



# **Women's Football Review**

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Final Report

30 April 2005

## Acknowledgments

Women's Football is experiencing exponential growth in terms of the number of participants and its professionalism, both at the international and domestic level. It is hoped that this Report will assist in ensuring that Australia has appropriate structures in place to maximise the impetus being generated to ensure not only the growth of the game in this country, but the competitiveness of our elite players and national teams.

Thank you to all those parties who provided submissions and input to this review process. In particular, FFA would like to thank the independent Review Committee members for providing their expertise and advice, especially Patrick Hunt on the high performance side, Susan Crow on the competition structure and Julie Murray on the player related issues. The National Women's Manager, Jo Sanders, also deserves special mention for her contribution and assistance.

It is with pleasure that I now submit this Final Report into the structure, administration and promotion of women's Football in Australia.



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Eugénie Buckley  
Chair

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# 1 Overview & Scope of Report

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The purpose of this Women's Football Review Report is to report on the structure, administration and promotion of Football Federation Australia Limited's national women's club competition (known as the Women's National Soccer League or the WNSL), with particular emphasis on the role it plays in the elite player pathways of female Football players in Australia. The Report concludes with a number of recommendations for the future role, structure and format of a national women's club competition.

Women's Football is a growth sport with significant potential. It is hoped that this Report will assist FFA in enabling this opportunity to be realised within Australia.

## **1.1.1 Scope of Report**

Given this was the first time a review of women's Football has been conducted, we have endeavoured to make the Report as extensive and comprehensive as possible.

The scope of this Report is dictated by the Terms of Reference of the Review, which are attached as Attachment A. This Report provides recommendations on each of the Terms of Reference with particular emphasis on:

- (a) FFA's strategic priorities and objectives;
- (b) Structure of women's Football within Australia;
- (c) High performance objectives, including elite player pathways and the competitiveness of the national team;
- (d) Competition structure and logistics;
- (e) Commercial arrangements and opportunities;
- (f) Investment costs and budgets;
- (g) Player welfare considerations;
- (h) Status of the women's game within FIFA and the Confederations; and
- (i) Structure of women's Football leagues internationally.

The focus of the review and the Report is on players. The Report does, however, make some comment in relation to the pathways for female coaches, referees, selectors and administrators. It became evident as part of the review process that Football, and in particular FFA as the national governing body, needs to do additional work in these key areas.

## **1.1.2 Purpose of a domestic league**

When reviewing the structure of a league, it is important to ascertain the purpose or charter of that league so that it can be determined whether or not the league actually achieves its stated purpose. While there is some evidence of the historical purpose of the WNSL as a means of selecting a national team, it appears little consideration has been given to the purpose of the WNSL since that time. Accordingly, the Review Committee has assumed there are 4 key purposes of a domestic league and has assessed each element of the WNSL against these purposes.

The purpose of staging and promoting a national domestic league are to:

- form part of the national team selection process;

- provide regular, high level competition for elite players;
- enable players to test themselves against the best players; and
- to develop women's Football generally by showcasing the best players.

### **1.1.3 Period of time covered**

The WNSL began in 1996 and so this Report covers the period of time only from 1996 until present. During this 10 year period, women's Football has gone through substantial structural and organisational change. In that time, the Australian Women's Soccer Association merged with Soccer Australia Limited (the predecessor to FFA) and each of the women's soccer associations at the state level have merged (or are in the final stages of merging) with their respective State or Territory Federations (*State Federation*). In addition, an independent review into the structure, governance and management of the game in Australia was undertaken by the Federal Government, which recommended adjustment to governance systems and resulted in the establishment of a new, legal entity to govern Football (see Section 3).

This constitutional and structural reform has certainly required some adjustment for all stakeholders, including women's Football. As at the writing of this report, the Review Committee is satisfied that FFA and each State Federation is now focussed on the development of women's Football within their respective jurisdictions.

### **1.1.4 Overview of submissions**

Although it was acknowledged the review of women's Football was well overdue, all participants expressed pleasure that it was being conducted and gratitude for being included in the process. There was generally great support from within FFA and the State Federations for the overall development of women's Football.

