



## Competition Strategy Steering Committee Terms of Reference

### Background

AFL Barwon is the governing body responsible for the administration, development and promotion of community football and netball competitions across the Barwon region. We oversee the Geelong Football Netball League, Bellarine Football Netball League, AFL Barwon Female Football League, AFL Barwon All Abilities League and AFL Barwon Juniors, and provide administrative support to the Colac & District and Geelong District Football Netball Leagues under service agreements.

Our region is widely regarded as having the most vibrant and highest standard regional football and netball leagues in Victoria, with some of the highest participation growth rates in the country. These competitions play a central role in shaping the strength, identity and sustainability of community sport across the region.

Despite this, concerns remain regarding competitive balance and the long-term sustainability of clubs across all competitions, with clear trends of top and bottom tiers within each of our leagues. Recent years have seen several clubs experience significant challenges sustaining senior and junior football and netball programs. At the same time, rapid population growth in some areas has seen the introduction of new clubs, including the first new senior team in the region in 40 years.

These dynamics highlight the fragility of some club environments and the impacts of our rapidly changing region. They reinforce the need for strong system-wide support and long-term sustainability planning to ensure we remain at the forefront of community sport in Victoria.

### Purpose

AFL Barwon is establishing a **Competition Strategy Steering Committee** to develop a long-term, evidence-based, region-wide competition strategy across both football and netball. The strategy will:

- Improve competitive balance across all senior and junior competitions.
- Enhance club sustainability, particularly for clubs experiencing long-term underperformance.
- Support participation growth and promote clear pathways from junior to senior levels.
- Provide a flexible, future-focused competition structure that can adapt to demographic, participation and club-level changes.
- Recommend long-term structural reforms for implementation from the 2028 season onward.

## Scope (in scope)

The Steering Committee will examine and make recommendations to the AFL Barwon Board on:

### Competition Structure

- Optimal regional structure across all leagues and competitions
- Club movement mechanisms between leagues
- Review existing competitive balance levers (points, salary caps, tiering, list rules)
- Junior-to-senior alignment and pathway optimisation
- Premier, Major and Minor league statuses
- Alignment of netball and football

### Club Sustainability

- Impact of demographics, geography, school links, and volunteer capacity
- Financial sustainability
- Long-term underperformance trends and risk indicators
- Support mechanisms for clubs

### Participation & Pathways

- Junior competition structure and grading
- Barriers to participation and retention
- Pathways to senior local and elite competitions
- Umpire recruitment and retention

### Operational Considerations

- Scheduling, travel, logistics, resource and cost impacts
- Volunteer and workforce implications
- Transition timelines and phased implementation of any proposed changes
- Performance metrics to monitor success of proposed changes

### Stakeholder Engagement

- Consultation with clubs, leagues, Netball Victoria and other stakeholders
- Consultation with AFL Victoria on matters affecting affiliate agreements, such as junior age groups, TPP, APP, club movement and transfer protocols
- Communication strategy for proposed changes

## Out of Scope

The Steering Committee will not consider:

- Individual club governance, culture or personnel matters
- Financial grants or funding allocations outside competition structure
- Tribunal, integrity, or disciplinary frameworks

## Process

The Steering Committee will:

1. Validate and refine the draft problem definition, using data and stakeholder input, including consideration of the impact of **not** making change.
2. Develop design principles to guide all strategic decisions.
3. Oversee engagement with key stakeholder groups, ensuring consultation is well-planned, inclusive and aligned with the overall competition strategy process.
4. Produce a 5 to 10 year competition roadmap including structural options, transition plans and risk assessments.
5. Provide clear, actionable recommendations to the AFL Barwon Board, CDFNL Board, GDFNL Board and Barwon Regional Council as outlined below.

## Deliverables

### Problem Definition Report

- Confirmed issues, data analysis, trends and sustainability risks.

### Design Principles Framework

- Finalised principles guiding competition reform.

### Long-Term Competition Strategy (from 2028)

- Structural options (with pros/cons)
- Junior-to-senior pathway alignment
- Movement mechanisms between leagues
- Transition and implementation plan

### Stakeholder Consultation Summary

- Feedback from clubs, leagues, and other stakeholder groups

### Final Recommendations Report

- To be delivered by end June 2027 and submitted to:
  - AFL Barwon Board – for endorsement of all recommendations
  - League Boards – for endorsement of league-specific recommendations
  - Barwon Regional Council – for region endorsement

## Membership

The Steering Committee will comprise of:

- AFL Barwon CEO (Chair)
- AFL Barwon Head of Football
- AFL Barwon Head of Netball
- League representatives (GFNL, BFNL, GDFNL, CDFNL – one representative each, appointed by the Board of each League)
- Junior league representatives (up to two)
- AFL Victoria representative
- Netball Victoria representative
- Independent expert(s) as required (for example, competition design, umpiring, demographic analysis, facilitation)

## Roles & Responsibilities

### Chair

- Lead meetings and ensure progress against timelines.
- Manage communication with the Steering Committee and AFL Barwon Board.
- Ensure balanced representation of all leagues and clubs.

### Members

- Attend meetings and actively contribute.
- Review data, proposals and consultation feedback.
- Maintain confidentiality of discussions.
- Represent the interests of the region, not individual clubs or leagues.

### AFL Barwon Operations Team

- Provide modelling and administration support.
- Co-ordinate consultation processes.
- Draft reports and documentation.

### AFL Victoria

- Provide participation, retention and demographic data and insights.
- Co-ordinate consultation and engagement process where multiple league affiliates are involved.
- Integrate and mobilise the Barwon Regional Council to provide advice and expertise.

## Governance & Reporting

- The Steering Committee reports to the AFL Barwon Board.
- Major milestones and recommendations will be presented to the AFL Barwon Board.
- Decisions will be made by consensus where possible, or by majority vote if required.
- Conflicts of interest must be declared and managed appropriately.

## Confidentiality & Media Protocol

- Members must keep all discussions, documents, draft materials and deliberations of the Steering Committee strictly confidential unless authorised otherwise by AFL Barwon.
- Information shared within the Steering Committee is provided solely to support the development of the strategy and must not be distributed, quoted or referenced externally.
- Any public comment, media engagement or external communication relating to the Steering Committee's work must be co-ordinated through AFL Barwon.
- Members must not speak with the media, provide background information, or make public statements about the Steering Committee's discussions, materials or progress without explicit authorisation from AFL Barwon.
- Members are expected to contribute to an environment of trust, respect and open dialogue, supported by consistent adherence to confidentiality obligations.

## Meeting Schedule

- Fortnightly meetings during the initial problem-definition phase.
- Monthly meetings during strategy development.
- Additional meetings as required for consultation or drafting.

## Timelines

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
Confirm ToR & appoint Steering Committee	30 June 2026
Problem definition and design principles finalised	31 July 2026
Consultation phase	August to December 2026
Draft long-term strategy	January to February 2027
Present strategy to clubs for feedback	March 2027
Refine strategy	March to May 2027
Final recommendations to AFL Barwon Board	By end June 2027

## Success Measures

- Clear, evidence-based recommendations adopted by the Board
- Improved competitive balance indicators over time with enhanced competition quality
- Increased participation and retention across junior and senior levels
- Enhanced sustainability of clubs in the region
- Mechanisms adopted to manage growth and demographic change
- Stakeholder support and understanding of the strategy