

Albanese government faces backlash over visas for Russian athletes in Sydney

Russia's women's water polo team will this week compete in Sydney, just weeks after the IOC lifted a ban on the nation.



[Josh Hanrahan](#), July 20, 2026 - 7:59PM

Russia's women's water polo team has arrived in Sydney to compete under its national flag, sparking fury from the Ukrainian community.

The arrival of Russian athletes to compete under their flag on Australian soil has infuriated the Ukrainian community, and prompted calls for the Albanese government to explain why it did not block their visas.

Russia's women's water polo team will this week compete in the eight-team World Cup in Sydney, weeks after the International Olympic Committee lifted a ban on athletes competing in their national colours.

Ukrainian groups had previously called on the federal government to refuse the team visas, citing links to institutions and individuals sanctioned by Australia for supporting or financially backing the war in Ukraine.

Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, told The Daily Telegraph the presence of Russian athletes was "deeply disappointing".

"Australia has been one of Ukraine's strongest supporters since Russia's full-scale invasion, so seeing Russian athletes competing under their national flag here sends the wrong signal," Mr Myroshnychenko said.

"It risks normalising Russia's aggression at a time when Russia continues to wage a brutal war against Ukraine, killing civilians and destroying cities on a daily basis. Sport should never become a vehicle for overlooking or sanitising ongoing war crimes.

“More than 600 Ukrainian athletes have been killed, hundreds of sports facilities have been destroyed, and millions of Ukrainians continue to live under constant missile and drone attacks. Reinstating Russia under its own flag suggests that aggression can eventually be overlooked without accountability.”

Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations chair Kateryna Argyrou said the presence of the “blood-soaked Russian flag” in Australia would be used as propaganda by President Vladimir Putin.



Kateryna Argyrou, with Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the war, slammed the arrival of the Russian athletes in Australia as a “disgrace”. Image: Supplied

“A Russian national team is not a collection of independent athletes - it is a representation of the state itself,” Ms Argyrou said.

“It is disgraceful that today the blood-soaked Russian flag will be broadcast around the world from Sydney. The Kremlin will use it as propaganda - alleged proof that Russia is ‘normal’ and ‘accepted’.

“Their war crimes will be sportswashed on an Australian stage.”

The IOC placed restrictions on Belarusian and Russian athletes in October 2023, after Russia invaded Ukraine, before lifting them in May and July 7.

Opposition home affairs spokesman Jonno Duniam called for the “toughest security checks” on the players and said the federal government must explain what steps it took before approving their visas and whether any members of the team had links to sanctioned individuals.

“Home Affairs works with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to determine if the granting of a visa to an individual would be contrary to Australia’s foreign policy interests,” Mr Duniam said.

After qualifying through earlier rounds, Russia, captained by Ekaterina Profkofyeva, will play the Netherlands in the quarterfinals at the Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre in Homebush on Wednesday.