

**REPORT ON A**

**SURVEY OF THE AGES AND CODE PREFERENCES**

**OF**

**TASMANIAN CROQUET PLAYERS**

**&**

**SOME CONSTRAINTS ON THE GROWTH OF**

**CROQUET IN TASMANIA**

August 2017

# **SURVEY OF CROQUET PLAYERS IN TASMANIA**

## **Background**

What was the reason for this survey?

The writer had been tasked with attempting to raise sponsorship funds to heighten the image of the 19 Point GC Tournament conducted by Kingston Croquet Club in the Queen's Birthday Weekend in June of each year. The first question asked by potential sponsors was invariably: "What is your demographic?"

Thus, it was decided to conduct the survey and to share the results with Croquet Tasmania and its constituent clubs as an aid in dealing with potential sponsors and grant funders.

The writer has included some personal observations on a couple of matters affecting croquet in Tasmania towards the end of the report.

## **Methodology**

The survey was conducted through July and August of 2017 by circulating the secretaries of the ten Tasmanian clubs with a request that they invite their members to participate in a survey seeking information on the ages and code preferences of their members.

Respondents were invited to reply by email (fillable pdf with submit button or completing and saving form prior to emailing) or by mail either directly to the survey taker or via their club secretary. Thirty five percent of the respondents chose to reply by email despite many having difficulties with the fillable pdf.

Responses were received from fifty two percent of all croquet players affiliated through Croquet Tasmania.

A query to the ACA had indicated that they did not have any national statistics on the male/female or age mix of croquet players other than the results of a "Demographic Extrapolation" prepared by Croquet West in 2014. A copy of this was supplied to the survey taker.

## **Participation Rates**

ABS and Croquet Australia figures for population and croquet players respectively show that the participation rate for croquet in Australia is very low

	Population (,000)	Croquet Players	%
as at December 2016			
NSW (Inc. ACT)	8204	3093	0.04%
VIC	6244	2759	0.04%
QLD	4884	1395	0.03%
SA	1717	987	0.06%
WA	2568	704	0.03%
TAS	519	397	0.08%
NT	245		
Other	5		
TOTAL	24386	9335	0.04%

Table 1.

Table 1 show the populations of the various states and the numbers of registered croquet players at the end of 2016.

The participation rate in Tasmania is, surprisingly, twice the average of the nation and well clear of the next state (SA).

Notwithstanding this there is obviously a need to recruit more players to our game in Tasmania.

## Playing Groups

Much is made of the fact that croquet is a sport that can be played equally well by anyone regardless of gender or age. In recognition of this fact the survey looked at the ratio of female to male players and the ages of participants across six age spans (5-20, 21-35, 36 -50, 51-65, 66-80 and >80).

### Gender

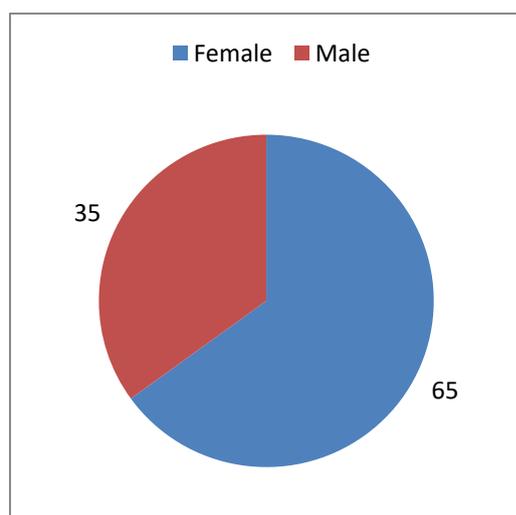


Chart 1. Gender

Chart 1 shows the percentage split of females and males in Tasmanian croquet players (65/35) and is almost identical with the results obtained in the 2014 WA Survey (66/34).

Although Tasmania and WA are the two states with the lowest numbers of croquet players, together they represent about 10% and therefore probably reflect the female/male mix for the whole of Australia.

