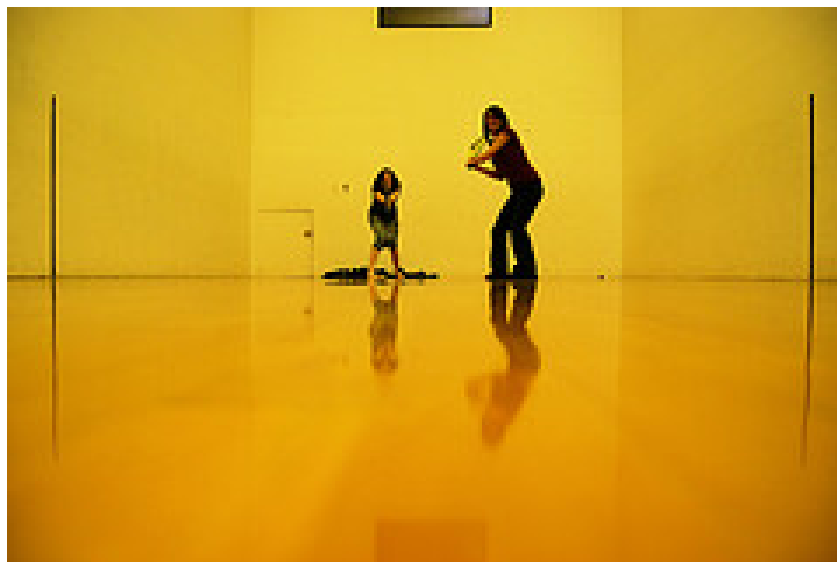


Squash in New Zealand: Evidence Base and Rationale for Action



Report Prepared by Dr Lesley Ferkins
November 2008

Contents

PAGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
1: INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Designing a Future Together	6
1.2 Report Outline.....	6
2: CURRENT & HISTORICAL INITIATIVES FOR SQUASH.....	8
2.1 Life Cycle Markers	8
2.2.1 Major Regional Reinvestment.....	9
2.2.2 Ongoing District Focus.....	10
2.2.3 High Performance.....	11
2.3 Organisation Performance of Squash New Zealand.....	12
2.3.1 Recent Financial Performance.....	13
2.3.2 Assessing Strategic Priorities.....	13
3: STRATEGY REVIEW AND REDESIGN PROCESS.....	14
3.1 Taking the Initiative – Squash New Zealand Board Press Go.....	14
3.2 Rationale for a Collaborative Process.....	14
3.3 Gathering the Evidence.....	15
3.3.1 Phase One – Briefing.....	15
3.3.2 Phase Two – Background.....	15
3.3.3 Phase Three – Information Collection and Strategy Generation.....	16
3.3.4 Phase Four – Draft Strategy and National Board Moderation.....	17
3.3.5 Phase Five – Draft Strategy Released and Presented for Feedback.....	18
4: STRATEGIC REVIEW AND REDESIGN OUTCOMES.....	19
4.1 Where Are We Now?.....	19
4.1.1 Workshops.....	19
4.1.2 Advisory Groups.....	19
4.1.3 Stakeholder Survey.....	21
4.1.4 Club Focus Groups and Interviews.....	22
4.1.5 Summary.....	23
4.2 Where Do We Want to Go?.....	23
4.2.1 Workshops.....	24
4.2.2 Advisory Groups.....	24
4.2.3 Club Focus Groups and Interviews.....	24
4.2.4 Summary.....	25
4.3 How Do We Get There?.....	25
4.3.1 Workshops.....	25
4.3.2 Advisory Groups.....	26

4.3.3 CEO District Tour.....	28
4.3.4 Club Focus Groups and Interviews.....	29
4.3.5 Summary.....	30
4.4 Assessing Previous Intentions.....	30
4.5 Emerging Themes for A Vision for Action.....	32
4.6 Assessing Risk.....	33
5: CONCLUSIONS.....	34
5.1 Key Messages for Action.....	34
5.2 Where to From Here and When.....	35
REFERENCES.....	37
APPENDICES.....	38
Appendix A: Timeline	
Appendix B: 28 June 2008 Workshop Summary	
Appendix C: 21 August 2008 Workshop Summary	
Appendix D: Stakeholder Survey Summary	
Appendix E: Club Focus Group and Interviews	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2008, the board of SNZ resolved to initiate an organisation-wide strategy review and redesign of the sport. It was also determined that SNZ would do so in collaboration with its eleven districts. The intention was to capture and represent the views and aspirations of the squash community in a cohesive plan for the sport.

Funded by SPARC, the review and redesign for squash in New Zealand has been a major process for the sport. It has involved significant creative and rational thought on behalf of more than 250 people drawn largely from the squash community. A feature of the process has been the collaborative approach to design. District personnel in particular, have had the opportunity to create the future direction of the sport, rather than to just comment on a plan developed at national level.

Workshops, focus groups, regional tours, surveys and advisory forums, were undertaken with club, regional and national personnel. The design involved:

- a) an assessment of the current situation, incorporating internal and external trends and issues, combined with a review of current and historical initiatives for squash;
- b) identifying the key aspirations for the sport; and
- c) a focus on how those aspirations might be achieved.

The framework of this report is designed around those three stages and includes a section on the context of squash, a detailed description of why and how the process was undertaken, and description and analysis of the outcomes.

The review and redesign process produced a compelling mandate for change. The key messages were:

- SNZ needs to take a stronger operational leadership role for squash in New Zealand.
- The district delivery mechanism needs to be redesigned to allow for less duplication and a more unified approach to delivery.
- The sport of squash with its 231 clubs, 11 district and 1 national body needs to act in a more unified way. A centralised information technology tool has been identified as the major strategy to achieve this.
- A major priority is the physical improvement of club facilities. The introduction of a hybrid (nonprofit-commercial) model of operation for selected clubs has been identified as the major strategy to achieve this.
- Squash entities in New Zealand need to focus their collective energy on engaging the estimated 130,000 people known to have an interest in squash in order to create a larger player base contributing to the game. A centralised information technology tool that allows greater flexibility and access to facilities has been identified as the major strategy to achieve this.
- High performance is a pillar of the game. Ongoing investment in this area is needed alongside the need to better leverage profile generated from world class performances.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have worked exceptionally hard over the past ten months to ensure this review and redesign process follows due process and generates the outcomes needed for the future of squash in New Zealand. A stand out example is Squash New Zealand's CEO, Mike Thompson. Being a CEO of a national sport organisation is an extraordinarily difficult role. Mike is hard working, capable and caring. The squash community is fortunate to have such a CEO. Paul Heron from SPARC has also worked diligently, and with considerable expertise in contributing to the steering group deliberations. Paul also cares a great deal about sport in New Zealand and SNZ is fortunate to have his wise counsel available to it.

The board of SNZ are also to be commended. Chair, Jim O'Grady, and members Neil McAra, Mark Dunwoodie, Wayne Werder, Warren Patterson, and Greg Urquhart, have invested significant time and expertise on behalf of squash in New Zealand as part of this review process over and above their normal directors' duties. The squash community at national, district and club level, both volunteer and staff who so willingly offered time, experience and expertise, are also especially acknowledged. The work of the six advisory groups has been important in forming the outcomes of this process and their work is gratefully acknowledged also. There is much wisdom within the fabric of the sport that has been and should continue to be tapped.

Thank you also to John Page, Susie Simcock, and Rob Walker for taking part in the workshops to challenge thinking, and to Ann Tidey who so expertly undertook the club focus groups and interviews. Finally, acknowledgement is also given to SPARC who has been a tremendous supporter of SNZ and whose foresight and funding has made this process possible.

1. Introduction

There are many aspects about the sport of squash in New Zealand that those involved can feel proud about. The financial position of Squash New Zealand (SNZ) and many of the districts and clubs is sound. Collectively amongst its clubs, districts and national body, the sport attracts 23,000 committed participants who play squash on a competitive and semi-competitive basis. The SPARC (2005) participation survey reports that a further 108,000 people choose squash as an item on their physical activity menu. In elite performance, squash players in New Zealand have kiwi icons and regular world beaters as a source of inspiration. SNZ is backed by SPARC, who in particular provide significant high performance funding to SNZ because of the ongoing success of its elite players.

Our world is changing however. Regular physical activity has become a priority for many New Zealanders who want to be active at a time and place of convenience. There are many options for involvement in physical activity and squash needs to position itself as a highly desirable option. Why has the sport of squash in New Zealand through clubs, districts and national body not been able to more fully engage those 108,000 people who play squash casually? Do we have the facilities to cater for a contemporary physical activity experience? How commercially viable are our clubs? How well coordinated are we across our 231 clubs, 11 districts and national body? Are there economies of scale within our regional delivery system that needs improvement? Are we being smart about the way our sport is organised nationally, regionally and at club level? Is there a clearly identified pathway for those who want to compete and to ultimately succeed on the world stage? How aware are New Zealanders of the success of squash players on the world stage and of the benefits in becoming involved in squash?

