



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

**Senior Male Football and Senior Netball Proposal
December 2023**



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FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

“AFL Barwon exists to support the passion of our stakeholders through responsible governance and professional leadership, in order to deliver a thriving sporting community.”

Participation across the region remains strong and growth continues post the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation and partial cancellation of seasons of 2020 and 2021.

The AFL Barwon Commission entered the 2023 season with a goal of completing a new Strategic Plan to ensure football and netball across the AFL Barwon region continues to grow and remains as a pre-eminent competition across county Victoria.

Throughout the development of this plan, it became apparent that whilst participation numbers were strong in the region, there were concerns highlighted.

These included:

- Varying competitiveness across the competitions
- Changing demographics as Geelong changes and evolves like never before
- Sustainability issues of some clubs through financial commitments
- Sustainability issues of some clubs through reducing junior participation in some areas
- Introduction of a minimum of 2, possible up to 4 new Clubs within the next 8-10 years from new areas of Geelong
- Changes to schools and 'catchment areas' of young players
- Continued issues with equity through the existing points and salary cap system
- Pressure on volunteers
- Clubs across county Victoria merging, going into recess, folding or being uncompetitive for prolonged periods
- Sports such as soccer and basketball continue to draw some young participants, this is especially high in pockets across Geelong

This was reviewed alongside opportunities that also exist alongside the above risks, these included:

- Geelong continues to grow, new growth corridors are bringing in young families, this means new clubs in new areas of Geelong will be required in coming years
- Interest and participation in football and netball in the region is at an all time high
- Some clubs are in a position to stretch and grow if given opportunities
- An opportunity to develop the highest standard of country football and netball in country Victoria
- A geographic advantage in terms of reduced travel compared to other leagues across metro and country leagues
- Clubs that are highly engaged in the development of young people and improvement of the community across Geelong.

With this in mind, and as part of the broader Strategic Plan, the Commission embarked on a process to consult on a new competition structure that whilst not being able to resolve all challenges immediately, could setup the football and netball landscape across the Geelong region to be contemporary and flexible and be able to manage the future challenges and take advantage of the opportunities.

It was also important to ensure that AFL Barwon created a structure and competition that was relevant to the local community, was an exciting prospect to players, supporters and sponsors and complemented Geelong's unique position of having the only regionally based AFL club.



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

PROJECT OUTCOMES



SENIOR MALE FOOTBALL & NETBALL

Creating a competition landscape that promotes greater pathways, competitiveness and opportunities for Clubs and players to succeed.



FEMALE FOOTBALL

Addressing growth opportunities across age groups, fixturing formats in-line with Fair Access Policy regulatory developments.



JUNIOR FOOTBALL & NETBALL

Creating a competition landscape that promotes greater participation and opportunities for Clubs to succeed.



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

PROJECT OUTCOMES



NEW CLUBS

Armstrong Creek FC & Surf Coast Suns FNC amongst other new Clubs into the future – how can they enter Senior Football & Netball and succeed?



LGA POPULATION CHANGES

Maximising how we capitalise on projected changes to population across the four major LGAs of City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire & Golden Plains & Colac Otway Shire.

Prior to finalising this structure, AFL Barwon has conducted three ‘town hall’ style consultation evenings, received dozens of responses via feedback channels and emails, along with countless phone calls and conversations. The AFL Barwon Commission and management team are truly appreciative of all the engagement and feedback received.

Throughout this process, we have concluded that the best way to resolve several of the current challenges and set our competitions up for sustainable success into the future is via an updated, contemporary competition structure. Feedback on the proposed structure has been generally positive, however we fully recognise that there are a number of views and opinions on the options. Change of this scale across so many competitions, clubs, towns and participants is never easy.

We are strong in our view that the structure outlined in the following pages will allow us to grow and develop into the future. Our football and netball community is in good hands with so many passionate and engaged people across our region.

The AFL Barwon Commission



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

THREE DIVISIONAL STRUCTURE



Competitions from 2025 will enter a three divisional model.

Each league has minimum participation requirements, points system and salary cap.

Female Football and Junior Football structures remain unchanged and have been discussed separately, [this document refers to Senior Football and Netball competitions only.](#)

The *AFL Barwon Premier League* is the set to be the *Country* pre-eminent league across the state.

The salary cap is set at a higher level to allow the attraction of high-end talent and be able to compete with other *Country* and *Metro* leagues for this talent. The cap is also set with an eye to the importance of ensuring the competition is driven by the development of local talent and the pathways for Juniors to develop within the region.

The Netball salary cap also increases to \$25K by 2026 to acknowledge the importance of Netball in building the community across our AFL Barwon Clubs and the high standard of Netball expected to be played in the Premier League.

AFL Barwon Division 1 has a slightly lower salary cap, but allows for 2 additional player points recognising that some movement from the Premier League to Division 1 is likely and encouraged. Division 1 also heavily encourages the development of Juniors and allows for clubs in a position to do so, to build and push for Premier League entry.

