



Government of **Western Australia**
Combat Sports Commission



Strategy to Address Rapid Weight Loss (Weight Cutting) by Dehydration

February 2020

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Foreword

As the recently appointed Chair of the Combat Sports Commission (the Commission), I endorse the strategy developed to address the dangerous practice of weight cutting. The Commission has undertaken this massive project to tackle this serious issue which is entrenched in combat sport throughout the world. Sadly, there have been many documented deaths and injuries around the world, sustained by combat sport contestants who engaged in weight cutting practices, yet the dangerous behaviours continue to be prevalent in all combat sports.

The Commission has been working to develop a strategy that improves the health and safety of combat sports in Western Australia within the parameters of the *Combat Sports Act 1987* and *Combat Sports Regulations 2004*. The Commission has undertaken extensive consultation throughout the development of the strategy and will continue to consult moving forward.

The members of the Commission recognise that some of the measures in the strategy represent significant changes to combat sports in Western Australia. I am confident that with increased education, the industry will see the importance of the need for change and support for this strategy for the health and safety of all persons involved in combat sports. We ask that you join us and assist in making Western Australia a world leader in combat sports contestant health and safety.

The development of this strategy has been a combined effort and I am extremely grateful to all who assisted in shaping the strategy including those who attended workshops, provided submissions and feedback, as well as the various experts and organisations that provided advice to the Commission. The strategy will be trialled for a period of twelve months during which time the Commission will review key objectives to ensure they are met and the effectiveness of the strategy.

I formally thank all the Commission members and staff (past and present) for their contribution over the past two years. I am encouraged by the direction of the Commission and look forward to continually striving for a safer and healthier combat sports industry. The only way we can stop this dangerous practice is to create a culture where safety is paramount and everyone's responsibility.

The Hon. Bob Kucera APM JP

Chair, Combat Sports Commission

February 2020



Overview

Weight cutting is a dangerous practice often inappropriately undertaken in combat sports. This is where contestants rapidly decrease their body weight before weigh-ins through excessive dehydration, for the purpose of gaining an advantage by competing in a weight class artificially below what could be achieved through diet and training.

Contestants then attempt to regain the lost weight in the time between the weigh-in and the contest (usually about 24 hours in Western Australia), with the intention of being heavier than their opponent in the contest.

Many physical and mental symptoms occur as a result of weight cutting by dehydration which are harmful to all contestants.

In addition, while contestants may be able to regain most or all of the rapidly lost weight, research suggests that contestants are not adequately hydrated at the time of the contest. This creates an increased risk of injury, which can prove fatal.

Despite the risks, there have been many deaths and countless injuries to combat sports athletes around the world. There is a deep-seated culture of weight cutting throughout the world that is commonly accepted as standard practice when preparing for a contest.

The Commission is concerned for the health and safety of all contestants. In developing a strategy to address weight cutting, the Commission engaged and consulted with the industry, experts and key stakeholders. Consideration was given to all feedback received throughout the many phases of consultation. The Commission is extremely thankful to all who contributed to this important piece of work.

The strategy will be implemented on a 12 month trial basis and reviewed by the Commission upon receipt of sufficient data to determine the degree to which the strategy has been effective in curbing dangerous weight cutting behaviours.

Consultation

Consultation took place over many phases as follows:

- Phone interviews (April 2018)
 - The Commission devised a series of questions aimed at gathering information concerning the culture, perceptions and drivers of weight cutting, as well as ideas on how to address weight cutting. Overall there was an overwhelming desire for change, however, a concern that unless mandatory, there would be a disadvantage to those who did prepare for a contest in a safer manner.



- Workshop 1 (May 2018)
 - Following the one-to-one interviews, an industry workshop was held. The purpose of the workshop was to develop an opportunity statement, define the success of the project and identify measures of success.
 - Contestant Safety Project - Opportunity Statement: Written by participants of the industry consultation.

“Our opportunity is to deliver the safest possible environment for combat sports participants that is manageable for promoters and trainers. We will do this by developing and implementing a comprehensive range of practical and cost-effective strategies, which results in a mindset change amongst all stakeholders to the combat sports industry, with regard to weight cutting by dehydration. Safety First Always”
- Workshop 2 (June 2018)
 - A second workshop was held over two sessions after the development of an interim strategy. The interim strategy was presented, debated and refined with the attendees.
- Draft report released (December 2018)
 - The Commission released its draft strategy report for public comment in December 2018 which contained research, consultation feedback, existing strategies to address weight cutting worldwide and the draft strategy. The public comments assisted the Commission in shaping the strategy.
- Discussion paper (April 2019)
 - The Commission released a discussion paper with an evolved draft strategy which had been shaped by the responses to the draft report. This process assisted the Commission in refining the strategy.
- Consultation Paper (December 2019)
 - The Commission released a consultation paper in December 2019 which contained the proposed strategy. After reviewing all feedback to the consultation paper, the Commission adopted the strategy as detailed in this document.



The Strategy

The strategy to address weight cutting by way of dehydration is broken into three pillars. They are weight assessment, regulation and education. The strategy is detailed below:

➤ **Weight Assessment**

- **Single weigh-in attempt**

- The rules will stipulate that contestants have only one attempt to make weight.
- Contestants will weigh-in wearing minimal clothes.