1.1 DESIGNING A FUTURE TOGETHER

In February 2008, the board of SNZ set in motion a course of action that sought to ensure the long term future of the game. The board sought to consider the current position of squash in New Zealand and to design a future direction that reflected the aspirations and addressed the frustrations of those involved in the game at club, district and national level. Funded by SPARC, the intent of this action was to collectively design a future for squash in New Zealand between the national and district entities that also reflected club and individual participant needs. From the outset, there was a sense that the way the game is positioned in the marketplace and organised throughout New Zealand, would need to change. The process of review and redesign sought to capture the national and district thinking, in particular, regarding current situation, aspirations for the future and strategies for how to achieve those aspirations.

1.2 REPORT OUTLINE

This report provides an overview of the context within which the review and redesign process took place. It summarises current and historical initiatives undertaken by SNZ, identifies the key “life cycle” markers of the sport, and the performance of the organisations charged with delivering the game. It then explains the process undertaken to design a four year (2009-2012) direction for

squash in New Zealand. In particular, it sets out the collaboration process used to engage national, district and club level personnel and details the outcomes of this work. In so doing, it provides an evidence base and rationale for action. If squash in New Zealand is to achieve the aspirations that so many of us have for the sport, it has become clearly evident through the review and redesign process, that we need to re-think our current pathway. “If nothing changes, nothing changes”.

2. Current & Historical Initiatives for Squash

There are approximately 23,000 registered squash members, 231 squash clubs and 11 district squash associations in New Zealand. Like many sports in New Zealand, estimates of participation figures show a much higher number of people participating than are registered members. Surveys in 2000-2001 and 2005 consistently determined there were approximately 130,000 adults taking part in squash (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2005, 2008). Organised competitions and interclub results are tracked by a grading system first developed in the 1970s by Wellington squash enthusiasts and later adopted nationwide. The then unique system attracted foreign interest with some countries adopting a similar system. It was also adopted by Tennis New Zealand in 2005. Now computerised, the Grading System allows every competitive player in the country to be graded based on their playing results. The system also forms a major part of the National Club Member Register. In 2007, there were 15,856 graded players and a further 7,048 active leisure/casual club members, giving a combined total of 22,961 club members (Squash New Zealand, 2007). As also noted in the Squash New Zealand Annual Report (2007), the total number of players identified above was, “believed to be below real club membership numbers as indications are that many clubs continue to not provide Squash NZ with complete details of either/or ... junior members and ... leisure members” (p. 24).

Historically, there has been ongoing frustration expressed by SNZ personnel at the lack of ability to convert non-registered players to fee-paying members. In the 2003 Annual Report, Gerard De Courcy (SNZ Chairperson) noted: “ ... the numbers we receive from the grading list and membership surveys indicate that the growth is less than we should expect” (p. 5). Other such sentiments also appear in earlier Annual Reports (New Zealand Squash, 2001, 2002). De Courcy goes on to say: “I am concerned at what appears to be a number of people playing squash that the administration does not know about If we can’t measure what is happening then we can’t effectively manage it” (p. 5). Despite this frustration, membership numbers steadily rose between 1998 and 2005 following a period of major re-investment in the sport’s participation infrastructure. Over the past two years, however, there has been another decline in membership. Current figures show a loss of 1000 members, reducing from 23,929 in 2005 to 22,961 in 2007 (Squash New Zealand, 2005, 2007).

2.1 LIFE CYCLE MARKERS

An historical view of SNZ reveals a “velvet” period for the sport and is often noted as such in national body official records (Squash New Zealand, 2008). The years between the mid 1970s and mid 1980s saw strong growth in membership figures which peaked in 1984 at 54,000. It was also during this time that SNZ experienced its most outstanding international success (refer below). Squash membership numbers significantly declined during the 1990s, however, reaching a low of 19,000 in the late 1990s. Squash experienced a resurgence up until 2005, with numbers climbing as high as 30,000 (estimated). In particular, junior members increased, whereas seniors (20-35) and masters (over 35) remained static, as did women members (totalling 35% of overall numbers). There was also an increase in playing numbers of Maori, Pacific Island and other ethnic groups.

Noting a decline for the first time in membership numbers in the late 1980s, SNZ undertook a comprehensive review of the sport. A market research programme was implemented throughout

the country (Leisure Marketing & Management, 1993) and an evaluation of the situation was undertaken as a separate report that recommended major changes to re-shape the sport (Crellin, 1993). The Crellin Report (1993), in particular, appears to have had a major impact on the organisation. In talking with SNZ personnel, the Report appears almost part of its lore. A recent summary of the report, captures its essence as follows (Squash New Zealand, 2008):

Essentially it found that the market had changed, in conjunction with the life styles of New Zealanders and concluded that the Association (Squash New Zealand and its member clubs) while having achieved many significant milestones had lost touch with the market, by being focussed on the game and not on the general players. At the same time member facilities had aged and regular players were also ageing while new (younger) ones were not being retained. In short, Peter Crellin reported that ‘the sport showed the classic signs of being at the end of a life cycle’ and that Squash New Zealand needed in the future to be in the business of ‘fun and fitness’, promoting to the leisure and recreational market.

The recommendations from both the market research report and the Crellin Report were noted as being enormously challenging for SNZ and its clubs (Squash New Zealand, 2008). In particular, the Leisure Marketing and Management (1993) recommended that “the entire hierarchical structure of the administration of Squash be reviewed” (p. 24). The report went on to recommend a restructure that “would more than likely eliminate the District level altogether” (p. 24). As an outcome of these reports, however, changes were set in motion in late 1993 aimed at encouraging clubs to buy into a new marketing thrust and have been ongoing since, to varying degrees of success. Changes as a result of these reports included: introduction of glass-backed courts, multi complexes, school courts, re-vitalisation of some club facilities and administration, a greater emphasis by the national body and districts on club re-juvenation, introduction of the Susan Devoy Foundation in 1993 aimed at promoting youth squash at club level and the introduction of “Squash Dynamics”, a wholly owned and limited liability business venture by SNZ. Squash Dynamics was established as the marketing arm of SNZ and as such was an agency to promote the European designed ASB variable court system. SNZ also changed to a board of management in 1992, comprising six elected directors, the President (now Chair) and CEO.

2.2.1 Major Regional Reinvestment

Instead of removing the district layer (as recommended by Leisure Marketing and Management, 1993), SNZ sought to support club initiatives by investing in regional personnel. Through a joint investment with the districts, nine Squash Development Officers (SDOs) were introduced in 1998. The SDO network was established to assist clubs with promotion and marketing of the game and aimed to help clubs meet the changing environment identified from the earlier market research and subsequent Crellin Report (1993). Acting as a “sales force” for the sport, the SDOs were established to eventually link closely with Squash Dynamics. The SDO network was part funded by the districts and part funded by the national body. National funds were generated by reducing the national office staffing from 14 to 2 people (Squash New Zealand, 2008).

In 2002, SNZ undertook an internal review to investigate the effectiveness of the SDO model. It was found that the districts were struggling to effectively manage the SDOs and that SNZ needed to become more involved in managing the SDOs. The paid positions of the SDOs appeared to erode volunteer commitment and a subsequent decline in district volunteering occurred. Contracts and agreements were therefore established with districts and the money SNZ was providing for the SDOs was used as leverage to manage district performance in managing the SDO.

Since 2003, and under a new CEO, SNZ undertook a support and training programme for district boards. This included changing the district constitution to introduce a board of directors instead of a district management committee, assisting with identifying suitable board members and assistance with strategic planning. A benchmarking exercise was also introduced to track growth and performance at district level.

It appears the outcomes of this work significantly increased overall income generation for many districts from sponsorship and grant funding. These increases between 2002 and 2004 have seen five districts increase their revenue ranging between 57-163%. The remaining six districts have increased their revenue from between 6-47% (CEO, personal communication, 19 October and 14 November 2005). Figures from the most recent benchmarking report (Waikato Management School, 2008) showed an overall increase in regional revenue generation of 71% between 2002 and 2007, resulting in a net surplus across all regions of 11%.

2.2.2 An Ongoing District Focus

In 2005, an independent consultant (Chris Ineson, Driving Forces) was commissioned to undertake a review of the relationship between squash clubs and districts to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and to recommend future strategies in the management of these relationships. This report found that “As a general comment the districts collectively are in sound shape relative to many other sports” (Ineson, 2005, p. 8) and that the districts are well positioned to take a leadership role and to act as a catalyst for change. The main thrust of the report was to recommend to SNZ that it reposition itself to become a service centre to the districts and that in turn the districts focus more on becoming a service centre for the clubs. In order to achieve this, the Report recommended that the districts complete their transformation from management committees to boards of directors.

In conjunction with this review in late 2005 and into 2006, the SNZ board considered changes to the way it funds its districts. Increasingly, SNZ was moving away from a tagged funding process, whereby it funds a specific position (i.e., SDOs), to a “bulk funded” model, based on membership numbers and specified performance criteria. In a relatively uncommon approach for NSOs, a portion of the membership levies from the squash clubs was sent directly to the national body and, in turn, the national body then funds the districts. This funding model allowed for greater influence by the national body over the outcomes expected of the district administration.