## Age

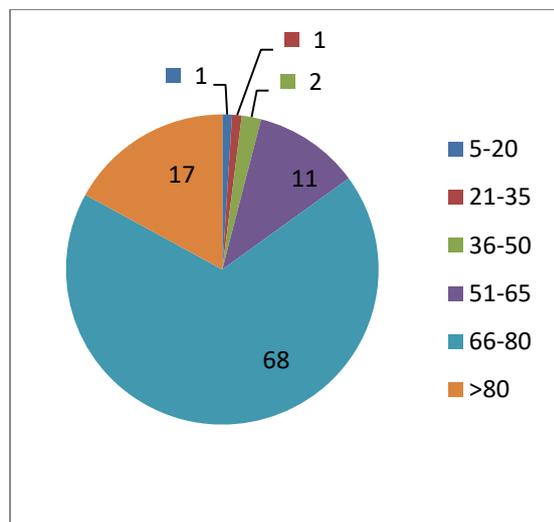


Chart 2 Players' Ages

Chart 2 shows the age ranges into which all (female and male) players fall.

Some thought was given to determining the ranges to be used. Croquet is often referred to as “an older person’s game”: what is an older person? For the purposes of the survey the writer has accepted that this is a person over the nominal retirement age of 65, so 65-80. The ACA is attempting to promote golf croquet at an under 21 level, so 5-20. The over 80 category clearly demonstrates that age is not a barrier

to playing croquet. The other three categories fall in that period of life where professions and families are commenced (21-35), are established (36-50) and then, hopefully, with family and profession well established time for more leisure (51-65)

The Tasmanian experience is like that of most croquet communities, the majority of players fall into the older age groups. 85% of croquet players in Tasmania are aged over 65.

The WA survey did not report on the overall split of ages although it did break age groups down by gender. This aspect in Tasmania will be addressed later in this report.

## **Codes - Association or Golf**

The WA survey reported the following percentage mix: -

Association	15
Golf	66
Both	16
Unspecified	3

In our survey we asked an additional question –“If you play both codes which do you prefer?” – as it was felt that the answer to this would give a better indication of the time spent in playing each code

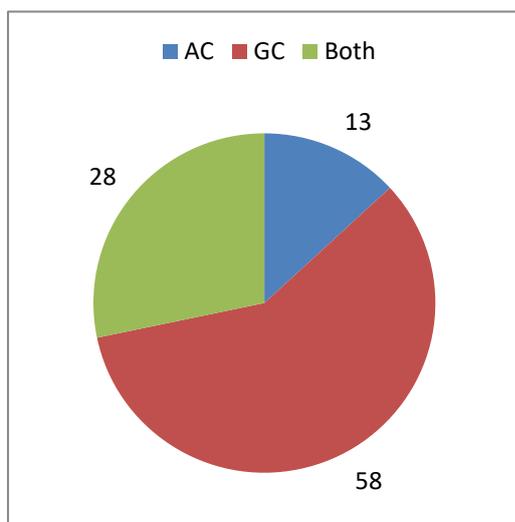


Chart 3 Code Preference

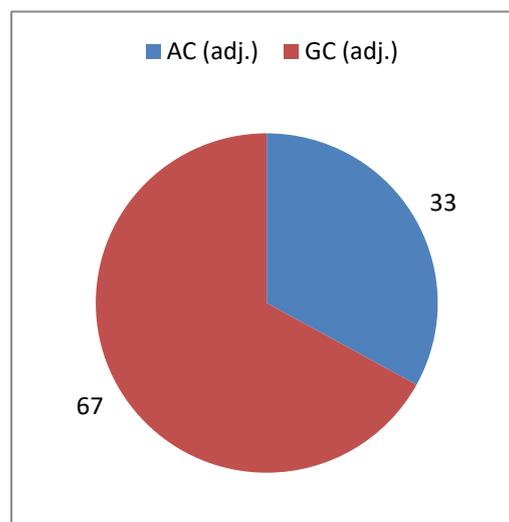


Chart 4 Code Preference (Adjusted)

The Tasmanian percentage of those who play both codes is almost twice that of the figure reported for WA and although at first glance it might appear that AC's popularity in both states is similar the game preferred by those who play both codes has a large bearing on the percentage of court time occupied by each code.

