

BOARD ROUNDS



Information update from the Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board

The Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board is issuing this information update as the first in what will be regular updates to the sector on matters relevant to the Board's role in the regulation of professional boxing and combat sports in Victoria.

Professional Boxing and Combat Sports Board membership has undergone some changes with the addition of a new Chair and two new members this year.

Alan Clayton was appointed as **Chair** in May 2023 replacing Simone Bailey who joined the board in 2015 and served as Chairperson for the last six years. Alan has significant regulatory experience, working in courts, corrections, child protection, disability services, gambling and greyhound racing and as Chair of the Board is committed to facilitating a vibrant program of promotions where the health and safety of contestants and the highest standards of integrity are at the centre of the Board's focus.

Alan is joined by **Stephen Bunce** and **Angela McLaren** who were appointed in

April and June this year. Stephen is a member of the Victorian Bar and has a lifelong passion for combat sports, having trained and competed in various combat sports at the amateur level. Angela's professional experience spans government regulation, private and not for profit sectors and she brings a knowledge and keen interest in combat sports. They are complementary additions to **Mick Ashton, Dan Cairnes, Neil Sjostrom** and **Sussan Thomas** (Victoria Police) as existing members of the Board.

Mandate – integrity and contestant health and safety

Recently the Victorian State Government reiterated its expectations of the Board.

“Essential regulation of professional boxing and combat sports must ensure the integrity and fairness of the industry and prioritise the health and safety of contestants”.

(Pete Betson, Deputy Secretary Sport and the Experience Economy, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions).

Traumatic brain injury

The Board participated in the recent public hearing as part of the Victorian State Coroner's inquest into the death of professional boxer, Shane Tuck. Following feedback already received from the Coroner's expert neurosurgeon, the Board has broadened its focus from concussion to traumatic brain injury. The Board will be proactive in addressing any findings and recommendations handed down by the Coroner and has already developed bespoke education videos for the sector to raise awareness of traumatic brain injury including concussion and the Board's return to fight strategy. The videos will be released early in 2024 and viewing them will become a mandatory requirement of all

registration, licence and permit applications processes. The video materials will be offered to organisations and associations working in amateur settings to encourage informed decisions by participants and a consistency in prevention and management of traumatic brain injury across competition, training, professional, amateur and recreational settings.

The Board has established a Medical Advisory Sub-Committee that includes Professor Tissa Wijeratne, Neurologist and Dr Chris Barnes, Haematologist and ringside physician and is working with them to consider the emerging scientific evidence associated with traumatic brain injury and contact sports and any potential improvements to strengthen contestant safety in combat sports.

• Growth in the sport

There has been a healthy increase in the number of promotions held over the last two years, following the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. There was a 35% increase in the number of promotions supervised in 2022-2023. The Board continues to supervise about 60 promotions annually that consist predominantly of professional level as well as a smaller proportion of corporate and amateur level events (that are not convened by a recognised amateur association).

The Board is conscious of the need to ensure that there are sufficient referees, judges, timekeepers and ringside doctors to officiate at promotions and will be prioritising a focus on pathways and accreditation of licensed officials and ringside medical officials to ensure a consistency in standards and procedures. Further updates about this will be provided in coming months.

• Assessing fairness in matchmaking

In fulfilling these expectations the Board is applying a priority focus to the critical assessment of contestant's competency as it considers applications for registration (including renewals of registration) and proposed matchups, including those that apply for exhibitions.

The emerging scientific evidence about traumatic brain injury as a result of repetitive head impacts and its long term consequences for participants of combat sports is a key consideration informing the Board's decisions about registrations and matchups.

• Modernising the registration, licence and permit system

A digital registration, licence and permit system for combat sports in Victoria is in development that will automate and streamline application processes. It is expected that the digital system will be available mid 2024 and further updates will be issued over the coming months.