In tandem with changes to the district funding model, the SNZ board also considered ways it could further develop district capability in terms of running the game at regional level and the delivery of national initiatives (e.g., high performance development programmes) via the districts. As noted in the 2005 Annual Report (Squash New Zealand, 2005a), the introduction of two new national office roles (coach development and district development manager – part-time) was designed to support SNZ’s regional development support strategy. The board also considered how it could better service and communicate directly with clubs and individual members via a major IT strategy (CEO, personal communication, 19 October 2005 and 14 November 2005). The Driving Forces Report (2005) confirmed to the SNZ board the need to work closely with the districts in order to build their capability and, in particular, to assist them to take more of a strategic approach. In 2007 a self-evaluation of the efforts by the SNZ board to support district capability was reported by Ferkins (2007) as part of a governance study of SNZ.

The evaluation identified that the SNZ board established the need to focus on the regional delivery mechanism of the sport “This is a big issue for squash and for other sports and it’s no different in Australia” (board member, 2 February, 2007). The evaluation considered whether, in hindsight, the strategy to support the districts through such efforts as a “buddy” system, becoming a “service centre” and a mentoring approach was still viewed to be the most appropriate way of improving district capability. Despite a sense from most board members that there had not been the gains they would have liked, most agreed it remained the best approach. “It was certainly designed to be a substantive change and could still be the best long-term strategy” (board member, 24 January, 2007). In seeking to support the districts and in particular the district boards, “... we were trying to influence the outcomes but not control the method” (board member, 24 January, 2007).

A consistent theme that emerged from the evaluation was an agreement that the national body would not gain from seeking control of the district entities through, for example, a structural change. “There is no need to control. If people were pulling in different directions or if the structure was holding the sport back, we may have needed to consider a different approach” (1g, 24 January, 2007). “I’m not sure we would solve our problem if we changed the structure” (1a, 28 February, 2007). “Squash needs to be more toward the service end of the continuum. You have to have an ability to influence and encourage the districts but we don’t have the need or resources to control” (board member, 2 February, 2007). One board member did agree that “... if nothing was a barrier, if we had a clean slate, we might have taken an alternate route but SNZ doesn’t have a choice – we don’t have the resources to do anything but work with our districts” (24 January, 2007). “I agree with the premise that we needed to focus on our district delivery mechanism, but I’m not sure we got much further down the track with it. In the longer-term and strategically, it will be our primary focus. But we struggled with it for a number of reasons (board member, 21 February, 2007).

Since this evaluation, there has been a further change in the funding and support arrangements between SNZ and the districts. According to a statement by SNZ Chairperson, Jim O’Grady, in the 2007 annual report, “the districts have effectively been given more autonomy to manage their plans but funding is still contingent on deliverable results” (Squash New Zealand, 2007, p. 7). This has been achieved through a national funding system based on agreed development plans where a percentage of the funding is guaranteed and the balance is dependent on results. O’Grady also states “The next twelve months will demonstrate how successful this approach has been and will have a strong bearing on the strategic direction the board may take ... (Squash New Zealand, 2007, p. 7).

That strategic direction is now being considered. Is squash in New Zealand at a cross roads? Have all the avenues for working with an 11 district delivery structure been exhausted? Is it timely to consider an alternative model that is more manageable for SNZ but allows greater cohesion and support from a district and club point of view? How might SNZ go about establishing the desired service centre system identified in the above thinking?

2.2.3 High Performance

SNZ has consistently been successful internationally. In the mid 1980s and early 1990s, Susan Devoy was the outstanding New Zealand athlete, winning New Zealand sports person of the year for her achievements on the international stage. She won four World Championships and eight

British Open Titles. Ross Norman was also World Champion during that era and New Zealand had 13 players in the top 20 rankings in World Squash. In 2001, Leilani Joyce was ranked number one in the world and also won multiple British Open Titles. SNZ claimed two gold medals (women's and mixed doubles) and one silver (women's singles) at the Manchester Commonwealth Games in 2002. There were 20 New Zealand world ranked players in 2003-2004, the Senior Women's team was ranked third in the world, the Junior Men's team, seventh and New Zealand's top female player, Carol Owens, held the number one world ranking.

The success continued in 2005 and early 2006 with Shelley Kitchen, the new number one female player in New Zealand, achieving a career high of 11 in the world. Kitchen also won bronze at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games in 2006 after combining with Glen Wilson to win one of two silver medals for New Zealand at the World Doubles event in late 2004. Not surprisingly, SPARC recognised SNZ as a "performance sport" and as such provided significant funding for its high performance programme (approximately \$375,000 in 2005), considered to be a leader in the field. This funding contract expired in 2006 following the Melbourne Commonwealth Games and despite SNZ achieving its targets in high performance, SPARC redesigned its high performance policy and did not initially name squash in its top tier for elite funding. This shift in approach by SPARC to what it considered to be "priority sports" was a major disappointment for SNZ and the progress of its high performance programme at that time. This was followed by the departure of key people in the SNZ high performance programme and called for urgent action on behalf of SNZ in order to secure ongoing SPARC investment. A high performance advisory group was established and SPARC high performance funding was again secured in 2007.

Alongside individual elite performance on the world stage, New Zealand has played host to numerous world squash events, the most recent including World Junior Men's (2006, Palmerston North) and World Masters (2008, Christchurch). In 2007, SNZ introduced a Closed Satellite series of tournaments, run under PSA regulations designed to offer developing players the opportunity to secure world ranking points in New Zealand. International and domestic tournaments as well as a competition schedule for club players form part of SNZ events strategy which has played an important part in the development pathways for New Zealand squash players.

High performance remains embedded within the sport and continues as a feature of the game. In 2007, career high world professional rankings were achieved by Shelley Kitchen (9), Kashif Shuja (41), Jackie Hawkes (19) and Louise Crome (25). With SPARC confirmation of its investment, the SNZ high performance programme (Project Delhi) remains focused on the Commonwealth Games in 2010.

Is the success of the SNZ high performance programme and its athletes integrated throughout the sport? How has the profile of winning medals on the world stage been included in the club and district structures? Should the two aspects of the game (high performance and participation) be separated or integrated?

2.3 ORGANISATION PERFORMANCE OF SQUASH NZ

One accepted way to glean an indication of overall organisational performance of a sport is to "take the financial pulse" of the NSO and to consider outcomes against intention (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart, Nicholson, 2006). These aspects are considered in general terms, below, and sit alongside the discussion relating to membership trends and performances on the world stage, outlined above.

2.3.1 Recent Financial Performance

SNZ's turnover is more than \$1,000,000. In recent years, its financial performance has been sound. In 2004, for example, the organisation produced what was noted by the CEO as " ... another strong financial outcome" (Squash New Zealand, 2004, p. 7). Total income for that year was \$1,357,759, and total expenditure was \$1,231,811 leaving a net surplus of \$125,948. Revenue increased in 2005 and 2006, levelling off again in 2007. Total income in 2007 was \$1,396,895. Levies and subscriptions amounted to \$461,101, and grants and sponsorship income totalled \$747,497. The major expenditure item was the high performance programme at \$490,721, followed by salaries and fees at \$215,983. The amount spent on regional development was \$189,851 and the net surplus in 2007 was \$82,289. The organisation's income increased by approximately 19% per annum between 2002 and 2004 with a net surplus ranging between \$100,000 and \$147,000 recorded in those years. In 2000 and 2001, SNZ recorded deficits of \$4,412 and \$130,527 respectively. SNZ again recorded a net deficit in 2005 of \$24,463 but returned a surplus in 2006 of \$31,747. The organisation's reserve situation is also strong. Accumulated funds totalled \$723,945 in 2001 and have risen since to \$1,104,468 in 2007.

2.3.2 Assessing Strategic Priorities

In 2003, SNZ released its current strategic plan. It identified three strategic priorities: growth, best practice and performance. These priorities support the vision articulated as: "Squash is recognised as an activity of choice for health and activity conscious New Zealanders and achieves success on and off the court" (Squash New Zealand, 2003, p. 5). The Growth goal relates to participation, considered by SNZ to be "the foundation of the sport" (p. 2). Through this goal it seeks to encourage more people to "become and stay involved, thereby increasing the depth of players, coaches and administrators involved in the game" (p. 2). The Performance goal is about excellence on and off the court. SNZ aspires to produce world champions and world-class people, and considers these people to be "the stars of the sport, whose profile encourages greater interest and participation" (p. 2).

The plan notes that Growth and Performance are natural goals for any sport but stresses that the Best Practice goal is the ingredient that ensures these elements are successful. "Having the right structures, best management processes, right funding, great planning, direction and an innovative approach" (p. 2) are examples of such ingredients. The plan also emphasises the link between the three goals, noting that without one element, the other two would diminish in time. There is evidence from board meeting minutes that the board has adopted the strategic plan as the basis of its work plan. Item seven on the agenda at the board meeting, 5 August 2005, for example, listed: Key Strategies, Actions Required, Timeline Analysis. The CEO prepared a document, framed by the strategic plan, that set out the subsequent strategies and priorities for 2005 and 2006.