The Review Committee conducted an extensive and comprehensive review. We sought written and verbal feedback from as many stakeholders as possible, including FFA, State Federations, national and state Women's Standing Committees, National Training Centre coaches, elite players, other Football leagues and other female sports. A List of the Verbal Submissions or Information Received is attached as Attachment B, a List of Written Submissions is attached as Attachment C and a List of Documents Reviewed is attached as Attachment D.

It was felt important that the Report 'stands alone', in the sense that it could also be reviewed and understood in context by people either outside the Football family or outside of Australian Football. To this extent, we have also summarised the basic structures of FIFA and FFA.

For ease of reference, we have prepared an Executive Summary that summarises the key issues faced with the WNSL and the key recommendations for the future (see Section 2).

## 2 Executive Summary

The administration of women's Football in Australia has gone through significant change, especially in the last 5 years. In 2001, the Australian Women's Soccer Association was subsumed under Soccer Australia Limited and in 2003, as part of a constitutional and governance reform process, each State women's soccer association that had not already amalgamated with its respective State Federation, began this process. In addition, Soccer Australia Limited was replaced as the national governing body by the Australia Soccer Association Limited (now known as Football Federation Australia Limited). To some extent, these significant structural and administrative changes meant that women's Football at the elite level had not been the focus of any detailed strategic planning.

Given the tumultuous history of the game in Australia, FFA's current strategic priorities focus on revenue generation activities (initially through the men's qualification to FIFA 2006 World Cup and the launch of the Hyundai A-League) to ensure financial stability. The development and promotion of women's Football is, however, important to FFA. To date, the focus of women's Football has been on the preparation of the national team and significant improvements have already been made on the administration and high performance front. This Review process will enable FFA to focus on the women's game at the next level down in line with its strategic priorities.

Women's Football is experiencing massive growth, with the increase in female player numbers being 75% in the 3 years to 2004. Such growth has attracted the interest of FFA's key commercial partners, who are in the midst of implementing junior or community Football programs that focus equally on boys and girls. This growth at the grass roots level provides significant opportunity for FFA that needs to be harnessed at the elite level.

Internationally, the women's game has also experienced exponential growth created by the impetus and programs generated by FIFA and then by the Confederations and member associations. All of the highest ranked teams in America, Europe and Asia have strong domestic leagues and are providing more funding to the development of women's Football. If FFA is to meet its aim of the international competitiveness of its national team, it needs to follow the international trends.

FFA needs a national domestic league for women's Football to:

- (a) form part of the national team selection process;
- (b) provide regular, high level competition for elite players;
- (c) enable players to test themselves against the best players; and
- (d) develop women's Football generally by showcasing the best players.

Given this purpose or charter, we think the WNSL met only the first purpose of selection of a national team and that it failed in all 3 other areas. Section 2.1 details the key issues with the WNSL from a structural and format perspective. For the reasons listed, we do not think the WNSL in its current format should be retained. Section 2.2 details our recommendations for the structure and format of a new domestic league.

### 2.1 Summary of WNSL Issues

The WNSL faces the same issues that led to the decline of the men's NSL. Lack of compelling national league, leads to lack of commercial interest from sponsors and television, which leads to a lack of promotion of the game and hence lack of opportunity for elite young athletes to choose Football as a sport. This downward spiral continues. This section summarises the key issues faced by the WNSL.



In terms of structure and format:

- (a) the season is too short (with each team playing between a total of 5 matches per season to a maximum of 11 matches per season over the years);
- (b) the season is structured around national team commitments, which led either to a compressed format (being mid- October to mid-December) or to a format that incorporated a large 6 week break in the middle of the season; and
- (c) the teams are NTC based, rather than State Federation based. Over time, this has meant that players in the WNSL are very young at an average age of 19 years and there was no place for 'older' or non-NTC program players from the State Federations. In addition, the priorities or purposes of NTCs may not directly accord with the FFA's or State Federation's purposes.

Accordingly, the WNSL has become a development league rather than an elite senior women's best competition.