There is a major difference between the preferences of female and male players who play both codes, again more later.

## Recruitment

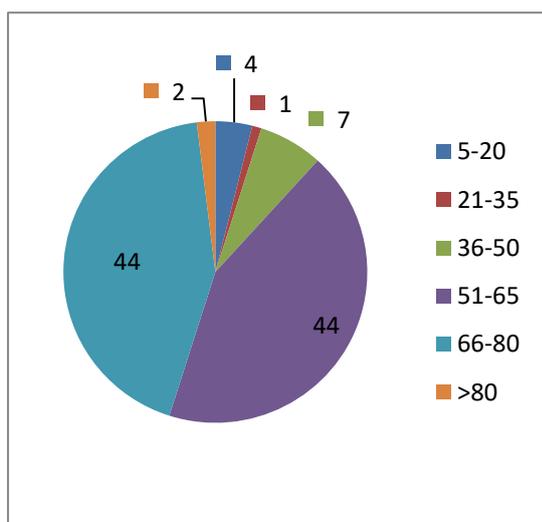


Chart 5 Commencement Age

Participants were asked to indicate the age at which they began playing croquet.

Responses have been grouped into the same age ranges as used in the previous section dealing with ages of players.

As might be expected the majority of people presently playing croquet have commenced playing later in life with 44% of respondent in each of the 51 to 65 and 66 to 80 cohorts.

60% of respondents commenced croquet in the age range 60 to 70 with the numbers being equal in both halves of the decade.