While there is much evidence to suggest that squash in New Zealand and indeed the SNZ strategic plan has achieved many of the goals set out above (such as financial growth and player performance) there are also worrying signs. The decline in membership is cause for concern, as is the instability of SPARC and other grant and sponsorship income. The ongoing challenges in effectively supporting the current district delivery mechanism, also remains a significant cause for concern. A more detailed summary of SNZ's achievements against intention, in light of the outcomes from the strategy review and redesign process, is provided in Section 4.4.

3. Strategic Review and Redesign Process

This section details the process undertaken for the strategy review and redesign of squash in New Zealand. It also explains the rationale for choosing this process.

3.1 TAKING THE INITIATIVE – SQUASH NZ BOARD PRESS GO

Following a period of relative stability, there was significant change to the board of SNZ at the 2006 and 2007 AGM. Of the eight board members who had directed the organisation for the previous four years (2003-2006), two board members remained following the 2007 AGM. The board members were drawn from a range of professional backgrounds including legal, accountancy and business management. All were squash players and most had held positions within the district associations prior to their national board role. The board comprised 100% men between the ages of 40 and 60. The flavour of the new board reflected a desire to re-vitalise the sport. SNZ also had a new CEO whose first challenge was to stabilise the national office following significant staff changes. Another influence of change during this period (late 2007) was the partnership relationship developing between SNZ and the crown agency, Sport and Recreation New Zealand, known as SPARC. Eager for SNZ to both consolidate following significant board and staff changes, and to seize the opportunity such change creates, SPARC supported the organisation's desire to undertake a strategy review of the sport.

In early 2008, the board of SNZ resolved to initiate an organisation-wide strategy review and redesign. In gaining SPARC funding for the review, it was also determined that SNZ would collaborate with its eleven districts with the intention of capturing the views and aspirations of the squash community in a cohesive plan for the sport.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

While it was deemed timely for SNZ to review its strategic plan, first released in 2003, it was also identified that an organisation-wide redesign process would encompass a plan not just for the national body, but for the whole sport. As the primary stakeholders of the national body, the 11 squash districts were chosen as the collaborative partners for the redesign process. SNZ has led the way for many New Zealand NSOs in terms of its regional relationships (refer Section 2). The desire to collaborate in strategy design and implementation with its districts was another step forward in terms of creating a power-sharing governing model for the sport. This collaboration with district entities was designed to identify regional commonalities and variation within the overall organisation strategy which would ultimately connect strategic thinking to the regional strategy delivery mechanisms of the organisation.

In addition to the collaborative approach with the 11 districts, a number of measures were taken to also work with club personnel (detailed below). The basis of this type of approach is founded on an "interpretive" and "qualitative" methodology to generating knowledge. In other words, the desire to work in an in-depth way with selected stakeholders formed the basis of the process design. In addition, the intent of the workshops and meetings conducted with district and club

personnel was to draw out their ideas for the design of a strategy for the sport. This approach uses inductive reasoning – working from the ground up to build ideas. The approach lies at the heart of a collaborative method to strategy design (Heron, 1996; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998) and contrasts sharply with more traditional approaches of “consultation” where typically, the CEO or board might design the strategy and then distribute for comment to stakeholders. In addition to this approach, a stakeholder survey was used to understand more about stakeholders’ experiences and relationships with Squash New Zealand.

3.3 GATHERING THE EVIDENCE

The process of gathering evidence to inform action has involved a multifaceted approach. Spanning a nine month period (March – November 2008) and involving five phases, the process of collaboration has been both robust and demanding. The phases and major milestones of this process are summarised below. A timeline is also presented in Appendix A.

3.3.1 Phase One – Briefing

Phase one (March-April 2008), involved creating the initial design of the process. A steering group was established comprising SNZ CEO, an external facilitator and SPARC’s relationship manager with SNZ. Several briefing sessions were undertaken with this group and the SNZ board to determine the overall framework of the process. Intended outcomes of the process were identified by the SNZ board (from 14 March, 18 April 2008 board meetings) as follows:

- We have a plan to re-vitalise the sport
- We have defined what the game is (including new innovations)
- We have a plan for the more efficient delivery of our strategy
- By November 2008 AGM – we have clear KPIS agreed by squash community
- We have a concise document with measurable targets
- We have reviewed current situation and assessed usefulness of current strategy
- We have considered previous reports/delivery initiatives and incorporated these into our thinking
- We have created a bottom-up process in strategy design so that the outcomes have been shaped by squash stakeholders
- The delivery plan considers the district role in player development/talent identification and acknowledges the already agreed high performance strategy (Project Delhi)
- While the review needs to consider “fit” of current vision, the focus needs to be on connecting high level strategy with delivery. Therefore strategic questions regarding “HOW” are central to this process.

3.3.2 Phase Two – Backgrounding

Phase two (April-June 2008), involved communication with district personnel to explain the process and prepare participants for the up-coming workshop. The SNZ CEO travelled to most of the eleven districts to explain the process and to gain “sign off” from them. Where the CEO was unable to meet with a district board, a national board member undertook this role or a phone discussion took place. The plan for strategy review and re-design was also distributed to district personnel for comment. An “information gathering/preparation template” was prepared and

distributed to the SNZ board and district presidents to be completed prior to major regional engagement. It was also at this point that the strategy steering group worked through the existing SNZ strategic plan, and other documents such as the district benchmarking reports, in order to design a framework for the next phase.

3.3.3 Phase Three – Information Collection & Strategy Generation

Phase three (June-October), involved two workshops, outcomes from six advisory group forums, a stakeholder survey, a CEO district tour, three club focus group forums and interviews, and email and website communication.

The **workshops** were designed to allow the strategy review and formulation process to be created by the key stakeholders of the sport, that is, national, district and club personnel. The first full-day workshop, held on 28 June 2008 in Auckland, involved 28 people and comprised district presidents (or nominee), SNZ board, and selected staff and external personnel. Dubbed “workshop agitators”, the role of the selected external personnel was to challenge thinking and offer insight from their experience. The second full-day workshop, held on 21 August 2008, also in Auckland involved 17 people and comprised club and district staff members. Each district was invited to bring a club manager or official. For both workshops, SNZ covered the cost of this travel to ensure a national spread of participants.

Working within the principles of collaboration and inductive reasoning, the workshops were designed around three key questions of strategy:

- Where are we now? (situation analysis, captures trends, issues, strengths, weaknesses)
- Where do we want to go? (captures aspirations, vision for the future)
- How do we get there? (captures strategies and tactics to achieve desired vision)

In order to consider the performance and ongoing relevance of current strategic goals, reference to the goals of the previous plan as well as established advisory group focus areas, was made throughout the workshop. Three facilitators were involved in the 28 June 2008 workshop allowing for a three-group structure to be used. After each strategy question, the three groups came together to debate their outcomes. A summary of the process, people involved, and outcomes of the two workshops is provided in Appendix B and C.

Six **Advisory Groups** were established by the SNZ board in early 2008 in anticipation of the need for insight on strategy in specific areas of activity. The areas were:

- Club Development
- Marketing and Communication
- Referees
- Coaching Development
- IT/Technology
- Events

Terms of reference were established for the groups which comprised approximately five members each. Chairpersons were selected for each group and discussion took place via telephone conference calls, coordinated through the SNZ national office. In June and August 2008, written outcomes were prepared from each group and fed into the strategy design process via the steering group.

Also during phase three, a **stakeholder survey** was commissioned by SNZ to be undertaken by SPARC. The survey was administered to achieve the following outcomes (SPARC, 2008, p. 1):

- to understand more about stakeholders' experiences and relationships with SNZ
- to measure SNZ's performance in meeting stakeholder needs and expectations;
- to provide indications for how SNZ can better meet the needs and expectations of its stakeholders; and
- to ascertain stakeholders' aspirations for the future of the SNZ.

The survey was distributed electronically to 339 stakeholder respondents, of which 168 completed questionnaires, representing a response rate of 50%. Appendix D provides a full summary of the stakeholder survey. It is anticipated that the stakeholder survey would be administered again in one to two year's time to track any changes in stakeholder perception. Results from the survey are reported in Section 4.1 only of this report (Where Are We Now?).

A further initiative during this phase involved a **tour of the 11 districts by the SNZ CEO**. The purpose of this tour, which took place during September and October 2008, was to explain emerging strategy ideas, update districts as to progress on the overall process and gain further insight from district personnel. Outcomes from the tour are reported in Section 4.3 only of this report (How Do We Get There?)

It was initially intended that a **strategy survey** would be undertaken via the electronic questionnaire distribution mechanism, "survey monkey". However, as the survey questions were being prepared it became obvious that the type of answers needed would be more effectively generated from an in-depth approach. A series of three independent **club focus groups and interviews** was therefore undertaken to capture additional club sentiment, test emerging strategy ideas and supplement the workshop of 21 August 2008. This process replaced the intended strategy survey. The clubs chosen for participation in the focus groups and interviews were drawn from both rural and urban locations as well as large and small membership and turnover. A mix of club coaches, administrators and players (casual and full members) were chosen as focus group and interview participants. This aspect of the process was undertaken during October 2008. Appendix E details the nature of participants, the questions posed, and answers provided.