AFL Barwon Division 2 is designed to allow for Clubs to develop Junior programs for future expansion and progression, but also recognises that some Clubs, for a range of factors, may not be able to attract or sustain larger Junior programs. An allowance of 44 points is available, recognising that some Clubs could be challenged to develop locally. Prioritisation of AFL Barwon resourcing and funding will be directed to Division 2 to help establish sustainable Clubs and develop Junior programs for clubs wishing to build towards future promotion.

AFL Barwon understand that whilst progression and development for the future is required, preserving the history of both the Geelong Football Netball League and the Bellarine Football Netball League is important and we'll continue to look to ways to incorporate and retain as much of this history as possible.



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THREE DIVISIONAL STRUCTURE

AFL BARWON PREMIER LEAGUE

Football

- Male Senior/Reserve
- Minimum 1 team each Male Junior age group
- Non-mandatory Senior Female
- Establish Junior Female (to be established prior to Senior entry)*

Netball

- 1 team per A-E Grade Seniors
- Minimum of 2 teams per Junior Grade

Minimum participation requirements

~150 Male Footballers (52 Senior/98 Junior)
 ~120 Netballers (45 Senior/70 Junior)
 Plus Junior/Senior Female Football

Player points

Football 40 points - Netball 22 points

Salary cap

- 2025: Football \$110K - Netball \$20K
- 2026: Football \$110K - Netball \$25K

**A Club with an existing Female Football Program will still be able to continue this program without a Junior Program, but will significantly be encouraged to begin a Junior Program.*

AFL BARWON DIVISION 1

Football

- Male Senior/Reserve
- Preferred 1 team each Male Junior age group
- Non-mandatory Senior Female
- Non-mandatory Junior Female (to be established prior to Senior entry)*

Netball

- 1 team per A-E Grade Seniors
- Minimum of 2 teams per Junior Grade

Player points

Football 42 points - Netball 24 points

Salary cap

- 2025: Football \$90K - Netball \$15k
- 2026: Football \$90K - Netball \$15K

**A Club with an existing Female Football Program will still be able to continue this program without a Junior Program, but will significantly be encouraged to begin a Junior Program.*



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

THREE DIVISIONAL STRUCTURE

AFL BARWON DIVISION 2

Football

- Male Senior/Reserve
- Preferred 1 team each Male Junior age group
- Non-mandatory Senior Female, encouraged Junior Female (to be established prior to Senior entry)*

Netball

- 1 team per A-E Grade Seniors
- Preferred 1 team per Junior Grade

Player points

Football 44 points - Netball 26 points

Salary cap

- 2025: Football \$75K - Netball \$15k
- 2026: Football \$80K - Netball \$15K

- Club Development Lead dedicated
- \$100K invested by AFLB over 3 years to develop structures and Junior Programs across all clubs in Division 2

**A Club with an existing Female Football Program will still be able to continue this program without a Junior Program, but will significantly be encouraged to begin a Junior Program.*





FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

MOVEMENT BETWEEN COMPETITIONS

Core to the establishment of a three divisional competition is the ability for Clubs to move between competitions, to provide a sporting landscape that promotes greater sustainability and competitiveness.

It is important that initially Clubs nominate a division that best represents their current position in terms of participation, financial sustainability and competitiveness (pursuant to the entry criteria outlined on Pages 6-8).

Movement criteria across the divisions is based on a *Club Championship* framework. This framework recognises the equal importance of both Football and Netball to whole Club sustainability and success. Club championship points are allocated equally across Male Senior & Reserve Football, and A & B Grade Netball.

10 points = 1st place, 1 point = 10th place. Then combined to calculate total Club Championship points for the year. The total at the conclusion of every three-year cycle then determine the Club Championship standings in each division.

Therefore, based on Club Championship points for each three-year cycle, the top-placed Club in each division is then eligible for upward movement, and the bottom-placed Club in each division is then eligible for downward movement.

Example: In a ten-Club division, one Club moves up a division for the next three years minimum, one Club moves down a division for the next three years minimum, and eight Clubs remain in the same division for the next three years.

Upward Movement Support

It is important that Clubs are competitive if they move up a division. As part of any upward movement, the following will apply:

1. Retain additional 2 points for the first two years post upward movement, before aligning to the overall division points allocation:

Football: 40 for Premier League, 42 for Division 1 and 44 for Division 2.

Netball: 22 for Premier League, 24 for Division 1 and 26 for Division 2.

2. AFL Barwon will allocate funds for the first two years post upward movement, before aligning to the overall division salary cap allocation:

Football: \$10k for the first year and \$5k for the second year.

Netball: \$2.5k for the first year and \$1.25k for the second year (only for movement from Division 1 to Premier League. Division 1 & Division 2 have salary cap parity).