A structure is required that is inclusive of all pathways (being schools, clubs in State Federations and NTCs), but with a need to prioritise a particular pathway that accelerates development to compete for the national team at an international level. In our view, a stand alone, strong domestic league is integral to this pathway. A league team should be comprised of players from the NTC and State Federation club pathway. Such a league is vital to FFA's commitment to have a highly competitive national team.

For completeness, the Report highlights the many operational issues faced by the WNSL, which included poor match scheduling, lack of quality in venues and facilities and poor organisation. These operational issues are, however, easily overcome through proper management and allocation of resources. FFA should allocate a specific resource to the women's league from an operations and co-ordination perspective. This person could take responsibility for the formulation and enforcement of central operational policies as well as minimum standards for venues and match presentation. Once these operational aspects are addressed, the commercial opportunities available to the league are enhanced.

In addition to revenue generation opportunities, there are a number of sources of funding for the development of women's Football in Australia. If the view that a domestic national league is crucial to further develop women's Football and to ensure international competitiveness is accepted, it may be that some sources of funding need to be re-distributed to the league. In any event, the league requires more funding to ensure a professional product is created and maintained.

## 2.2 Key Recommendations

With all recommendations made, the Review Committee has been mindful of player welfare issues and the fact that women's Football is an amateur sport.

We recommend that the WNSL in its current structure and format be discontinued and replaced with new, national domestic league (for these purposes, referred to as the W-League). The W-League should involve at least 6 teams from the State Federations who would select players from both its own premier leagues and the NTC program. Those teams would play 3 rounds (or 15 matches each) with a Finals Series involving the top 4. The season would be played over summer with the Finals Series to coincide with the men's A-League to enable cross-promotional opportunities.

Given Football in Australia is undergoing significant constitutional reform and the 2005 calendar year is already hectic with the FIFA World Cup qualifiers and launch of the A-League, we recommend the W-League is launched in October of 2006. In the current environment, a 5 month lead in time is

inadequate to introduce the changes required and to successfully promote and launch a women's league.

The Committee recognises that it is vital that the momentum generated by this review process is not lost. Accordingly, we recommend a 3 stage process with the immediate appointment of a resource dedicated to women's Football to manage and co-ordinate this process. As a first stage for October 2005, we recommend a 10 day tournament involving the 7 State Federations of the most recent WNSL teams and the Young Matildas. The second stage in November 2005 would involve the top 3 teams from this tournament playing a round robin tournament against 3 Asian clubs. The third stage is the launch of the W-League in October 2006. The preparation for a successful stage 3 would be co-existent with stages 1 and 2.

### 3 FFA Strategic Priorities

When conducting a review into the structure, administration and promotion of women's Football, it is important to bear in mind the strategic priorities of FFA as the national governing body for the whole of Football in Australia. The current priorities focus on revenue generation and financial stability, which reflect in part the tumultuous history of the game in Australia.

Over the past two decades, Football in Australia found itself addressing a series of crises, including:

- severe financial problems (members equity of Soccer Australia was a negative \$2.6 million at 30 June 2002);
- reduced staffing levels;
- political infighting;
- lack of strategic direction and planning; and
- mixed results on the field in the international arena.

These issues culminated in the commissioning by the Federal Government in September 2002 of an independent review into the structure, governance and management of the Game in Australia (known as the Crawford Report). One of the findings of the review was that there were organisations not officially linked to Soccer Australia, for example, state women's soccer (Football) associations that were also involved in the staging of Football. The Crawford Report made more than 50 recommendations, most of which have already been implemented.

The most significant recommendation was that Football in Australia, through the national governing body, has a truly independent Board. This necessitated the redrawing of the Constitution and the appointment of a new Board, which occurred in July 2003. The Board appointed John O'Neill as Chief Executive Officer in February 2004 and he has now completed an initial restructure of the organisation and finalisation of the organisation's key strategic priorities.

After a planning conference of FFA senior management in October 2004, the following were identified as FFA's 5 strategic priorities:

1. Qualify for FIFA 2006 Germany World Cup and perform above expectations at the FIFA World Cup, while continuing to develop other high performance players, teams and resources for now and subsequent years.
2. Launch and conduct a successful men's national Football competition that is commercially viable and well regarded by the Australian Football community.
3. Establish relationships, technology and expertise that allow FFA to provide significant tangible benefits to the broad Football community (registered members and others) with much stronger links to that community and generating substantial revenue in support.
4. Engage with Asia through Australian participation in matches and tournaments, and in other ways, to build strong relationships that will support FFA's long term objectives and generate revenue for FFA.
5. Make FFA financially viable.