The final initiative was the preparation of regular **newsletter and website updates**. Designed as an electronic communication tool, the newsletters were distributed to over 300 stakeholders including district and club personnel on a two-monthly basis beginning July, 2008. Updates regarding the review process were also posted on the SNZ website. Both the newsletters and website updates, although recognised primarily as passive communication, invited comment.

3.3.4 Phase Four – Draft Strategy and National Board Moderation

The steering group (comprising SNZ CEO, external facilitator and SPARC relationship manager) began preparing the planning documents throughout the period September and October 2008. The national board met on 26 September and 25 October 2008 to consider these emerging strategy documents. This allowed the national board to help shape the emerging strategy and to understand the key messages derived from the collaboration to date. This present report was presented to the national board on 25 October 2008 and distributed to districts thereafter.

3.3.5 Phase Five – Draft Strategy Released & Presented for Feedback

The present report and draft strategy will be released prior to, and presented at the district forum during the Annual General Meeting weekend of SNZ on 21 and 22 November 2008. Districts are invited to provide feedback on the plan by mid December 2008. It is the intention of the SNZ board to meet mid January 2009 to consider this final feedback and for the SNZ CEO to thereafter “road show” the future of squash to the 11 districts via club meetings.

4. Strategic Review and Redesign Outcomes

This section details outcomes from the strategic review and redesign process. It incorporates key learning from the review relating to current and historical initiatives (Section 2) and integrates this with outcomes from the information collection and strategy generation phase (Section 3). From this, emerging themes for the overall strategy are identified and elements of risk are assessed.

4.1 WHERE ARE WE NOW?

A summary that represents thinking on the question, “where are we now?”, is detailed below. This thinking captures both internal and external trends and issues and, in essence, provides a situation analysis from which strategy ideas were generated. Key outcomes were as follows:

4.1.1 Workshops

Overall outcomes from the 28 June 2008 workshop, comprising SNZ board members, staff, and district presidents relating to the current situation were:

- We need to better understand our clientele
- Clubs and facilities are the heart of the sport
- Our organisation (SNZ, Districts, Clubs) is not representative of all players (108,000 casual players vs 23,000 members)
- Our organisation systems and structure are hampering our progress
- The value of high performance success is not leveraged or valued enough
- Our game has huge potential

Overall outcomes from the 21 August 2008 workshop comprising national, district and club staff relating to the current situation were:

- We are member focused to the detriment of our future growth
- We have ageing facilities that are unattractive to new participants
- We lack a “whole sport” coordinated approach
- We are not making the best use of our resources

Of note is the concurrence in thinking between those charged with the governance of squash organisations, (28 June workshop) and those charged with the operational functions (21 August workshop). In particular, the “picture painted” in terms of aging club facilities, the lack of services for casual orientated squash participants, and the lack of a whole sport/coordinated approach, were strong messages from both groups about the current “state of play”. These sentiments have been echoed through the years in SNZ annual reports and other commissioned reports such as Crellin (1992) and Leisure Services Management (1993).

4.1.2 Advisory Groups

Current issues identified from the Advisory Groups are set out below. For summary purposes, points from the Referees and Coaching Development groups have been combined.

Club Development

- No national strategy from SNZ on how to approach club development
- The allocation of SNZ development grant is not tied to any specific performance measure
- No forum for squash personnel working in the area of club development to meet, share ideas and discuss issues pertaining to club development
- Are eleven districts too many?
- There is no consistent approach from the districts in determining what skills and experience are required for someone to fill the role of SDO
- Not all districts have a strategic plan in place
- The quality of district boards and their members' understanding of what constitutes best practice governance and how to implement it are variable at best

Marketing and Communication:

- 23,000 club players but numbers are declining
- No centralized means of communicating with club players
- Significant college and intermediate school competitions but limited linkages with clubs
- A number of private and council-owned facilities that are not affiliated to SNZ exist
- 108,000 casual players
- Players no longer want to commit to annual subscriptions, joining clubs long term, being on committees, or working bees etc
- Some clubs are seen as cliquey and not welcoming
- Club use is low during the day but can get clogged in the evening
- SNZ has limited information about squash in New Zealand

Coaching Development/Referees

- Lack of direction from SNZ regarding coaching development over the last year
- Resignation of High Performance Manager and National Coach in a very short space of time meant that the continuation of the High Performance programme was led by the High Performance Advisory Group (HPAG) and two high performance coaches
- Concern expressed over the degree of input from the HPAG. It appears to be highly influential in operations and appointments within the coaching system
- The issue of appointing a national coach as opposed to a national coaching director uncovers areas of accountability – if you have a national coach and no coaching director, who looks after the coaches? Conversely if you have only a coaching director what happens to HP?
- Lack of understanding and knowledge of the functions and responsibilities of three positions within the current SNZ coaching and development system - Game Development Officer, High Performance Manager and Coach Development Manager
- Concern also expressed over the content of our present coaching accreditation in relation to SPARC directives
- Stagnation exists regarding world referee appointment guidelines
- Not enough training opportunities relating to world referee appointment guidelines

IT/Technology

- Overall, there has been a serious lack of direction from SNZ over the last few years in terms of IT/Technology development
- SNZ has not been leading the districts in IT
- SNZ does not have a centralized data base which manages all aspects of squash from access to tournament control, to club admin etc

- Entry of interclub and tournament results is archaic
- The present national interclub interface is in need of a good overhaul
- District administration forms and many other forms used by districts and clubs are not on-line

Events

- The New Zealand Open should continue to be our highest international profile event
- The Mount Maunganui Festival of Squash is a successful and important initiative
- Nationals as the primary representative fixture has seen a depletion in top player availability
- Colin Shield/Mitchell Cup are also important events that need review in terms of sponsorship and team composition
- Superchamps format works well but the event needs to be better promoted
- Format and timing of National Age Groups, Junior Open and North and South Island Junior Champs works well but these events also lack a profile
- A coordinated approach to media liaison for all events is lacking

Again, many of the issues identified by the advisory group members were reflected in the workshop thinking. The common threads from the advisory groups' assessment of the current situation related to the lack of coordinated approach to the delivery of the game, the lack of a robust pathway for coaches, players and referees, and issues relating to club facility presentation and maintenance.

4.1.3 Stakeholder Survey

The stakeholder survey, designed as a "barometer" of stakeholder perception regarding the work of SNZ, demonstrated an overall satisfaction rating of 55%. More specifically, the survey established satisfaction ratings for five distinct areas of work. Results for these were as follows:

- Leadership and Direction: 54.0% satisfaction
- Communication: 54.3% satisfaction
- Service Delivery: 54.5% satisfaction
- Quality of Relationship: 54.8% satisfaction
- Overall Performance: 59.8% satisfaction

There was remarkable consistency across the first four areas of work, with the overall performance rating increasing by 5%. The survey also established satisfaction ratings from seven different stakeholder perspectives (including athlete, coach, official, club/regional representative, affiliated partner). These perspectives placed against the survey areas noted above, identified the following satisfaction ratings, as detailed in Table 1:

Table 1: Satisfaction with SNZ by Stakeholder Grouping

Stakeholder Perspective	Leadership & Direction	Communication	Service Delivery	Quality of Relationship	Overall Performance
Athlete	57.9%	57.3%	60.5%	63.0%	57.9%
Elite/HP Coach	46.7%	65.9%	54.8%	57.7%	48.3%
Junior, club or regional coach	52.4%	55.8%	54.5%	58.3%	58.3%
Official	55.5%	53.6%	54.5%	57.1%	54.8%
Club representative	51.9%	51.6%	49.7%	58.2%	53.4%
Regional representative	53.2%	54.4%	53.9%	61.0%	53.9%
Affiliated partner	70.0%	66.7%	55.7%	71.7%	60.0%

Noteworthy, is the higher ratings generated from SNZ affiliated partners, with the lowest overall performance rating coming from the elite coaching segment. Overall there was not a sizeable variance between perspectives. Appendix F sets out a more detailed summary of the results and includes comments from respondents.