- **Weight Class Conditions**

- Initial Weigh-in (within 24 hours):
 - Contestants must weigh within their nominated weight class. (There will be a 500gm allowance.)
 - Where there are occurrences of missing weight at consecutive promotions, the Commission will enforce weight class conditions.
 - Where there are multiple, non-consecutive occurrences of missing weight, showing patterns or significant instances of missing weight, the Commission may enforce weight class conditions.
- Secondary Weight Check:
 - A secondary weight check will occur in a two-hour window from 'doors open' at each promotion.
 - If a Contestant is 10% to 15% above the upper limit of the agreed weight class, the Contestant will receive a warning on the first occasion. After any subsequent occurrence, the Commission will seek to impose a condition on the Contestant's registration that they go up a weight class.
 - If a Contestant is more than 15% above the upper limit of the agreed weight class, the Commission will seek to impose a condition on their registration that the Contestant compete at a higher weight class.
 - Data obtained from the secondary weigh-in will be used by the Commission to determine the degree to which the strategy has been effective in curbing dangerous weight cutting behaviours.

- **Amendments to the Certificate of Fitness**

- The Certificate of Fitness will be amended to include the contestant's past contest weight, current weight and proposed contest weight. The purpose is to ensure that contestants and medical practitioners consider whether the intended weight can be safely achieved. This process will also ensure that medical practitioners have an opportunity to raise any health concerns with patients prior to any proposed weight loss.



➤ Regulation

- **Prohibition of devices that artificially dehydrate contestants**
 - The Commission's Code of Conduct will explicitly prohibit the use of sweat suits, saunas and other devices that artificially dehydrate the contestant.
- **Position paper to be issued to all interstate and international contestants**
 - A position paper will be provided to international and interstate contestants, stating Western Australia's position on weight cutting and discouraging its use. The position paper will be issued via the promoter under permit conditions.

➤ Education

- **Mandatory online education assessment**
 - All registrants will undergo an online education assessment which will ensure that registrants attain a minimum level of knowledge prior to competing or participating in combat sports in Western Australia. This assessment is also to be completed by parents or guardians of contestants under 18 years of age.
- **Introduction package**
 - Upon registration, an email package will be issued to registrants comprising of a registration letter, dangers of weight cutting education materials, guidelines and a link to the mandatory training.
- **Industry education package**
 - Materials will continue to be distributed to the industry focused around the dangers associated with weight cutting.
- **Contestant Record Book insert**
 - Information about the dangers of weight cutting have been included in the Contestant Record Book.
- **Guidelines**
 - Guidelines will be updated to reflect the strategy.



Implementation

The Commission is working towards full implementation of the strategy by late 2020. The Commission has already begun to roll out the education part of the strategy and the anticipated timeline for the rollout of the remaining parts of the strategy is as follows:

Month	Action	Requirements
June 2020	Soft launch of strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single weigh-in attempt• Secondary weigh-in required• Prohibition of sweat suits, saunas and other devices that artificially dehydrate contestants.
October 2020	Hard launch of strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weight class conditions commence
October 2021	Review of strategy following the 12 month trial	

*Please note that the above table is a guide only and actual timelines may vary.

Next Steps for Industry Personnel

If you are currently registered by the Commission or interested in being registered you should:

- Keep informed with Commission updates via Facebook, email and the Commission's website.
- Talk to your trainer about how you prepare for contests and ensure you maintain a healthy diet, good training regimen and good level of hydration.
- Contact the Commission if you have any queries about the changes.

Contact

- For any queries, contact the Commission on (08) 6552 1604 or email combatsport@dlgsc.wa.gov.au.
- Follow the Commission on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/combatssportscommissionwa/>
- Visit the Commission's website: <http://dlgsc.wa.gov.au/csc>



Frequently Asked Questions

❖ **Why isn't the Commission testing for dehydration?**

Dehydration testing by urine specific gravity (USG) was not included in the strategy. Advice from medical practitioners and academic researchers was that the accuracy of USG testing is not sufficiently reliable to determine hydration levels of a contestant. The Commission considered plasma sodium testing as an alternative method of dehydration testing. However, the Commission was unable to obtain a consensus among medical practitioners or academics on the appropriateness of using this or any method of dehydration testing in a combat sport environment.

❖ **Why isn't the Commission setting minimum weights via body scanning?**

The Commission considered the use of body scanning technology to set minimum weights at which contestants could compete. The only practical measurement apparatus with sufficient accuracy is DEXA scanning technology, however the use of these devices in Western Australia is only permitted for clinical or academic research purposes.

❖ **What is the new weigh-in process?**

Contestants will be required to submit to an initial weigh-in and secondary weigh-in. The initial weigh-in will take place as per current practice, within 24 hours prior to the advertised start time of contest. The secondary weigh-in will take place at the contest within two hours of doors open.

❖ **Who will be required to undergo mandatory online training?**

Everyone who registers with the Commission or renews a registration. Mandatory online training will not apply to existing registrants until they renew registration. However, existing registrants are encouraged to voluntarily undertake the training.

❖ **When will saunas and sweat suits be banned in Western Australia?**

The use of sweat suits and saunas and any other method which purposely and artificially dehydrates a contestant will be expressly prohibited by the Commission through its Code of Conduct from June 2020. Registrants that breach the Code of Conduct are subject to disciplinary action.

❖ **How will the Commission review the success of the strategy?**

Contestants will be required to submit to a secondary weigh-in prior to the contest. The data will allow the Commission to ascertain the degree to which the strategy has been effective in curbing the dangerous weight cutting behaviours. The Commission will undertake a review of the success of the strategy after 12 months.



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For more information contact the Commission on:
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