From these strategic priorities, the following FFA Mission Statement was derived:

"To substantially and sustainably enhance the standing, credibility and viability of Australian Football at home and abroad by:

- Preparing and presenting national teams of which all Australians can be proud;

- Managing a highly popular national Football competition as a distinctive and innovative entertainment proposition for Australia;
- Building a very inclusive, mutually valuable relationship between FFA and other Football bodies in our region; and
- Fostering a unifying new Football culture which embraces success, diversity, professionalism, integrity and the universal appeal of the game.”

Qualification for FIFA 2006 World Cup would not only result in immediate and substantial financial return to FFA, but it would bring exposure to the game in Australia from which further commercial returns could be derived. For example, for the upcoming FIFA World Cup there is total prize money of CHF 332 million, with CHF 29 million going to the winner and CHF 7 million to each of the 32 qualifiers. For our purposes, Swiss francs equate with the Australian dollar. Qualification would essentially secure the financial stability of FFA for future years. Accordingly, FFA is committing substantial time and monetary resources to its “Road to Germany” campaign.

The men's national club competition (known as the Hyundai A-League) has a vital role as the ‘shopfront’ of Football in Australia. Given the previous administration's complete lack of success in this area, FFA is committing many resources and expertise to the success of this new league.

From a timing perspective, the success or otherwise of these first 2 priorities will be known by the end of this year.

This is not to say that women's Football is not a priority for FFA. In the context of revenue generation, however, it sits below the first 2 strategic priorities. To date, the focus of women's Football has been on preparation of the national team and significant improvements have already been made on the administration and high performance front.

In Australian Soccer Association's (as FFA was then known) Business Plan 2003-2007, the key programs of 2005 and 2006 were stated to be to continue to grow and expand the women's game. The women's game in Australia needs strengthening, including the league, administration, commercial revenues and support for players. The commissioning of this report into women's Football at the domestic league level is the next step and highlights the importance of women's Football within these strategic priorities.

Women's Football sits nicely within the Mission Statement. Indeed, one factor that differentiates Football (Soccer) from the other 3 Football codes in Australia is that it is played by males and females from juniors through to national teams representing Australia at significant international events.

The strategic priority of engaging with Asia also has synergy with women's Football with the national team having recently played against Japan, China and Korea. The development of women's Football has become a priority in Asia and the opportunities this may generate are discussed under Section 11 below.

Given it is unlikely that the women's league would be able to generate substantial revenues, it is not one of FFA's key strategic priorities. The development of the women's game is, however, very important and is consistent with the priorities of the competitiveness of the national team and engaging with Asia.

## 4 Structure of Women's Football Within Australia

Australian women's Football has experienced an incredible rate of growth over the past decade, touching the sport at every level, from grassroots to the elite. The surge in player numbers makes women's Football one of the fastest growing sports in Australia, and indeed around the world. This section provides some background information on how women's Football is structured within Australia, both at the national and state level. For completeness, a brief overview is firstly provided on the structure of FFA.

### 4.1 Overview of FFA

FFA is the member association of FIFA representing Australia. As such, FFA is bound by the FIFA Statutes and various rules and regulations. The status of women's Football within FIFA is considered below in Section 11. The focus of this Section is on Australia.

Football in Australia is still in the midst of substantial constitutional reform (the detail of which is beyond the scope of this report), but for present purposes the members of FFA are each of the State Federations and are:

- Australian Capital Territory Football Federation (trading as Capital Football);
- Football Federation North Territory;
- Football Federation Victoria;
- Football West;
- Northern NSW Soccer Federation;
- Soccer NSW;
- Soccer Queensland Limited;
- Soccer Tasmania; and
- South Australian Soccer Federation.

As part of the constitutional reform process, there are no longer any separate women's soccer associations at the national or state level. The Australian Women's Soccer Association (which was based in Canberra) came under the auspices of Soccer Australia Limited (the predecessor company to FFA) in 2001.