4.1.4 Club Focus Groups and Interviews

While the club focus groups were designed to “test” emerging strategy ideas, it was also a useful mechanism to generate insight regarding the current situation from those squash clubs involved. Outcomes relating to current situation as perceived by players, coaches and administrators, included:

Perception of Current Roles Undertaken by Club

- Clubs are the heart of the sport
- Ladder, league competitions, tournament
- Voluntary coaching
- Informal coaching sessions
- Court booking systems, online and other methods
- Facilities
- Social gatherings
- Dedicated volunteers and managers who keep their club running

Perception of Current Roles Undertaken by District

- Sport development/service officers – highly valued by clubs that still have access to one

- Information conduit between club and national
- Providing support and cohesion for clubs
- Link to national level for junior pathways and coaching
- Interclub league
- Coaching clinics
- Website
- Referees and rules (by some)
- Mini-courts for schools (by some)

Perception of Current Roles Undertaken by SNZ

- Has a strong focus on elite performance and international participation
- Provides steer to Districts to achieve common goals
- Grading list
- Website – but not many club members visit it

Perception of Relationship between Clubs, Districts and SNZ

- Top-down hierarchy and messy communications that undermine unity
- Whatever changes occur, players should be at the centre of the sport’s structure and systems
- Passion drives the sport at many levels, and it is important to build upon that, especially capitalizing on the energy and enthusiasm that exists at club level
- Clubs feel disconnected (suspicious?) about lack of communications around strategy discussions

4.1.5 Summary

From the “picture painted” above regarding the current situation for squash in New Zealand, it is clearly evident there exists a need and appetite for change. Information was collected in multiple ways and from multiple sources (to include both internal and external issues) in order to establish a platform of understanding from which strategy could be generated. In terms of an internal focus, perhaps a feature of this type of process is the tendency to concentrate on what’s wrong with squash, omitting those many aspects that are successful within the sport. However, as identified in Section 1, there is also much evidence that demonstrates this success and the strengths of the squash system. The next section brings together both the good and the bad, the internal and external considerations, and summarises thinking relating to future aspirations for squash in New Zealand.

4.2 WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

A summary of thinking relating to the question “where do we want to go?”, is detailed below. As above, multiple methods were used to generate this thinking. For the purposes of this report, the two workshops, six advisory groups and three club focus groups/interviews are summarised. In particular, workshop participants were encouraged to think big picture and long term and to consider the whole sport in their deliberations. Key aspiration statements or priority areas were then derived from this work. Further detail relating to how these aspirations might be achieved is set out in Section 4.3 (How Do We Get There?).

4.2.1 Workshops

28 June 2008 Workshop (Collective Summary)

- Our high performance success is self sustaining, feeds back into the game and is valued by club participants
- We understand our clients' needs and have structures, systems and processes to meet needs
- We have flexibility in the delivery of the game at the local level, characterised by a mixed/hybrid offering, for example, commercial facilities with associated clubs retaining the club feel; clubs prospering where appropriate; fully commercial facilities where appropriate.

21 August 2008 Workshop (Collective Summary)

- We have accessible, welcoming facilities that cater for a range of participants needs
- The "participant" market is captured
- There is a uniform approach to the delivery of the game

4.2.2 Advisory Groups

A summary from the six **advisory groups** relating to the broad aspirations for squash in New Zealand was that:

- A single database of all affiliated members is in place
- Existing members are retained and there is growth in numbers
- Casual member/non affiliated players and groups are incorporated within the SNZ umbrella
- There is a robust pathway for coaches, players and referees
- School/club and SNZ relationships are thriving
- Facility management issues are addressed. Clubs have the ability to plan repairs, maintenance and development either through SNZ or the districts
- We have fewer, bigger events that generate significant profile for the sport

4.2.3 Club Focus Groups and Interviews

Seven priority areas were derived from the club focus groups. Each priority area is further detailed in Section 4.3 (How Do We Get There?).

- We have improved processing speed for grading list
- We have flexible and obvious membership benefits
- Greater information accessibility is available for clubs and individuals
- There is a considered introduction to an online court booking system
- We further "invest" in coaching courses as a key membership benefit
- Our facilities are attractive and inviting for current and new players
- We have a nationwide strategy for creating better school links/junior pathways

4.2.4 Summary

It is often much more difficult to encapsulate future aspirations than to identify current issues. The summary statements above, however, offer a common and clear direction for the development of a strategy for the game. As many of the statements regarding a desired future have been derived directly from the assessment of current issues, the future strategy also provides an opportunity to address current frustrations. With this in mind, it will be important to ensure the strategy is focused on selected priorities rather than attempting to overcome all issues.

4.3 HOW DO WE GET THERE?

From the outset, it was recognised that a key part of this process was to ensure substantial thinking related to how the sport as a collective grouping might implement the strategic aspirations identified. The intent therefore was to connect strategic thinking with action steps. Again, “how” ideas were derived from multiple sources with the primary focus on the workshops and advisory groups.

4.3.1 Workshops

As noted above, the 28 June workshop identified three major aspirations for squash in New Zealand. A summary of **how** these aspirations might be achieved is provided below:

High performance

- National promotion to change the perception of high performance from benefiting a few to significant value for the whole game
- Communicate and celebrate high performance success on a regular basis and in multiple ways

Understanding client needs

- Create a centralised (and simple) market information system that collects data and is able to be shared/used throughout the country
- Develop new product offering to meet needs of specified target groups (e.g., 20-40 yrs, women)
- Centralise the way we offer service functions (e.g., IT system that integrates court bookings, access, security, grading membership etc).

Flexible delivery

- Create a system of tiered clubs (clubs identified as A, B, C, or D). Using the “80/20 rule”, work with those clubs who want to change. For example, identify ten clubs willing and able to partner SNZ in developing a sustainable, income generating model that captures casual and club based squash players.

The 21 August workshop also identified three major aspirations for squash in New Zealand. Below is a summary of how these aspirations might be achieved:

Accessible, welcoming facilities

- Establish IT solutions that provide access to courts/facilities at any time, at any place throughout New Zealand

- Create multiuse facilities that can be used for a range of activities (other sports, functions etc)
- Undertake a programme of facility upgrades to create contemporary, tidy and clean venues
- Educate clubs to think of themselves as sustainable businesses (with diversified sources of income) to fund ongoing upgrades

The participant market is captured

- Offer a differentiated member fee structure (casual, family, full year, weekly, monthly, 6 monthly etc)
- Offer programmes for the participant market that complements competitive/membership orientated products
- Undertake market research to gather data on the participant market (wants, needs, profile)
- Undertake market research to determine what the 15-25 age group want and offer it
- Offer programmes that meet the needs of a diverse range of participants/members, including the non regular competitor
- Offer coaching services that up-skill participants
- Promote squash as a contemporary sport for other sporting activities
- Market squash to children
- Use our high performance successes as a promotional tool

There is a uniform approach to the delivery of the game

- Create a common brand/logo for all levels of the game to adopt
- Develop coordinated marketing and branding campaigns
- Develop a system to capture common IT data that is accessible nationwide
- Organise regular district and club forums
- Develop a shared vision and shared programmes, templates, resources etc
- Develop club specific initiatives as well as national/whole game initiatives
- Research and plan whole game initiatives before offering, and undertake ongoing evaluation
- Develop a whole game market information system
- Create a sense of coordinated effort that national, regional and club entities contribute to

4.3.2 Advisory Groups

The advisory groups also provided outcomes relating to how identified aspirations might be achieved. These were expressed as recommendations and were attributed to specific advisory areas. Four of the six groups identified recommendations that were able to be included within this report at this time. They are as follows:

Club Development

- SNZ must develop clear and consistent guidelines, leadership and direction as to what constitutes effective club developments
- SNZ should undertake a review of the current district structure to consider the following:
 - Linking the annual district grant to specific, measurable areas including club development initiatives
 - Providing guidelines to districts for best practice/processes to implement a strategic plan

- Current number of districts – can Squash NZ deliver its programmes better to fewer districts
- SEMs/affiliation fees need to be tiered to reflect player/participation level to encourage more members/greater revenue
- SNZ needs to canvas the clubs to find out what they want (this could mean looking outside of the sport for delivery of club development) – consultation process/focus groups could be performed with a sample number of clubs
- Squash NZ needs to provide a national forum for club development ideas to be discussed and shared

Marketing and Communication

- Develop a database of all affiliated club members
- “Sign-up” all major non-affiliated squash facilities (explain benefits)
- Investigate drop-off of young adults from the sport and generate strong relationships with schools/regional school bodies
- Enlist casual players, include them on grading list for a nominal fee to enable better communication
- SNZ must ensure the health/viability of clubs either directly or through the regions so its delivery mechanism for squash is healthy and viable
- Take advantage of the exercise and healthy eating messages and public funding in this area
- Share successful district initiatives across the whole sport, for example, Canterbury, Opening the Doors; Auckland, club surveys, on-line interclub and website; Wellington, Open Weekend
- Enable squash facilities to be used by other sports, for example, martial arts, running, cycling – consider multisport facilities
- A single data base will need a good/robust relationship between clubs, districts, and SNZ
- Upgrade website to become far more user-friendly

IT/Technology

- SNZ has a single data base which is owned by SNZ
- Squash NZ owns the source code and all out-sourcing schedules therefore keeping Squash NZ in charge
- Leave the website alone until Squash NZ has a drive to revamp just the front page while the centralized data base is being put in place
- The new website roll-out should take place along with the introduction of the centralised data base

Events

- That SNZ sanction the New Zealand Open prize money in 2009
- The SNZ retains the present format for the National individual event and requires all contracted players to be available for selection for the teams event
- That SNZ trial a revised team make-up for the Cousin Shield/Mitchell Cup in 2009 and consider an equalisation process to aid clubs financially
- That SNZ create a Junior Series over three tournaments (Open, North, South Island Champs) with sponsor, points and prizes
- That SNZ consider event media liaison across all events with a view to exploding this role

4.3.3 CEO District Tour

This second CEO district tour was timed to explain emerging strategy ideas and to gain feedback from club and district personnel on work thus far. The tour took place during September and October 2008. A general summary of district perception is provided in this section alongside the key points that were discussed during these meetings.

