

Media Release

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Digital Editors: note image links at end of release

Homophobia in Sport Campaigner Receives Order of Australia Medal

The founder of the Sydney Convicts, Australia's first gay rugby union club, has been awarded the **Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)** for "service to rugby union and to the promotion of social inclusion for LGBTI people." The award was announced on Australia Day.

Andrew "Fuzz" Purchas founded the Sydney Convicts in 2004 to provide gay, and many straight men, with a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment to play and enjoy sport. Purchas has played a key leadership role in the club since it was founded, helping lead the Convicts to many victories on and off the field.

On the field, the Convicts have challenged stereotypes and proven gay men can and do play high-quality, competitive, contact sports. They have won their local, mainstream competition twice (they play in the Sydney Suburban Rugby Union as part of the Woollahra Colleagues Ruby Club). The Convicts have also won the Bingham Cup, the world cup of gay rugby, four times, making the club the most successful of the 80+ gay and inclusive rugby clubs around the world.

Off the field, the Convicts have been strong advocates for change to sporting culture. **Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull** said the Convicts "elevated the issue of homophobia in sport onto the national agenda." [1]

In 2014, the Convicts hosted (and subsequently won) the Bingham Cup, in Sydney. Purchas was president of the organising committee, which set-out to use the event to increase the visibility of gay athletes and discrimination experienced. The event became a catalyst for change to sporting culture:

- Purchas played a central role in convincing the CEOs of five of Australia's major sports (the ARU, AFL, NRL, FFA and Cricket Australia), **to sign formal commitments to 'eliminate' homophobia** from their respective sports
- The Bingham Cup and related anti-homophobia initiatives generated **thousands of media stories**, around the world, increasing awareness about gay athletes and homophobia
- The Bingham Committee and the Sydney Convicts commissioned and managed the "Out on the Fields" study, which was **the first international study on homophobia in sport**. The research findings provided very strong, statistical evidence of homophobia in sport. [More info and statistics at end of release](#)
- Purchas also led the creation of the Pride in Sport Index, which is the **world's first program to measure the progress made by sports bodies in addressing homophobia** and making their sports inclusive of LGBT people. To date, nine peak sporting bodies have agreed to undergo annual measurement and reporting in PSI's inaugural year. [More info:](#) <http://www.prideindiversity.com.au/prideinsport/>



Sydney Convicts President, Don Rose, said “The Sydney Convicts are extremely proud and congratulate Andrew “Fuzz” Purchas, founder and life member of the Sydney Convicts Rugby Club, for his recognition in this year’s Australia Day Honours. Andrew’s long standing commitment and service to rugby locally and internationally, has been a driving force behind the ever-growing landscape of anti-homophobia in sport spanning more than a decade. I have personally witnessed his passion, dedication, and commitment to delivering real change to our community. I’m also aware of Andrew’s significant contributions to LGBT inclusion in many other aspects of his life.”

Rose continued, “On behalf of the Sydney Convicts, and as an individual who benefits from the work he pioneered, I am extremely grateful for Andrew’s substantial contribution to rugby and LGBT inclusion over many years. Congratulations Fuzz!”

Purchas is also Chairman of International Gay Rugby (IGR) and has been on its executive for the past 12 years. Following the ground-breaking work of Andrew Purchas and the Sydney Convicts, in advocating the need for proactive initiatives promoting LGBT inclusion in sport, World Rugby and IGR entered an MOU to promote and support LGBT inclusion in rugby. World Rugby is the first World Sporting Body to formally agreed to address homophobia.

Andrew Purchas said, “I am thrilled and honoured to receive this award which reflects the contribution of many people in working towards equality in sport regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Purchas says much more work is still needed to change sporting culture. “Despite significant social advances in the recognition of rights of gay and transgendered people, discrimination in sport continues to be both common and damaging. Without pro-active initiatives, at all levels of sport, this discrimination will continue to have a very negative impact on the ability for LGBT people to enjoy the many benefits that sports offer.”

1. Malcolm Turnbull made these comments in 2015 after the Convicts received a series of awards, including one from the United Nations/International Public Relations Association, for their advocacy work <http://bit.ly/2kl7Vum>

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About Homophobia in Sport

Numerous studies conducted in Australia and overseas have found sporting culture have found high levels of homophobic behaviour, particularly in men’s team sports. The most notable was the Out on the Fields Study, which found 80% of the 3000 gay and straight Australian study participants had ‘witnessed or experienced homophobia in a sporting environment.’ The most common form was slurs such as ‘faggot’ or ‘dyke.’ This anti-gay behaviour, even if it is intended to be humorous, makes gay and lesbian people feel unsafe and unwelcome. A study by [beyondblue](http://beyondblue.org) also found this form of discrimination contributes to the high levels of suicide among LGBT people. For more info visit www.outonthefields.com



About the Order of Australia

The Order of Australia is the pre-eminent way Australian's recognise outstanding members of the community at a national level and nominations are encouraged from all members of the Australian public. The purpose of the Order of Australia is to recognise, by national honour, those who have made outstanding contributions that benefit their communities, and ultimately our country. The second purpose of the Order of Australia is that it serves to define, encourage and reinforce community standards, national aspirations and ideals by acknowledging actions and achievement and thereby identifying role models at all levels and in all spheres of the community.

More info: <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/government/its-honour/medal-order-australia>

Images of Andrew Purchas

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lyrxrtguvqkzx6/AAAWaUZFsW-hOgZooLk2wyy8a?dl=0>