



MEMO 13-2025

DATE: Friday 7th March
TO: NPLW & Premier Competition Clubs
FROM: General Manager Football Operations
SUBJECT: Opportunities for Application into Premier Female Competitions, PYL Boys & JDL

For Information or Action	Action required	Action completed by	NNSWF Contact	Total Pages
Information	N/A	N/A	Mitchell O'Keefe	7

Dear All,

Executive Summary

As there is a significant amount of detail in this memo the key points can be summarised as follows:

- NNSWF Board has approved a growth and development plan for Womens and Girls football including decoupling of NPL Women's PYL Girls competitions and opening of applications for NPLW & PYL Girls competitions for the 2026 season and beyond.
- As per the recent JDL review NNSWF will open an application process for clubs wishing to enter the Junior Development Leagues in March 2025 for entry into the 2026
- NNSWF will open an application process for clubs wishing to enter the Premier Youth League Boys competition in March 2025 for entry into the season 2026

Prior to the public announcement made across NNSWF website and social media channels, I wanted to provide you with the full details of the principles that these significant announcements are based on:

NPL WOMENS & PYL GIRLS

As you would be aware, at the direction of the NNSWF Board of Directors, management convened a working group to review the current competition structures. The group sought to provide recommendations for a roadmap to grow these competitions sustainably and effectively.

The working group met throughout 2024 to discuss a number of core issues relating to the current scope and structure of NNSWFs Premier Womens Leagues and key considerations relating to the evolution of women's and girls football in the region.



These core issues can be summarised as follows:

- The recent shift towards NPL clubs offering both Womens and Mens programs
- A lack of an accessible pathway for any club who currently sits outside of the NNSWF Premier Competition structure.
- NNSWF has seen incredible growth in female football recently and ensuring that competitions are structured to cater for this growth and more accessible is critical to the development of our players, clubs and leagues.
- The perception of the “gulf between premier football and community football” in the female game.
- An increasing number of aspirational clubs in the female football community in Northern NSW who want access to higher level competitions and leagues.

The working group considered these issues and submitted a suite of recommendations to the NNSWF Board of Directors, which were unanimously accepted in December 2024.

This Roadmap for Women’s and girls football will be implemented in distinct phases:

- Phase 1 - Laying the Foundations; and
- Phase 2 – Competition Evolution

Phase 1 – Laying the Foundations

Phase 1 will consist of 4 key action items:

1. Decoupling of Youth and Senior football
 - Decoupling the NNSW NPLW and PYLG competitions will allow NNSWF and Clubs to make youth-focused decisions that prioritise nurturing talent across the region in isolation of Senior football. This approach ensures the best environment for youth development while showcasing senior players at the highest level without compromising the integrity of youth pathways.
 - Decoupling also opens opportunities for clubs interested in entering PYLG but not yet ready for senior competitions.
 - This change also aligns the Womens game to the structure already implemented in the Mens competition structure.
2. Opening Applications for Entry of new clubs into the JDL and PYLG from the 2026 season
 - Applications for entry into the JDL and PYLG from the 2026 season will open in March 2025, and follow the timelines indicated below. This provides clubs with sufficient time to prepare for entry while maintaining competition integrity. By August 2025, the JDL and PYLG league structure and size will be confirmed, ensuring transparency for all stakeholders.
 - This application process will remain consistent for the 2027 and 2028 seasons, with a re-evaluation of the process throughout 2028 to measure its effectiveness. The approach allows flexibility in accommodating new clubs each year while emphasising a structured, transparent process to guide and support aspirational clubs effectively.



- Importantly, any expression to enter NNSWF Premier Competitions will need to be accompanied by a letter of support from their respective Member Zone to ensure expansion occurs in an open, transparent and supportive manner.
3. Opening Applications for Entry in NNSWFs National Premier League Womens
 - Applications for the NPLW 2026 season will follow similar timelines to those connected to the JDL and PYLG. Consistency sends a strong message of commitment to the growth of women’s premier competitions while providing clarity for aspirational clubs seeking senior competition entry.
 - This approach positions annual expansion as progress over perfection, recognising that structural challenges such as uneven fixtures or byes may arise. Such challenges should be seen as necessary steps toward a broader goal of increased access, broader geographical spread, inclusivity and growth in the women’s premier ecosystem.
 4. Communication of the Evolution Plan
 - This memo is the first part of the communication strategy which will see these changes formally announced shortly and communicated via NNSWF’s platforms.
 - The formal announcement of the phased approach to the growth and development of our Womens Premier Leagues will also outline the details of phase 1 including how to apply, the respective competition criteria and the resources and support available for clubs, whilst confirming the principals that underpin phase 2.
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Phase 2 – Competition Evolution

Phase 2 will comprise 3 longer term targets as we continue to work towards future growth and development of NSW Premier Women’s Leagues:

1. Promotion & Relegation within Senior Women’s Competitions
 - The first step toward introducing promotion and relegation at the senior level in the future is to grow the NPLW to a size where this becomes viable. At this stage NNSWFs views on this are that a minimum of 12 established NPLW clubs would be required before any promotion and relegation structure would be considered. In the early stages, alternative models could be explored, such as splitting the league partway through the season to encourage competitive matches and ensure new clubs remain engaged in meaningful and closely contested fixtures.
 - These changes will be carefully planned and contingent upon the number of aspirational clubs applying to enter the competition. Any significant structural changes are required to be presented to the NNSWF Board of Directors for approval, ensuring that the competition is ready for this level of evolution.
2. Restructuring of Premier Youth League Girls
 - Aligning the structure of the PYL Girls to the structure already established in the PYL Boys provides greater flexibility in fostering competitive environments, increases the



number of competitive matches for all clubs and provides a level of equality between the youth competition structure for boys and girls premier competitions.