Emerging Strategy Themes (What)

- Focus on all squash players – not just members
- Club/ Facilities at the heart of the game
- One Sport
- Need for people to feel that they are joining the sport (not just the club) – need for inclusiveness
- Transparent service provision, move away from tax system to user pays – onus on SNZ to provide services people want
- Flexible solutions to incorporate need of different types of clubs (rural, managed, number of courts etc) and account for regional needs
- Sustainability – working within our means and more effectively

How the Themes will be Addressed (How)

- IT Platform – national database with services radiating from core
 - One set of information for the country
 - Varying access for different levels within database
 - Services including; communication, court booking and payment, access, security, competition management
- Coaching Strategy
 - Coaching Director building coach and athlete pathways, coaching communities, resource and coordination
- One brand/ image – sharpen up marketing, look and feel
- Centralised Services
 - as above through IT Platform
 - Player development (Coachforce)
 - Marketing (Open Weekend, Branding)
 - Financial Management
 - Competition Management
- Rationalisation
 - Federate according to District need
- Uniform Scoring System
- Hall of Fame/ Alumni to act as repository for history and tradition of sport
 - Physical home
 - Website
 - Induction Event
 - Regional fundraisers via alumni

Checking for Understanding (Are we on the right track? What do you think?)

The CEO found that generally the meetings were positive and that the themes outlined were overall supported. He also noted that specific regional foci meant that some solutions met with varied levels of support. A flexible approach was welcomed as was a mechanism to communicate with all squash players and subsequent access to supported facilities. The suggestion to federate according to District need had a mixed response. The CEO noted that clubs appeared to be attached to and fond of their Districts and this will take more consultation.

Outcomes of some meetings sought pursuit of more aggressive change and less consultation (shortened timeline) to avoid perceived procrastination or inaction. Boards were keen to see a plan to provide feedback on, and for the implementation to include intermediate steps taken in 2009 towards end goals, rather than spend another year 'preparing' for change.

Overall, the CEO noted that people were very keen to see a plan on paper to provide feedback on and satisfied that they have been listened to.

4.3.4 Club Focus Groups and Interviews

The seven priority areas identified by the club focus groups and interviews are now matched with further detail. This detail provides feedback on the emerging strategy ideas and/or offers additional suggestions and questions as to **how** these priority areas might be addressed.

Improved processing speed for grading list

- The planned long-term technological improvements most welcome
- For the present, make better use of current technology (Excel spreadsheets and email) to submit data, and speed up the publication of the grading lists

Flexible and obvious membership benefits

- Greater perceived value for clubs and individuals for affiliation fees
- More flexible membership packages created to attract casual players to the clubs
- Maintain full opportunities for traditional club member

Greater information accessibility

- SNZ to provide frequent, regular newsletter about the "family" to ALL in the "family" (i.e. all players)
- Create and sustain a sense of belonging that is not currently there
- Improvements to SNZ Website – determine target audience; who visits it; promote it

Online court booking system

- Great to have – but have the consequences (and potential new problems) been addressed yet? For example, there are other technologies also available (txt messaging; SMS)
- Who will fund the capital cost of installing swipe card access machines to courts in non-staffed clubs?
- Income will be greatly improved (especially for daytime use) – will clubs be able to invest back into development?

Investment in coaching courses

- As an incentive to new players, offer a "package" of playing time and coaching clinic to encourage them to improve and join in ladders and leagues
- Help current members improve techniques, and rise up the league

Attractive and inviting facilities

- Set common standards to which clubs should aspire, to retain the brand image of squash
- More attractive clubs can charge higher membership fees
- An increase in court numbers to grow membership to its fullest extent would be welcome AND would allow for greater sharing by clubs to host championship events (plus provide another revenue stream to fund future developments)

- Where would clubs be without “the bar”? An important revenue stream but equally important (if not more so) is the social networking opportunity this provides and defines the culture of the club

Schools links/junior pathways

- Determine a nationwide common strategy across all districts as to how links with schools can be maximised to greatest effect, such as income stream, growth in youth membership and talent.
- Determine usage rationale for Micro-courts – why used in some areas and not in others?
- Make more of the potential links with SPARC Active Schools programme (and other recreational campaigns) as a potential source of funding of courts
- If it wasn’t for the parents, school/club links would not be forged or sustained. What happens when children leave the school? Who takes on the responsibility for the link?

4.3.5 Summary

As demonstrated above, there were consistent messages that emerged from all groups involved in the strategy review and redesign process in terms of how aspirations might be achieved. Improved information technology tools feature strongly in almost all discussion. Also of note, was the focus on SNZ as the “fix it” organisation. A number of suggestions regarding “how”, related to an additional role for SNZ. Perhaps if there was one singular message from the process above, it would be a greater mandate for SNZ. In order to offer guidance for the development of a new vision for action, the next section provides an assessment of the previous strategic plan in light of the outcomes noted above. It also establishes the emerging themes from the review process.

4.4 ASSESSING PREVIOUS INTENTIONS

So how well has SNZ done in its desire to lead the sport? What have been the strategic outcomes? An assessment of SNZ’s achievements against intention, in light of the outcomes from the strategy review and redesign process, is now offered. This assessment is based purely on deliberations from an independent perspective, taking into consideration the evidence available through the review and redesign process. For some aspects, there was not sufficient evidence to provide any meaningful appraisal. Using the cornerstones of the SNZ strategic plan as set out in Section 2, the assessment is as follows:

1. GROWTH

People – to recognise and develop the people involved in our sport.

There was not sufficient evidence from the review process to allow a meaningful appraisal of this aspect.

Rating: NA

Facilities – to improve the appearances, access, availability and operational success of facilities delivering our sport. Concern expressed throughout the review process indicates this goal has not been achieved with little discernable progress made since 2003.

Rating: 3/10

Participation – to increase the opportunity for more people to experience and enjoy the sport of squash. Declining membership figures and concern expressed throughout the review process regarding the lack of progress made in creating an environment for the causal/social player to experience squash indicates little progress in this area.

Rating: 3/10

2. BEST PRACTICE

Communication – to increase the understanding and profile of squash. While there is significant evidence from the review process that raised concern about an untapped profiling of squash, the stakeholder feedback relating to communication, rated over 50% satisfaction.

Rating: 5/10

Efficiency – to improve the efficiency of national, district and club level operations of the game. A number of the initiatives identified in the 2003 strategic plan have been undertaken such as the benchmarking of districts, development of inter-sport relationships at national level, and the external assessment and research of practices.

Rating: 7/10

Relationship – to build and maintain strategic partnerships that will enhance squash in New Zealand. A decline in sponsorship offers evidence of a less than desirable outcome for this aspect. However, the relationship building effort afforded to SPARC has resulted in significant financial and non financial support for SNZ.

Rating: 6/10

3. PERFORMANCE

Player development – to indentify and develop talented elite players and coaches. Despite the challenges faced regarding SPARC's reassessment of its high performance investment in SNZ as well as the loss of key high performance staff, there remains a strong pool of squash talent that has been developed to world class levels.

Rating: 8/10

Success and excellence – to achieve excellence in our performance programmes and produce people who succeed within squash at national and international level. As above.

Rating: 8/10

Just as the stakeholder survey returned a “pass mark” of 55% satisfaction, so too does this assessment indicate overall achievement against strategic priorities for more than half of the initiatives identified. Essentially, SNZ is “on track” in some areas and languishing in others. The next section identifies those areas where particular focus is needed.

4.5 EMERGING THEMES FOR A VISION FOR ACTION

Clear themes emerged from the review and redesign process. Top of mind for many people was the need to **arrest the decline in membership**. From a peak in 1984 of 54,000, SNZ figures now show 23,000 registered members. It was also consistently recognised, that the market for this membership growth should come not from participants new to squash but from the **estimated 108,000 people** in New Zealand known to already have an appetite for squash. As this theme was explored, it became evident that the current squash “product” is pitched primarily to the competitive player at the expense of the social or casual player. A lack of court time, difficulty in accessing facilities, and a lack of organised programmes for the non competitive player appeared to be a major issue across many club venues. There was a repeated sense that this was very much a ready but lost market.

The second theme that emerged focused on **clubs and club facilities**. Despite some debate as to the place of clubs as a future delivery mechanism for sport, it was strongly acknowledged that the activities of the 231 squash clubs across New Zealand lay at “heart of the game”. Based on this thinking, many related ideas focused on ways to **strengthen clubs**. So that squash might position itself for a changing world, the club development theme also established a desire to develop a hybrid model of club and facility development. A hybrid model recognises the positive aspects of a nonprofit club structure that has allowed clubs to endure for over 100 years, and adds concepts of commercialism such as pay for play and a focus on revenue generation. Another important aspect of this theme was the desire to “smarten up” the look and feel of the club facility. It was acknowledged that many facilities around New Zealand were of poor quality and uninviting for the aspiring causal player.

