



# **AFL CENTRAL FOOTBALL COMMISSION**

## **DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER STATE OF THE REGION**

# WorkSafe AFL Victoria Country Region Commission



New South Wales

South Australia

- CENTRAL VICTORIA  
REGION COMMISSION**
- Bendigo F&AFL
  - North Central FL
  - Heathcote & CDFL
  - Loddon Valley DFL
  - Bendigo JFL
  - Bendigo UA
  - North Central UA

Cape Otway

BASS STRAIT



5<sup>th</sup> June 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for taking the time to read this discussion paper. We strongly urge that you elevate this document to board level and provide us with feedback on what you see are the important issues in our region.

We are obliged to provide AFL Victoria with a State of the Region Report in the next few weeks and we would really appreciate your views. We have ambitions to build a report that reflects the views of the football community and one that leads to sound strategies around improving football in our region.

If you are able to make your main points using our online survey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/S9D8YSS>) it would be appreciated.

If you would like any further information please contact Paul Hamilton on 0413155667 or at [paul.hamilton@aflcentralvic.com.au](mailto:paul.hamilton@aflcentralvic.com.au)

We would like you to supply your thoughts by the 24<sup>th</sup> June.

Paul Hamilton

Regional General Manager

Central Victorian Commission

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

5	Introduction & Invitation
6	Stakeholders
7-10	Common themes from stakeholder feedback
11	Summary of Focus Areas
12-13	Invitation for Feedback

## **INTRODUCTION AFL Central Commission**

The AFL Central Commission has been established to represent the needs of Australian Rules Football in the Central region. The independent commission is charged with the responsibility of building the capacity of the region to contribute more significantly to the growth and sustainability of the game.

The Commission has engaged in the spirit of collaboration as we gather information to determine the state of the game in our region. It is important to reach agreement amongst the stakeholders of the game as to where we currently stand as a code. Where are our greatest concerns? What opportunities lie ahead to develop our game? How can we increase our connection to our communities?

We wish to take this opportunity to provide you, as a key stakeholder, with the learning's we have established so far. We also wish to provide you with the opportunity to participate in the building of a state of the region report that we will forward to the AFL Vic Executive within the next 6 weeks. This report will lead to the building of a strategic plan that addresses the identifiable concerns we currently have with the game. We would expect that some of the key areas this will address include:

- Developing a regional focus to improve engagement, participation and strategic growth of Australian Rules Football.
- Bringing the football community together to advance the good of the game
- Improving the strength and vitality of football clubs in the region. This includes enhancing the experience for our volunteers that are the lifeblood of our game.
- Recognition of relationship with Netball and other sports in the region in working together for mutual benefits.
- Provide our young players with clear pathways and strong junior competitions
- Provide opportunities to improve our coaching and development of players.
- Identify and research key issues impacting on community football throughout the region.
- Look at the governing structures of our game and provide the most effective systems and structures to promote the growth of our game.
- Recognition of the Social and Economic impact of Football in the region
- Developing the recruitment, retention and welfare of our umpiring groups.
- Strategic Facility development for the region
- Understanding that we live in a rapidly changing world that requires us to be flexible and adaptable.

No doubt there will be other issues uncovered as we continue to talk with people and call for submissions. It is also clear that there are different challenges in different regions. We acknowledge and must have the flexibility to understand that the challenges in the North Central league for example are different to the ones faced by the BFNL.

AFL Victoria has provided the commissions with the infrastructure and support to implement the strategies required to take our game forward. We are determined to grab this opportunity to bring people together to grow and energise our game.

## **Stakeholders**

We see the stakeholders in our great game as all people who have an active interest in the sport in our region. All of the people listed below would like to see a strong positive direction for Australian Rules Football throughout the Central Region.

- Auskick participants
- Junior participants (7-12)
- Youth participants (13-18)
- Female participants (all ages)
- Senior participants including masters
- Leagues: BFNL, LVFNL, NCFL, H&DFL, BJFNL
- Clubs & Families
- Schools & other educational providers
- AFL Ambassadors
- Local Government
- Media
- Umpires
- Netball Vic
- Pioneers/Gold
- State Government/Local politicians
- AFL Vic
- Coaches
- Past players & Officials
- Fans

## Common Themes From Engagement

Over recent months, the commission has sought to engage a number of our key stakeholders in the region in order to gauge people's view on the state of our game. Each of the leagues, the Juniors, the Umpires, Bendigo Pioneers and Gold as well as AFL Vic have been included in these discussions. We recognise there are a lot of stakeholders that have yet to have a say and this draft report represents an invitation to provide your thoughts.

We have broken down the key messages we are receiving into 4 key areas – Participation, Club Capacity, Facilities and Administration.