## Additional Analysis by Age and Code

### Female

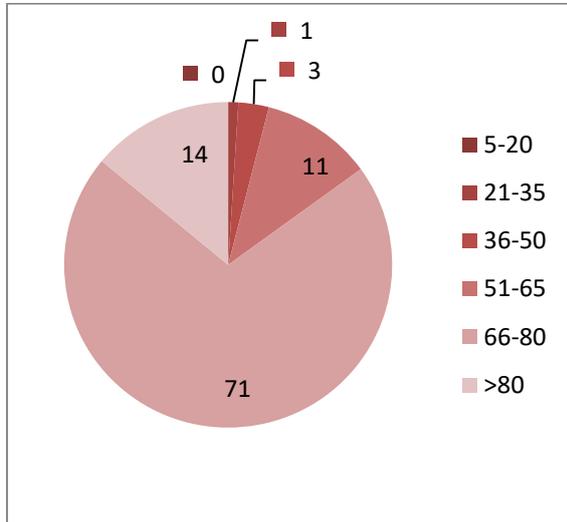


Chart 6 Female Ages

### Male

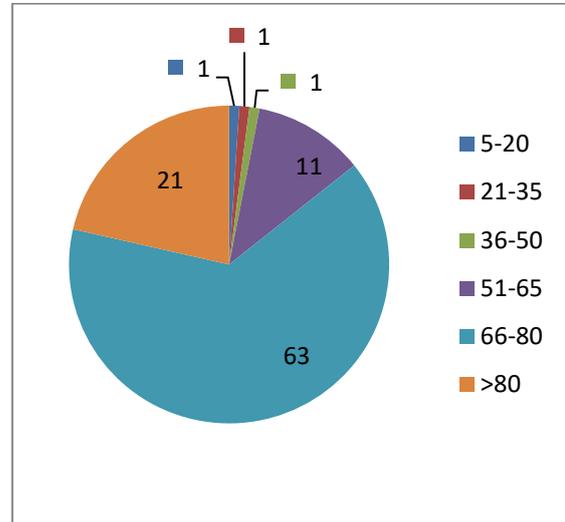


Chart 7 Male Ages

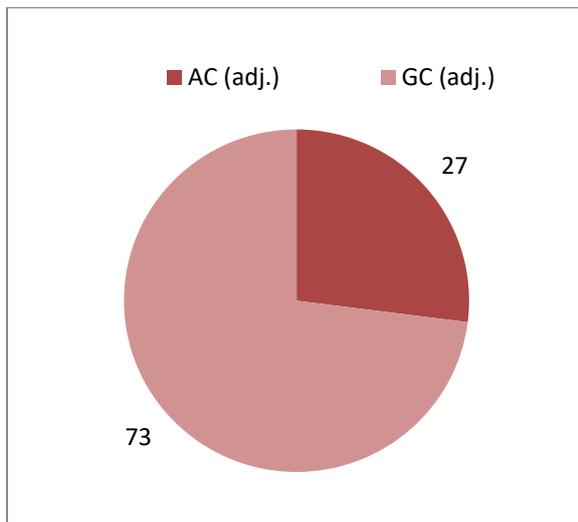


Chart 8 Female Code Preferred

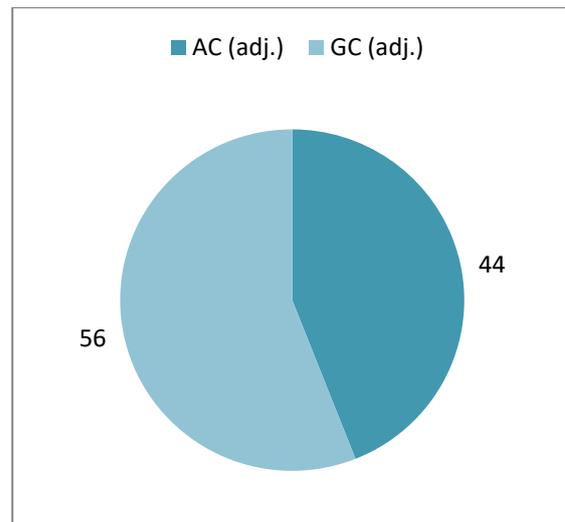


Chart 9 Male Code Preferred

Charts 6 and 7 show the age breakdown of females and males and Charts 8 and 9 the (adjusted) code preferences of females and males.

The percentages of females and males over 65 are equal but the proportion of males over 80 is 50% higher than that of females.

Of those respondents who indicated that they played both games the preference for AC was much greater with male respondents, 44%, compared to females, 27%. The

result being that while a little over a quarter of females prefer to play AC the figure for males is nearer to one half.

The WA 2014 figures are listed for comparison. Note the different age ranges used in their survey.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
0-19	0	1%
20-59	14%	21%
>60	82%	76%
Unspecified	4%	2%

*Table 2 WA Age Spread by Gender*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
AC	14%	15%
GC	68%	63%
Both	15%	20%
Unspecified	3%	2%

*Table 3 WA Code Preferences by Gender*

## **Observations**

### **Age**

Problems arise from the aging of players and particularly from the advancing ages of males who would normally be expected to participate in much of the heavier work undertaken by the volunteer workforce of club members, e.g., lawn maintenance, etc.

Lack of this volunteer workforce leads to either (sometimes both) deterioration in the quality of lawns or additional costs incurred by having to retain professionals to undertake the tasks otherwise performed by volunteers. Both problems can cause loss of club members, some will go to other clubs for better facilities while others may drop out of croquet completely because of increasing costs.

The other obvious matter related to age is the natural loss of players due to illness, infirmity and death. If croquet is to prosper and continue as a viable sport the croquet bureaucracy at club, state and national levels must look at ways to recruit more players.

### **Recruitment**

An examination of the responses to the survey confirms the view that most new recruits to croquet commence playing the game in their 60s. Typically recruitment occurs as a result of Seniors' Week, U3A and friendships with existing players. The problem with this is that most of the new recruits will suffer from the same aging problems as the existing player pool.

## **Codes**

The perception that AC is dying in Tasmania is not born out by the survey results (ref. Chart 4 above) when one takes into account the playing preferences of those respondents who indicated that they play both codes.

The concentrated effort of southern clubs to teach and coach GC players in the techniques and tactics of AC is clearly paying dividends.

Unfortunately the picture is not as good in the north of the state where the equivalent figures (after adjustment for preference of those playing both codes) are AC 18%:GC 82%.

The Devonport Club reports that 13 of its 23 members, including “newer” members, are enthusiastic about playing Ricochet, a game designed by John Riches as a means of teaching AC - can this be developed to the next logical step?