In addition, under FFA's Constitution it has established a Women's Standing Committee whose broad function is to advise the Directors and Chief Executive Officer on matters relating to women's Football. In particular, it is charged with making recommendations on measures to promote, develop and improve women's Football in Australia.

As national governing body, FFA's key Football operations responsibilities are to:

- (a) select the senior and underage national representative teams;
- (b) conduct the major domestic club competitions, being the Hyundai A-League (men) and previously the WNSL (women);
- (c) stage underage national championships (called the National Youth Championships and previously the National Talent Identification Championships); and
- (d) develop the framework for community or 'grassroots' Football, including coaching and development.

#### **4.1.1 National Teams**

FFA currently has 8 national teams, being the men's senior team (Socceroos), under 23 team (Olympic Team or Olyroos), under 20 team (Young Socceroos), under 17 team (Joeys) and the Futsal team (Futsalroos) and the women's senior team (Matildas), under 19 team (Young Matildas) and Futsal team. A Paralympic team has recently come within FFA's purview through the men's cerebral palsy team. In addition, FIFA has recently introduced beach soccer for men, with World Championships to be held later this year.

In relation to national teams, FFA is responsible for:

- the selection of members of the national teams;
- talent identification, elite development and coaching programs;
- participating in international matches in Australia and overseas; and
- staging international matches in Australia.

For the women's senior national team, there is 1 key FIFA event (FIFA Women's World Cup) and the Olympic Games, both of which Australia has to enter a qualification process. There is no FIFA Confederations Cup equivalent for women (although one if being mooted). FIFA Women's World Cup is held every 4 years and Australia has qualified for 3 of the 4 FIFA Women's World Cups. The next World Cup is to be held in 2007 in China. The Olympic Games are held every 4 years and Australia has qualified for 2 of the 3 women's Football tournaments at the Olympics. The team most recently competed at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. The next Olympics are in 2008 in Beijing, China. In addition, FFA also arranges for the Matildas to compete in international matches or 'friendlies' each year.

For the women's youth national team, the FIFA Under 19 Women's World Championships are held every 2 years and Australia has qualified for both Championships held to date. From 2006, these will be Under 20 Women's World Championships. FIFA has also recommended that consideration be given to under 17 championships coming within FIFA's purview (see further under Section 10).

#### **4.1.2 Domestic national leagues**

FFA is responsible for the conduct, administration and promotion of the national club competitions for men and women. For the men, the Hyundai A-League starts in August 2005 and involves 8 teams (located in Auckland, Brisbane, Newcastle, Central Coast, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth) playing 3 rounds (being 21 weeks and 84 matches). For the women, it has been the WNSL, which is the subject of Section 5.

#### **4.1.3 National Youth Championships**

FFA is responsible for staging the National Youth Championships for boys and for girls. The structure of the National Youth Championships does change over the years in terms of age groups and participating State Federations. At the older age (currently under 18 for girls), the tournament usually involves 8 teams, essentially comprised of 1 team from each of the State Federations (but with 2 from New South Wales – being country and metro – to account for the substantially higher participation numbers and none from the Northern Territory to account for the substantially lower participation numbers). At the younger age (currently under 16 for girls) the tournament usually involves 10 teams, being the above 8 together with the smaller State Federations of Northern Territory and Tasmania.

FFA has overall responsibility for the National Youth Championships (in terms of rules and regulations), but has tendered out the operational side (which was won by a State Federation, being Soccer NSW).

The girls National Youth Championships are in July 2005 and are contested at the under 18 and under 16 age groups. These age groups are important because in relevant years they provide a selection forum for the under 19 national team, which is linked to the FIFA Under 19 Women's World Championships. These age groups at this level will of course need to be reviewed for the change in FIFA World Championships from under 19 to under 20 (from 2006) and the likely introduction of an under 17 FIFA World Championships, to bring the male and female youth championships in line.

It is worth noting that there used to be national championships for senior women, in a similar format to the national youth championships. These were abolished when the WNSL was introduced, presumably on the basis that open or senior women would be competing in the WNSL.