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

MOVEMENT BETWEEN COMPETITIONS

Downward Movement Support

It is important that Clubs are supported if they move down a division. As part of any downward movement, the AFL Barwon Club Development Lead will be engaged directly with the Club to support:

- Juniors growth and sustainability strategy;
- Promotional support of juniors program, to enable greater community participation locally; and
- Additional dedicated support where required by the Club.

Division 2 Support

The implementation of the Club Development Lead position within AFL Barwon is to support all Clubs with their strategic direction, funding opportunities and sustainability of volunteers and their Club community.

With the implementation of the Division 2 competition, the Club Development Lead will provide significant support to these Clubs, to ensure they have a sustainable future, regardless of whether they have aspirations to move upward or not within the divisional structure.





FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

TIMELINE

1

FORUM 1 - 12TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Presentation of Concepts, Ideas and Initiatives to advance Male & Female, Junior & Senior, Football & Netball within the Barwon region.

2

FORUM 2 - 24TH OCTOBER 2023

Presentation of feedback themes and consultation across all Project areas since Forum 1

3

FORUM 3 - 5TH DECEMBER 2023

Presentation of AFLB Senior Male Football & Netball Proposal.

Senior Male Football & Senior Netball

4

INTERNAL COMMITTEE CONSULTATIONS

Where does your Club sit within the AFLB Senior Male Football & Senior Netball Proposal?

5

AFLB ENGAGEMENT

Clubs are requested to advise AFLB as to where they see themselves within the Senior Male Football & Netball Proposal.



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why have you allocated additional player points to Division 1 and 2?

The overarching criteria for clubs across AFL Barwon is junior development. However, based on the criteria, junior development is most prevalent in the Premier League clubs, followed by Division 1 and then Division 2. Therefore, it is expected that clubs in Division 1 and 2 will require more external recruitment than Premier League clubs. Allocating additional points to these leagues provides that opportunity. It also opens opportunities for players at the fringes of higher leagues to be able to be recruited to lower divisions and should they carry an additional point, this is not an inhibitor for this movement given the additional point allocations.

NB: AFL Barwon reviewed an option to remove the additional point penalty applied via the AFL Vic rules to junior players from 'premier leagues', however it was felt this competition structure provided a more controllable way to address this without setting a precedent across all AFL Vic Leagues.

2. Will all the junior players just go to the Premier League clubs?

The structure of the competitions provides options for players depending on their capability and ambitions. Even in today's league structures, there is a pull to the higher leagues from some juniors, however there are many reasons as to why juniors do not move to high division clubs. One of the reasons that juniors may not attend their most local clubs, is a perceived lack of on-field success. Ensuring senior club competitiveness, at any division, across football and netball is important for the attraction and retention of juniors.

The ability for clubs to move divisions also provides clubs the opportunity to develop a strong junior program with a view to moving into a higher league, enticing juniors with strong club ties and ambitions to develop and progress with the club.

AFL Barwon is also committing resourcing and significant funding to develop programs to attract and retain juniors for clubs in Division 2.

3. Will players leave clubs that move down a Division?

There is no doubt that when a club moves down a Division (noting that this may be 2 clubs every three years), that a small number of players may decide to depart to continue with a club in a higher division. This would be no different to decisions players make at the end of every season when they assess their own development and ambition. A three year cycle provides clubs the opportunity to quickly replace and re-build towards possible promotion.

4. How do clubs find the additional money required to move up a Division?

AFL Barwon is committing to assist clubs that step up a division to ensure they are competitive. This includes retaining the additional two points for two years and an allocation of \$10K across the first two years to assist with the increase in football and netball Salary Cap increase.

An assessment of a club's financial sustainability and ability to meet the additional financial commitments is part of the process for acceptance into a higher division.



FUTURE OF FOOTBALL & NETBALL PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

5. Why is there a difference in the salary cap between the Divisions?

It is important that each division has its own unique competition. Develop of juniors is prioritised in the allocation of points, however it is also noted that it is expected that the high divisions will have a higher level of competition. Given that, in conjunction with develop of quality juniors, the requirement to pay a higher salary to players will be required. Whilst more recruitment may be required on lower divisions (hence the additional points), it is expected that it will be at a lower per player payment level.

The salary caps are tiered based on this expectation.

6. Why have you only noted the Salary Cap to 2026 when early versions showed to 2028?

A lot of feedback on the salary cap was received. Feedback was generally half and half to either increase or keep the salary cap the same. Based on that, AFL Barwon will increase the Salary Caps by a smaller amount, \$10k to 2026 and then re-asses based on financial reports, economic environment etc. before committing to any further changes beyond 2026.

7. What happens to the Geelong and District Football Netball League?

The GDFNL will remain as a league within AFL Barwon, however will not be part of the divisional structure. Some clubs currently in the GDFNL, may participate in the new divisional structure. Discussions are on-going.



For enquiries, please contact us.

 www.aflbarwon.com.au/future

 edward.wilson@afl.com.au