### PARTICIPATION

- **Regional Approach:** We need to take a regional approach to Junior Football participation
- **Junior Player recruitment and retention:** It is important to look at how we attract/recruit players to our game. How do we increase these numbers, how do we retain juniors and what structures are best suited. It has been noted that there is a significant drop off in players in the 15-18 age groups. There is a need to research and address this issue going forward.
- **Auskick:** Auskick requires a revamp. It has been a good introductory program but it currently relies too much on luck – the luck of which parents run an age group. Our feedback is that there are lots of good experiences for kids but also too many negative stories where kids are lost to the game as well.
- **Junior-Senior pathways:** We require structures/systems where Senior clubs are linked strongly with the junior pathways – from Auskick through to Senior football. There are some clubs who do a great job with making the connection and putting time into their juniors. We would like to see this as the norm and not the exception. We should look to remove impediments for kids to progress through the stages of their football development. A suggestion is that each Senior club is provided with a geographic region that they work and have responsibility for e.g. schools, auskick etc.
- **Competitive Junior games:** It is clear there is a need to ensure more competitive games at junior level. This could be to look at competition structures and rules/regulations. Our Junior administrators are currently working on these issues. We need to assist and guide them with these endeavours.
- **Coaching:** There is a need to improve the standard of coaching overall but with an emphasis on junior coaching. Coaching at Junior levels should have the following objectives: (1) development/improvement; (2) creating an enjoyable environment and (3) teaching respect. Further strategies are required on how to achieve an improvement in standards across the region. An active coaching association and/or coaching coordinators at each club could play an integral role in facilitating this.
- **Female participation:** There have been some very positive steps in developing female football in the region in recent years. How do we ensure this continues? AFL Vic research indicates that girls need all female space. This could mean an all female component of Auskick in order to attract and retain participants. How do we support female participation in the game? How do we provide more opportunities?
- **Umpires:** There is an ongoing concern about attracting and retaining umpires. We need to look at recruiting programs with an emphasis on schools, past players, females. Can we have

each junior club nominate 3 people to do an umpire course? (clubs generally supply umpires/parents to assist on match day). How can umpires continue to develop and retain their young umpires?

- **Interleague:** Is there an opportunity to increase interleague opportunities for juniors or representative football? Basketball does this very well.
- **Turnover of administrators in junior sport:** There appears to be a large turnover of junior administrators at club level. This is largely based on the fact they are parents and their children move on. It is important to maintain some consistency of programs when people leave. If a good junior development program has been set up, there needs to be some maintenance of it as people move on. Club coaching co-ordinators, documentation of processes (in an easy format) etc. could be some of the solutions to this.
- **Schools:** There is no doubt that there is a great opportunity to partner with schools in developing football and netball programs as well as pushing the healthy lifestyle messages. Our feedback from our stakeholders is that it is an area we can really work on to develop our game and connect to the local community. It has been recognised that this is an area we must focus on into the future. This involves both primary and secondary school levels.
- **New participants:** How do we attract new participants? AFL 9s program may provide a vehicle to do this through schools, businesses, community groups.
- **Elite pathways:** Elite pathways need to remain a focal point of football in the region. Bendigo Pioneers and Bendigo Gold provide opportunities for our young footballers to reach the highest levels of the game. Is there community support to continue to provide this so that our youth do not need to leave the area to pursue their dreams? Do clubs see the long term benefits for the region in having a TAC cup and VFL side? Are we willing to support them?
- **Current numbers problem:** There is recognition that there is a current problem with numbers of players at clubs at Senior level – particularly with Seconds sides. This is an issue that will need to be considered with strategies going forward.

## **CLUB DEVELOPMENT**

- **Club Assistance:** It is clear from the engagement sessions held so far that clubs need help and assistance. There is a need to find a way to resource assistance to clubs.
- **Training of volunteers:** Clubs are largely run by a volunteer force. It is essential to find ways to grow and develop the skills of the volunteers in a manner that is not exceedingly difficult. In house training is largely more successful than external training.
- **Board member support:** There is a clear deficiency in support for boards and clubs. Clubs report a lack of succession planning and volunteer support. There are no training programs for presidents, secretaries and treasurers. We would like to get to the stage that if you join a board you have the opportunity to be developed personally and professionally.
- **IT systems:** There is a need for centralised club computer systems so there is not a great loss of IP during transitional periods.
- **Successful modelling:** We need to utilise clubs that have been successful and look at their models. What are the elements of a successful club: - Governance, Culture, Finances, Partnerships, Community link. The most important ingredient is the People. Having the right people with the right skills is a hallmark of a good club. These skills are not always available

hence the need for support and training. There is a need for all clubs to engage in strategic planning and sustainability development. The commission has a role to connect people and clubs and demonstrate 'best practice' methodology.