#### **4.1.4 Junior Football**

FFA is responsible for junior Football only in the establishment of junior pathways and in coaching and development policies and programs. The actual conduct of junior competitions are under the auspices of the State Federations (and more accurately, the member or district associations of the State Federations).

The junior pathway is currently being reviewed by FFA. The 2004 pathway involves under 8s (ie under 7s and under 6s) playing "Rooball", which is a 6 a side competition with boys and girls playing on a small field. The next level is under 10s and under 9s who play a 9 a side competition with boys and girls playing on half a field. After this age group, boys and girls play 'regular' Football on a full field.

FFA, together with its key commercial partners, are currently development programs to tap into the grass roots or community Football. For example, the FFA, the Australian Sports Commission and a sponsor (being Telstra) have recently introduced a Targeted Sports Participation Growth Program called "FreeKick". Interestingly, FreeKick has been specifically designed to be inclusive of requirements to attract female participation and must have equal representation between boys and girls. The objective is to grow Football participation levels in the 6-12 year age group by an additional 63,250 in 3 years. Within this number, FFA expects that conversion rates from FreeKick to registration with a Football club to be higher for girls.

## **4.2 State Federations**

In this section, we:

- (a) briefly examine the role of the State Federations;
- (b) detail the participation numbers, with emphasis on the percentage increases in registrations; and
- (c) briefly review the structure of women's Football within the State Federations.

### **4.2.1 Role of State Federation**

Each State Federation is responsible for the organisation, promotion and administration of Football within that State Federation's particular state or jurisdiction. For example, Football Federation Victoria is responsible for Football in the State of Victoria. A State Federation will conduct men's and women's leagues and championships within its own state and choose state representative teams to participate in national championships (such as the National Youth Championships referred to above). Given the State Federations are members of FFA, each State Federation is subject to the rules and regulations of FFA.

Essentially, the grass roots and community Football is the domain of the State Federations and their districts or associations with FFA having a role in setting policies, including in relation to coaching and development.

Based on written and verbal submissions, it appears the State Federations are committed to the development of women's Football. Most State Federations have full time staff at the participation level (such as a women's Football development co-ordinator) and at the elite level (such as a full time head coach). Soccer NSW has a dedicated Women's Participation Unit to promote women's Football. This is probably a reflection of the larger participation numbers (and hence correspondingly larger registration fees).

#### **4.2.2 Rate of growth**

Football, and women's Football in particular, has been experiencing phenomenal growth in recent years. The 2004 census numbers as at 15 December 2004 are attached (Attachment E). The total registrations for the year are just over 400,000, with over 65,000 of these for females. New South Wales accounts for 37,500, Queensland about 10,000 and Victoria almost 6,000. These numbers are based on registrations as provided by the State Federations and do not include school or church numbers. Independent surveys estimate that just over 1.2 million Australians play Football, making it the country's biggest team participation sport.

For women's football, it is the percentage growth in numbers rather than the numbers themselves that are of real significance. The growth in player numbers among women alone increased 75% in the 3 years to 2004 [source: Roy Morgan research – single source March 2003]. In the biggest participant state, New South Wales, the rise in female participation of 25 per cent in 2004 came on the back of a 28% jump in 2003, confirming women's Football as the fastest growing sport in NSW.

Of these 1.2 million players who participate in Football, 41% are 14-17 year olds, which is a 13% increase since 2000. The challenge for FFA is to convert this grass roots participation to FFA customers (such as buyers of tickets to national team and domestic league matches and merchandise). This conversion would be assisted with strong domestic leagues for males and females as a link from the grass roots to the national teams. The reasoning is that grass roots would be able to regularly watch, and hence be connected to, our elite players who would be playing high level Football week in week out in the domestic leagues.

#### **4.2.3 Structure of state leagues**

As discussed above, State Federations conduct male and female leagues within their respective states. In addition, the district associations (who are the members of the State Federations in the same way as the State Federations are members of FFA) conduct local leagues for juniors, both boys and girls.

It is not proposed to go through each of the State Federation league structures, because essentially they have the same structure with differing formats necessitated by differing participation numbers. By way of example, we briefly outline the structure that exists within the jurisdiction of New South Wales, where they have 30,000 registered females playing Football.

