contest form.

(2) Any police officer is authorised to attend a weigh-in.

26 Viewing of weigh-in

The promoter of a professional combat sport contest must ensure that a person authorised by the Authority views the weigh-in.

27 Provision of weigh-in scales

The promoter of a combat sport contest must provide appropriate weigh-in scales for any weigh-in at the contest.

28 Weigh-in of all combatants on same set of scales

The promoter of a combat sport contest must ensure that all combatants in the contest are weighed in on the same set of scales.

29 Weigh-in before combat sport contest

(1) A combatant must not engage in a combat sport contest unless he or she has submitted himself or herself to the weigh-in for the contest.

(2) The combatant must present himself or herself for the weigh-in:

(a) at the time set by the promoter, in the 24 hours before the scheduled start of the contest, or

(b) if the promoter of the contest has made a written application to the Authority for another period to apply, at the time set by the promoter in the period approved by the Authority.

30 Functions of an approved amateur body at an amateur weigh-in

For the purposes of section 46 (2) (e) of the Act, the functions of an approved amateur body at a weigh-in relating to an amateur combat sport contest are:

(a) to supervise the weigh-in, and

(b) to ensure that an official records the combatant’s weight.
Promoters have occasionally requested clarification or exception to these regulations, particularly regarding the timing and location of weigh-ins and what happens if a combatant does not make weight.

Individual promoters have requested approval from the Authority to have multiple weigh-ins at different locations, to hold the weigh-in more than 24 hours before the contest and to hold multiple weigh-ins after a time delay if a combatant fails to make weight for the contest. The *prima facie* reasons for these requests have been reasonable however removing these requirements could be seen to impact on the integrity of the contest and combat sports more widely.

Questions

10. The regulations state that both combatants should use the same set of scales and implies that there is only to be one joint weigh-in of all combatants in each contest. Should combatants be required to weigh-in on the same set of scales? At the same location? At the same time?

11. Noting previous discussions about REWL and dehydration, should weigh-ins outside the 24-hour period before the scheduled start of the contest be permitted?

12. Again, noting previous discussions about REWL and dehydration, what should happen if a combatant does not make weight for a contest? This is not regulated by the Authority and is addressed through the relevant sport rules. Should this be regulated by the Authority?

13. Are the functions of the approved amateur body at a weigh-in as outlined in clause 30 of the Regulation (above) still appropriate?