- **Club Capacity Programs** : We would like to see proactive support for clubs. This could include software programs that are interactive and are there for the benefit of improving clubs. It is essential that they are not seen as 'auditing of clubs' but rather as ways to assist clubs.
- **Community**: There is great opportunity to build Community and Club relationships. Many clubs in our region have incredibly strong connections to their community and in some cases are the hubs of their communities. However, usually the larger the town/city the looser the connection. A long term goal is to see all clubs strongly connected to their communities. The challenge with our changing demographic conditions is to ensure clubs are open and welcoming institutions who the community has a sense of belonging to. We need to look at programs and methods to ensure this happens.
- **Volunteers**: Volunteer recognition and support is vital for the future of clubs. The ability to attract, train and retain volunteers will determine many clubs future. How can we find new people to volunteer. Can we find win-win situations where we can attract young people who we can assist with their development as they assist our clubs?
- **Funding assistance**: There is a need for support with grant funding – both the knowledge of what is available and the processes required.
- **Football needs**: Coaching, football operations and engagement with player development programs all remain key areas of focus and improvement at all clubs.
- **Past Administrators**: It is recognised that there may be an opportunity to tap into some of our great past administrators of the game. Could we utilise some of our great people that have gone before us so that their experience is not lost. This could evolve into a mentoring program of sorts.
- **Player Payments**: A noted concern from some clubs was the increasing player payments that they have to meet to remain competitive. Affordability and the capacity to maintain a consistent playing group are issues that need to be continually explored. It is acknowledged that any potential solutions should be explored in conjunction with all Country Victorian football regions.

## **FACILITIES**

- **Facility concerns**: It is a fact that 58% of regional Victorian venues do not comply with minimum training venue standards. We are keen to do an audit of our region in relation to this. It is clear that there are very few clubs in our region that don't require infrastructure investment. Key issues include change rooms, lighting and oval surfaces.
- **Limited Resources**: There are limited resources available.
- **Collaborative Approach**: In order to receive facility funding a collaborative approach is required. Funds are limited and councils/state governments require a professional approach and guidance with their funding decisions. It is important to measure the economic benefits generated through footy when making applications.
- **Strategic Approach**: The Central Football Commission will be required to develop a long term plan for facilities in the region that aim to increase participation and provide the best

use of assets. Councils will be looking for a strong regional rationale behind any applications and will be looking for the commission for guidance. This regional approach is across leagues, clubs and shires.

- **Must gather facts:** Facts and data will need to be established when promoting decisions. Information such as the usage of grounds, the opportunities to share facilities must be ascertained.
- **Alignment with Council Plans:** It is important that with all facility strategies that we are clear on the plans of council/shire and seek ways to align with them.
- **Opportunities:** We need to identify where the funding opportunities lie. What programs can we utilise?
- **Why we must invest in facilities:** We need to push the strong rationale behind investment in facilities – (1) occupational health and safety, (2) increasing participation and (3) the broader benefits (economic and social) for the community. Facilities play a broader role in the community beyond the sporting field. There is no doubt also that lack of facilities creates a barrier to participation for players, volunteers and spectators.
- **Council Partnerships:** We have some very good councils and shires in our region. How can we work best with them? They are more than just facility providers and we may be able to form partnerships with them on other services e.g. youth services.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

- **Administration Hub:** A sporting hub has been developed in Mundy St, Bendigo where football in the region is administered. We are looking for ways to provide efficient and effective administration of our leagues as well as looking for opportunities to develop our game. We need to continue to find ways to do this better so we can provide support to clubs and leagues. A lot of the efficiencies will come from good administration at club level.
- **Grow to support:** We need to continue to grow the hub to provide the necessary resources for football and netball in our region. Some strategies will need to be adopted to make it commercially viable.
- **Key Focus:** A key focus going forward is how we can *'Build the capacity of the region to Build the capacity of clubs'*.
- **Structural Changes:** People have identified the need to look at structural arrangements in football. Is there a better way to look at the structure of leagues, umpiring bodies and governance arrangements for the sustainability of football in our region. We want and need all stakeholders to be engaged in this conversation.
- **Community Connection:** We are keen to connect with other sports and work together for the benefits of youth and healthy living in our region. We also want to form relationships with key partners such as local councils and educational institutions like La Trobe University that have similar goals to ourselves in developing young people.

## **SUMMARY OF FOCUS AREAS FROM FEEDBACK RECEIVED**

1. The health of our great game has reached a critical point in its history. We have an opportunity now to work together for the overall betterment of the game. The commission structure has provided us with this opportunity and we must grab it.
2. We need a strong focus on improving our participation levels in the game. We must devise strategies to attract more people and retain them. This is particularly important at Junior levels.
3. Club Capacity – Clubs need assistance in attracting and developing their volunteer base. Strategic planning and long term sustainability of clubs must be a crucial plank in all future strategies.
4. Schools – There is great opportunities to partner schools in healthy lifestyle and education programs that include football and netball development.
5. Community Connection – As a football community we need to continue to develop strategies that ensure strong connection to our local communities. How can we ensure that we are open, welcoming clubs that are ready to meet the needs of our changing demographics and provide a home for all that wish to become a part of our club.
6. Facilities – Facility and infrastructure development must remain a key plank of our strategies going forward. We require a collaborative, strategic approach to how we address this challenging problem in the face of limited resources.
7. People have identified the need to look at our league and governance structures in order to be best prepared for all future challenges.