Soccer NSW conducts the Arrive Alive (sponsor) NSW Women's Super League. In 2005, the Super League involved 15 clubs in the Sydney metropolitan area, (being Blacktown Association, Central Coast FC, Gladesville Ravens, Macarthur Rams, Manly United FC, Marconi Stallions, Northern Tigers, NWS Koalas, Penrith Nepean United, St George, Sutherland Association, Sydney University and University of New South Wales) and included two country clubs (being Bathurst City and Southern Branch). The Super League has five age groups, Girls U12, U14, U16, U21's and 1<sup>st</sup> Grade. All grades play at the



same ground on the same day. One of the requirements for the Super League was for the clubs to have youth teams a component of their structure and development.

In addition to Soccer NSW's Super League, each district of Soccer NSW runs their own leagues and competitions. Most associations run an all age women's competition and are trying to develop junior all girls competition in the various age groups.

#### **4.2.4 Females in men's leagues**

In some States and, in particular, regional areas there is an issue with the better female players not being able to participate in matches of a good enough standard, ie they are simply too good for the local women's team or league. One way to overcome this issue, is to have females playing in men's teams and/or a female team playing in a men's league.

At the elite level, having girls playing and training with boys is a ready made cost effective solution to ensure that our elite female players are constantly challenged in the training and competitive environment. For example, the Queensland Sting WNSL team play as team in a boy's league and the Western Waves WNSL team played against the Western Australia Under 14 North and South Boys State teams as preparation for the 2004 WNSL season. In addition, when in camp the national team seeks matches against boys representative sides (such as 15 to 17 year old age group) and overage men's sides (such as the over 35s). The under 19 national team (Young Matildas) played against the under 14 Western Australian State team. All of the above matches have been highly competitive. In addition, individual elite female players play in male teams.

There is no national or state policy on the issue of whether girls can play in boys teams or whether girls teams can play in boys' leagues. Accordingly, each State Federation has 'adopted' its own practice and so the approach is fragmented and ad-hoc. This solution has been treated differently between the States and even within States in different years. The only real guide is the anti-discrimination legislation which essentially sets under 11 years of age as appropriate for mixed teams.

For example, in Germany girls and boys play in mixed teams at both the under 12 and under 14 level. Given Germany won the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2003 and the FIFA Under 19 Women's World Championships in 2004, the structure of women's Football in Germany should provide some valuable insight.

It is appreciated there is a balance between maximising opportunities for elite female players with accounting for concerns regarding risk of injury and liability given the greater strength of boys. It is recommended that FFA review this area and formulate a national policy in consultation with the State Federations.

## 5 Structure of Women's National Soccer League

In this section, we review the structure and format of the WNSL. This is closely linked to the next section on high performance considerations, particularly the elite player pathways. The competition and logistics considerations, commercial arrangements and opportunities, and investment costs of the WNSL are considered in the following Sections 7, 8 and 9 respectively. This section concludes with our comments on the key issues that arise due to the structure and format of the WNSL.

### 5.1 WNSL Structure

In the structure of the WNSL, we review the:

- (a) historical purpose surrounding the introduction of the WNSL;
- (b) structure of the WNSL, including the teams;
- (c) role of the FFA in the WNSL; and
- (d) role of the State Federations in the WNSL.

#### 5.1.1 Historical overview

The catalyst for the change in the development of women's Football was its acceptance as an Olympic sport, a decision announced in September 1993, three weeks before Sydney was named as host for the 2000 Olympic Games. Subsequent government funding enabled women's Football to rapidly build a much more professional structure, particularly at the elite level. This funding was linked to the State Institutes and Academies, which subsequently formed teams that played each other in a national league. Accordingly, from a historical perspective, the purpose of the WNSL was to enable national team selection and competitive preparation and, to this end, it achieved its purpose.

#### 5.1.2 Structure

The WNSL began in 1996/97 and there have been 9 WNSL seasons. The structure and format of the WNSL has varied over those seasons for reasons largely driven by cost minimisation.

