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WOMEN CATCH THE SPORT BUG IN 2006

Australian women have caught the sport bug leading strong growth in viewing of sports programs on free-to-air commercial television in 2006.

A Free TV Australia analysis of the metropolitan TV ratings in 2006 shows double-digit growth has been recorded across several major demographic groups including Men 16-39, Men 25-54 and Women 16-39.

The greatest growth in audiences for Free TV sport is among Women 25-54. This demographic has experienced 45 per cent growth in metro areas in 2006 compared to the same period last year, and 39 per cent growth in regional areas.

In particular, women are watching more cricket and rugby union.

The Commonwealth Games also helped boost overall audiences for sport on commercial free-to-air television with audiences up more than 28 per cent on the same period last year. Even compared with another Commonwealth Games year (2002) audiences in 2006 are up 33 per cent.

Compared with five years ago, metro TV audiences viewing sport on commercial free-to-air television are up 32 per cent (2006 v 2001).

In regional markets, it's a similar story with a 32 per cent increase in audiences viewing sporting programs compared to the same period last year.

Last week alone, sport programs on Free TV reached more than 7.7 million Australians in the 5 cap cities and a further 3.1 million in regional areas.

"With footy finals season about to swing in to gear, the growth is likely to continue as viewers tune in, in their millions, for must-see TV such as the AFL and NRL Grand Finals and the final Bledisloe Cup match," said Free TV Australia's CEO, Julie Flynn.

"The figures demonstrate that free coverage of sports is more valued by Australians than ever and it is essential that the anti-siphoning list be maintained so that it can continue to deliver the quality sports coverage viewers love."

For media enquires, please call Free TV Australia on (02) 8968 7100.

Figures sourced from OzTAM and Regional TAM data. Based on analysis of "sports" genre (Sports Event, Special Sports Event & Other Sport); all people, survey weeks 7-31, excluding Easter.