The introduction of GC caused more scheduling problems in Tasmania than in other places because of the smaller pool from which players of the two codes can be drawn. Developing other mallet sport codes here would exacerbate these problems.

## **Other Matters**

The following two matters do not result from anything in the survey but are rather the writer’s personal observations after being involved with croquet in Tasmania for five years.

- There exists a dichotomy between groups of players in that some view croquet as a competitive sport and others as a social activity. This often causes friction at the club level between the two groups as the social players consider that the more competitive aspects of the game, pennants, tournaments, etc., reduce the time available for them to have access to the lawns.

There is also a degree of resistance by some to the thought of expanding competitions into the school area for this same reason – that it will reduce the court time available to existing members.

There can be no doubt that croquet is a competitive sport; it is played competitively at a national and international level between individuals, states and nations. Notwithstanding that fact, there is no reason that it cannot also be a social activity. The problem is to marry the two activities harmoniously.

If members are prepared to travel short distances and clubs are prepared to share facilities the close proximity of club facilities in each of the three regions of Tasmania and the under-utilisation of the total number of lawns available provides

an opportunity for competitive and social play to be better organised by the sharing of lawns.

- Another constraint on the growth of croquet in Tasmania is the lack of four court venues, particularly in the south of the state. Four courts are recognised as the minimum requirement to host a unit of the national championships in both AC and GC.

Tasmania has hosted National Championships in GC (2015) and AC (2017) and in earlier years augmenting club lawns with space on soccer pitches, football grounds and bowling greens. Comments from participants on these temporary facilities have been anything but complimentary.

For the standard of croquet played in Tasmania to improve it is vital to attract low handicap players from the mainland to local tournaments.

The lack of multi-court venues limits the number of matches that are available to entrants with the result that low handicap players from the Mainland are not interested in entering tournaments conducted by Tasmanian clubs. The obvious exception to this is the Easter carnival held at the six lawn Northern Tasmanian Croquet Centre at St Leonards.

## **Conclusions & Recommendations**

For croquet, in Tasmania and nationally, to prosper in the long term it is essential that a vigorous campaign to recruit younger players is undertaken as a matter of urgency.

In addition to this general requirement to introduce more players to the game Croquet Tasmania needs to make representations to State and Local Government with a view to establishing four court venues.

The survey indicated that of the 206 respondents only one commenced playing while in the 21-35 age group. This group is not seen as having any value as a field for recruitment.

Existing arrangements for recruiting the 51-65, 66-80 and >80 groups should continue.

It is suggested that the best age groups on which to concentrate recruitment efforts are 5-20 and 36-50. These two groups can easily be seen as one contiguous group, the younger cohort being the children of the older.

Croquet Australia has, over the last three years, conducted National Under 21 GC Championships and was fortunate to have the World U21 allocated to Melbourne in January of this year.

This national U21 competition could be used as a basis to establish croquet competitions between secondary schools and colleges and individual students with a view to having students continue in the game after school. If interschool competitions can be initiated parents of the students would inevitably be exposed to the game with the potential for recruiting them along with their children.

The opportunity to represent one's country, with the current example of the Fletcher brothers, must be seen as wonderful challenge/opportunity for these young people.

If a recruitment campaign along these lines is to be undertaken it must be at an organisational level with state and national associations first seeking commitment from clubs and club members, and then approaching individual schools to participate. State Departments of Education and Sport and Recreation need to be involved and the Australian Sports Commission should be approached for material assistance.

The national and state associations need to commit funds to a professionally designed campaign including the preparation of material such as brochures, videos and press and television promotions.

Perhaps we, the croquet community, can learn by looking at the way in which another sport with many similar characteristics to ours – Orienteering, a non-contact, gender neutral sport, played in the open air, requiring tactical skills and providing the opportunity for family generations to play together - promotes itself. Orienteering, which has approximately the same number of registered participants as croquet nationally, has achieved funding status with the Australian Sports Commission.

*Refer to the attached extracts from Orienteering Australia reports.*

Peter Tracey

Hobart

August 22, 2017

Click [HERE](#) to see relevant Extracts from Orienteering Australia reports