

Sport industry an unlikely ally in environmental sustainability

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Dr Sheila Nguyen

When it comes to leadership in environmental sustainability, the sport industry might not immediately come to mind. However for Dr Sheila Nguyen, Deakin University sport for social change expert, they are a perfect ally.

"Research tells us that people expect higher-profile entities, such as the sports industry, to do more to influence and make decisions that improve

their communities. Environmental leadership is one way they can do so," Dr Nguyen explained.

"The planet needs all hands on deck and the sport industry can quickly mobilise a mass of fans, spectators and participants to back a movement that impacts everyone's life, not to mention, protecting our natural assets is business prudence.

"Without water, energy and materials, we cannot deliver key components of our business – participation, entertainment and employment. The sport industry needs to move the environment up the agenda."

Dr Nguyen has been invited to speak on behalf of the Australian and New Zealand sport sector in Paris next week at the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21/CMP11), the annual meeting between nations, which have vowed to take on climate change.

"This conference is crucial for its objective to come to a renewed global agreement aimed at stabilising atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases and keeping global warming below 2°," Dr Nguyen said.

"European sports organisations, NGOs, government representatives and the public at-large will make up the audience, so it is my hope that sharing our stories will increase the awareness of the Australasian sport industry's good work in environmental stewardship and see us considered a valued stakeholder in the wider [climate change](#) effort and conversation."

The sport industry is considered resource intensive in its use of water, energy and materials, for example, through its business and athlete needs, infrastructure materials, use of packaging and so on. However Dr Nguyen argues that while across the board the sport industry isn't any

more environmentally offensive than other businesses, it does have an incredible opportunity to influence through its reach and profile.

"There are two great opportunities for sport in the [environmental sustainability](#) movement – built environment and stakeholder engagement," Dr Nguyen said.

"Built environment opportunities include, but are not limited to, areas of improvement for sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources and indoor air quality. And when it comes to stakeholder engagement, it could be using its star power to influence social attention towards environmental sustainability."

Dr Nguyen cites the Melbourne Cricket Ground in Yarra Park as an example of the sport industry showing leadership in environmental sustainability.

"They have designed, built and are operating a water treatment facility on site where they treat water to the extent that it is class A level. Around 600 kilolitres of water is produced and used to water the park," she said.

"With the Australian Open around the corner, it is worth noting that they have been part of an ongoing 15 year, \$700 million, redevelopment project with the goal to establish Melbourne Olympic Park as 'one of the most sustainable sports and entertainment venues in the world,' and they have done so with energy reduction strategies and infrastructure decisions, with Margaret Court being the first LEED Gold certified sport facility in Australia.

"This is the tip of the iceberg, and the volume of eco-conscious actions will continue to grow within our industry and within the Australasian region."

Dr Nguyen's passion for environmental issues when she was eight years old.

"When asked what I would like to be when I grew up, my response was 'an environmentalist'," she explained.

"I was greatly inspired by the enviro-consciousness of my best mate's parents from that young and impressionable age, and have always had an underlying 'hippy streak' which has manifest in my research exploring how high profile industries, like sport, can use its star power to influence social attention – environmental sustainability is one such area.

"I am immensely fortunate that my passion for both the health of the environment and the future of our sport industry has culminated into an opportunity to spread the good word and perhaps encourage step change, small or large, through presenting on the COP21 stage at the Grand Palais."

Provided by Deakin University

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