- Lessons learned from the introduction of this structure in the PYL Boys competition have proven that this approach dramatically improves the number of competitive matches at all levels and increases player and team engagement. Introducing a similar model in PYLG would ensure that new teams do not need to enter the top tier immediately, creating opportunities for growth and development whilst ensuring competitive football.
3. Connecting NNSW NPLW to Zone Community Competitions
- A long-term goal of Phase Two is to establish a connected competition pyramid between NPLW and community football. This connection is vital for creating a seamless progression for aspirational clubs while ensuring community-level competitions remain strong.
 - The concept of expanding the NNSWF NPLW with the addition of a second tier within premier competition structure will make it easier for clubs to bridge gap between Community and Premier Football. For example, community clubs could first be promoted into a second-tier premier competition rather than being placed directly into the NNSW NPL Womens competition, providing a smoother and more staged transition into Premier Competitions.
 - The pace and success of this aim will largely depend on the growth of the NNSWF NPLW and the appetite and readiness of clubs at the community level. Continued engagement with local zones and stakeholders will be essential to evaluate the impact on community football and to determine where these competitions may sit in the next three to five years.

There are a number of key considerations for Phase 2:

- Any action on these agreed concepts from Phase Two will be implemented only when the league demonstrates stability and readiness, and with approval from the NNSWF Board of Directors.
- While growth targets and timelines will depend on the number of aspirational clubs, clear communication of long-term goals is critical to providing a clear direction for the future of our Womens Premier Competitions, maintaining engagement and setting expectations.
- NNSWF will not impose a connected competition pyramid in women's football without demonstrated appetite from community-level clubs and support by all relevant Member Zones.

Premier Youth League Girls Age Groups

Our strategic focus for the expansion of the Premier Youth League Girls (PYLG) competition is centered on increasing the number of clubs to enhance the long-term sustainability and viability of the competition. While there have been recent discussions regarding the potential inclusion of Under-14 and Under-16 age groups within existing PYLG clubs, our current approach prioritises the introduction of new clubs over the expansion of age groups within existing clubs.



The primary justification for expanding age groups has been to provide equal opportunities for girls compared to boys. However, our preferred pathway to expansion is based on the following key considerations:

- **Geographic Growth and Accessibility:** Expanding the competition through the introduction of new clubs allows for broader geographic growth and improved access for players. This approach reduces the risk associated with relying on a small number of clubs, ensuring competition sustainability even if challenges arise at individual clubs.
- **Manageable Entry for New Programs:** New clubs, including regional programs, are more likely to successfully establish themselves in PYLG if they initially enter with three teams rather than five. This phased approach allows clubs to develop their programs and infrastructure before considering the addition of further age groups.
- **Facility Constraints:** Seven of the eight current PYLG clubs already support a broad range of programs, including PYL Girls, PYL Boys, NPL/NL1 Men's, NPL Women's, and Junior Development League (JDL) programs. The addition of two extra age groups within existing PYLG clubs would place further strain on already limited facilities. Expanding the competition by adding new clubs would alleviate facility pressure by increasing access to more venues.
- **Volunteer Capacity and Operational Demands:** Clubs that currently deliver Girls Premier football operate five-game match days. Expanding the PYLG competition by adding two additional age groups would increase this to seven matches per day, significantly increasing the workload for club volunteers. This could impact the ability of some clubs to continue delivering their programs effectively.
- **Development Pathway Considerations:** From a technical development perspective, maintaining the current age group structure aligns with best practices observed in Football NSW and Football Victoria. The existing structure supports a higher quality of player development by ensuring a focused approach within each stage of the pathway.

While we acknowledge that there may be a need to introduce additional age groups in the future, we believe that the immediate focus should be on expanding the number of clubs participating in the PYLG competition rather than increasing the number of age groups within existing clubs. This approach ensures a sustainable, geographically diverse, and technically sound competition that provides the best opportunities for players, clubs, and the broader football community.

PREMIER YOUTH LEAGUE BOYS

Following the introduction of the new structure of Premier Youth League boys in recent years, Northern NSW Football will also be opening up applications for new clubs to express interest to join the PYLB for the 2026 season and beyond.

With the exception of age groups, the criteria which has to be identical to that of the PYL Girls application, met will be outlined on the club application page of the Northern NSW Football website. All applications will be considered in conjunction with the impact on the competition of adding any new clubs.

JUNIOR DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE – BOYS & GIRLS



As noted in the communication sent in early 2024 stemming from the JDL Working Group, clubs outside the current premier structure will be permitted to express interest for entry into the Junior Development League for season 2026.

These clubs will be required to meet the minimum Bronze standard before being accepted for entry into the JDL. Full details on the requirements for entry into JDL can be found [HERE](#).

NEXT STEPS & TIMELINES

To ensure consistency across all applications for entry into these competitions, all application will follow the same timelines outlined below:

Event	Date
Announcement of Application Opportunities	7 th March
Applications Open for NPL Womens, PYL Girls, PYL Boys and JDL (Boys & Girls).	8 th March
Application Period Closes	31 st May
Application Assessment Period	2 nd June – 22 nd June
Confirmation of New Clubs for 2026	By 31st July

The process for expressions of interest will be managed by Northern NSW Football's Football Operations & Compliance Coordinator, Mitchell O'Keefe. Mitchell will be happy to meet with any prospective clubs and assist them in their applications. Mitch can be contacted on:

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If you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to Mitch or I.



Regards,
Liam Bentley
General Manager Football Operations
Northern NSW Football

MEMORANDUM