The third theme centred on the national, regional and local **squash system**. This theme spoke to the need for a **greater role for SNZ**, and a more **streamlined regional delivery mechanism**. Many of the calls for action targeted SNZ as the implementer. It is worth cautioning at this point, that SNZ could not undertake the type of reforms being proposed without significant contribution from regional and club volunteers and staff. A significant aspect of this theme related to reform of the current district structure. Instead of eleven districts and 1 national body, with much duplication, could clubs and players be better served if national and regional entities worked as if they were one organisation? SNZ and its districts have tried a number of different ways of working together (as outlined in Section 1). Outcomes from the process detailed above indicate a desire for major reform in this area.

The fourth theme involved **pathways to high performance success**. While a separate planning process has been undertaken to map out actions for the 2010 Commonwealth Games (Project Delhi), high performance still emerged as an important theme from this review process. Of note was the need to **leverage high performance success** throughout the sport and to ensure an integrated pathway for coaches and athletes toward high performance. It was acknowledge that a national coaching strategy needed to be developed.

The final theme that emerged related to a sense that the sport is too disparate; that there needs to be a stronger drive on behalf of clubs, districts and the NSO, to work together and to **act as one sport in image and delivery**. In outworking this concept, the need for **one online portal** incorporating regional and club sites emerged very strongly from the review process. In addition to this, thinking also focused on the need for a **whole sport IT tool** that could be used for self service court bookings and club registration alike. Such a tool could also capture player data and be used to inform future decision making. Finally, in order to capture the notion of “one sport” a common logo or brand was identified as a key action.

4.6 ASSESSING RISK

From the themes identified above, it is clear that major change is desired and is being strongly proposed. It is also evident from the assessment of the previous strategic plan that although change might be desired and proposed, the most significant challenge lies within the implementation. The previous strategic plan identified much of what this review has discovered. What the previous strategic plan did not achieve was a plan for action. The risks associated with inaction, are as follows:

- Continued decline in membership
- Reduced opportunity for commercial sponsorship income
- Reduced opportunity for public sector funding support
- The above leading to an unsustainable high performance programme
- A lost opportunity to revitalise a sport that has many positive attributes

Conversely, the primary risks considered to be associated with taking the type of action proposed in the above themes are as follows:

- A club facility redevelopment programme is a costly exercise. There are numerous financial risks associated with this proposed action. The scale and timing of such a programme needs to be carefully considered and in particular the decision to use reserves versus waiting for additional membership income to be generated will be a difficult choice.
- Another risk associated with the proposed club development actions centres on the potential loss of control if a commercial ethos is encouraged. Careful consideration needs to be given to ownership issues and purpose of activity.
- Any national and regional restructuring process comes at significant cost in terms of time and resource. Changes such as those proposed in the themes above have the potential to cause alienation by people currently committed to what they are doing. Careful consideration needs to be given to aspects of the national and district delivery mechanism that are working successfully and should be retained (such as regional competitions).

5. Conclusion

The review and redesign for squash in New Zealand has been a major process for the sport. It has involved significant creative and rational thought on behalf of more than 250 people drawn largely from the squash community. A feature of the process has been the collaborative approach to design. District personnel in particular, have had the opportunity to create the future direction of the sport, rather than to just comment on a plan developed at national level.

Workshops, focus groups, regional tours, surveys and advisory forums, were undertaken with club, regional and national personnel. The design involved:

- a) an assessment of the current situation, incorporating internal and external trends and issues, combined with a review of current and historical initiatives for squash;
- b) identifying the key aspirations for the sport; and
- c) a focus on how those aspirations might be achieved.

The framework of this report was designed around those three stages and included a section on the context of squash, a detailed description of why and how the process was undertaken, and description and analysis of the outcomes.

5.1 KEY MESSAGES FOR ACTION

The key messages, designed to guide future action for squash in New Zealand are as follows:

1. There is a strong need and desire for **change**. To continue on, with “business as usual” would be at odds with almost all thinking derived from the review process.
2. There is a strong desire for Squash New Zealand **to take a stronger operational leadership role** for the sport. This is in terms of more centralised systems and processes as well as providing more direct communication and greater resources for clubs.
3. The 11 **district delivery mechanism needs to be redesigned**. SNZ and the districts need to move “closer together”. This change could involve the establishment of regional branches, but also needs to be mindful of the need to retain the important work that districts currently offer to clubs.
4. The sport of squash with its 231 clubs, 11 districts and 1 national body needs to act more as **one united entity**, rather than 243 different organisations. A centralised IT platform or tool to be used for many of the administrative, membership and financial functions, currently duplicated across the sport, is one of the major strategies identified for achieving this. Another is the development of one strong brand for the sport.
5. A major priority is the **physical improvement of club facilities** and that clubs need the intervention and support of the regional and national entities in order to engage

in facility upgrade. Sitting alongside this is the desire to work with selected clubs in order to create a hybrid (nonprofit-commercial) model of operation.

6. A market much larger than the 23,000 players currently registered as members, exists for the game of squash. For the next four years squash entities in New Zealand need to focus their collective **energy on engaging the estimated 108,000 people** known to have an interest in squash. If this is achieved, squash in New Zealand will have 130,000 players contributing to the growth of the game. A centralised information technology tool that allows greater flexibility and access to facilities is a major strategy to achieve this.
7. **High performance is a pillar of the game.** Ongoing investment in this area was a key message from the review alongside the need to better leverage profile generated from world class performances.

In translating the key messages outlined above for the forthcoming plan, it is recommended that the document is framed as a plan for strategic change and that it highlights, in particular, those major strategic initiatives for change with a focus on the next four years (2009-2012). As such, the strategic outcomes could be framed as follows:

- 130,000 participants are contributing to the growth of the game
- Clubs are healthy, welcoming and relevant to all that play the game
- Capable and aligned national office and regions are supporting squash in New Zealand
- Pathways to high performance success are obvious for players, coaches and referees
- One strong brand is established to bring together the squash entities in New Zealand

Up to three strategies need to be identified under each strategic outcome, supported by key performance indicators. The work subsequent to this plan of course needs to be focused on outworking each strategy.

It will also be critical to keep SPARC “close” to the forthcoming change process. The government agency holds a reservoir of important knowledge about change processes in sport. It is also in a position to invest financially in sports who are trying to help themselves through large scale reform.

Finally, there are many extremely positive aspects about the sport of squash in New Zealand. Section 1 of this report demonstrates the strong financial position of SNZ, for example, as well as the achievements of squash players on the world stage. Outcomes from the club focus groups in Section 4 also identify successful club and district activity. It would be easy to take away a negative perspective from this report. Instead, a positive view is that this report has been commissioned because those who care about the game want to build on its success. The outcomes identify, why, what and how this might be achieved.

5.2 WHERE TO FROM HERE & WHEN?

The next steps for the SNZ board who now need to drive subsequent action, should be:

- Deliberations on this report
- Plan for strategic change development and refinement for presentation at the 2008 AGM
- Development of a power point presentation that details strategic action for the 2008 AGM

- A further round of engagement with district entities (early 2009)
- Decision on action by early 2009
- Implementation of action, mid 2009-2012

References

- Crellin, P. (1992). *Crellin report: marketing New Zealand Squash in the next decade*, Auckland.
- Ferkins, L. (2007). *Sport Governance: Developing Strategic Capability in National Sport Organisations*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Deakin University, Melbourne, VIC.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hoye, R., Smith, A., Westerbeek, H., Stewart, B. & Nicholson, M. (2006). *Sport management: principles and applications*. Sydney: Elsevier.
- Leisure Marketing & Management. (1993). *New Zealand Squash market research: summary report*, Wellington.
- Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B., & Lampel, J. (1998). *Strategy safari: A guided tour through the wilds of strategic management*. New York: The Free Press.
- Sport and Recreation New Zealand. (2005). Retrieved 16 December, 2007 from www.sparc.org.nz/research-policy.
- Sport and Recreation New Zealand. (2006). Retrieved 22 August, 2006 from www.sparc.org.nz/research-policy/club-membership.
- Sport and Recreation New Zealand. (2008). *Squash New Zealand SPARC stakeholder survey*, Wellington.
- Squash New Zealand. (2001). *Squash New Zealand annual report*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2002). *Squash New Zealand annual report*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2003). *Squash New Zealand annual report: Strategic plan insert*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2004). *Squash New Zealand annual report*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2005). *Squash New Zealand annual report*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2006). *Squash New Zealand annual report*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2007). *Squash New Zealand annual report*, Auckland.
- Squash New Zealand. (2008). Retrieved 14 October, 2008 from www.squashnz.co.nz/history/nz-growth-and-infrastructure.asp
- Waikato Management School. (2008). *Benchmarking 2008 comparison: Squash New Zealand*, Hamilton.

Appendices

Please refer separate attachment for the following:

Appendix A: Timeline

Appendix B: 28 June 2008 Workshop Summary

Appendix C: 21 August 2008 Workshop Summary

Appendix D: Stakeholder Survey Summary

Appendix E: Club Focus Group and Interviews