Predominantly the WNSL comprised 6 teams representing states with a National Training Centre (NTC) program (ie an elite program that forms part of the national network, in each case based at the State Institute or Academy of Sport). Those teams were:

- Queensland Sting (based at the Queensland Academy of Sport or QAS);
- Northern NSW Pride (based at the NSW Institute of Sport or NSWIS);
- NSW Sapphires (based at the NSW Institute of Sport or NSWIS);
- Canberra Eclipse (based at the ACT Academy of Sport or ACTAS);
- Adelaide Sensation (based at the SA Institute of Sport or SASI); and
- Victoria Vision (based at the Victorian Institute of Sport or VIS).

It should be noted that these team names are 'nicknames' rather than separate legal entities. Victoria Vision joined after the first couple of seasons once it has introduced a part-time NTC program.

Given the teams represented only 4 States and 1 Territory of Australia, a mechanism was required to enable women from outside these regions to participate in the WNSL. Accordingly, a "draft" was introduced. This was not a draft in the formal sense, but depended on which teams needed players and the requirements of the National Coach at the time. Not surprisingly, many draft players came from

Western Australia (for example, there were five drafts in the 2003 season) because Perth did not have an NTC program. These women had to relocate from Perth to another State's NTC program and then participate in the WNSL.

In 2004, a 7<sup>th</sup> team from Western Australia was admitted to the WNSL. In contrast to the other teams, the Western Waves was a separate legal entity (being Western Waves Pty Limited ACN 081 902 669) and was funded largely from Women's Soccer Western Australia (as it was then known before it was encapsulated under the Football West entity). There was at the time no NTC program in Western Australia. FFA and Football West have since contributed to the funding of a part-time program from 1 January to 30 June 2005.

### **5.1.3 Role of FFA**

For the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 WNSL seasons, the league was conducted under the auspices of the Australian Women's Soccer Association. In 2001, this women's entity was subsumed under the national governing body, being Soccer Australia Limited. As part of the constitutional reform discussed in Section 3 above, Soccer Australia Limited was replaced 2 years later with Australian Soccer Association Limited (now known as Football Federation Australia Limited).

During this time of significant structural change and reform within the game in recent years, the WNSL did not receive sufficient time, resources or direction from the national governing body. This reflects more the upheaval and reform of the game, rather than a disregard of the development of women's Football. The new Board of FFA was only appointed in July 2003 and with the WNSL starting in October of that same year, the structure and preparations for it had already been finalised. A new senior management team was introduced to FFA in 2004 and a decision was made to continue the WNSL in its current format for the 2004 season and to then conduct an extensive review. This decision was in line with the strategic priorities discussed in Section 3 above.

The role of the national governing body was in determining and enforcing the rules and regulations of the WNSL and the match schedule. The national body also provided funding to the league's operation. So while the WNSL came under the auspices of the national body, little was done by way of centralised direction or control and there was certainly no centralised marketing or promotion.

### **5.1.4 Role of State Federation**

The teams participating in the WNSL were NTC teams (as opposed to State Federation teams as per the structure of the National Youth Championships). The delineation of responsibilities between each State Federation and the local NTC in teams of team management and event hosting, was a matter for each team to determine. Accordingly, there were significant differences between states, particularly in terms of funding, employment of staff and co-ordination of programs. For example, coaches of 4 of the WNSL teams are employed by (and hence accountable to) an NTC, 2 are employed by State Federations, one on a part-time basis, and the final coach is in negotiation for engagement on a part-time basis. This is addressed more fully under 5.3 below.

In most cases, this meant the State Federations also provided minimal support in terms of direction and control and marketing and promotion.

## **5.2 Format of Season**

The format of the WNSL season has varied over the years. The format was driven by the objectives of the National Coach at the time and cost minimisation.

One of the first formats involved dividing the teams into 2 pools. The first pool involved the teams from Sydney, Newcastle and Canberra who could travel by road to play each other and the second pool involved the remaining teams who needed to fly to matches.

In 2000, the WNSL was post-Olympics and so it involved only 1 round (being 5 matches). In the following year, the format reverted to 2 rounds. The WNSL season was a ten-match format with a one-off grand final to decide the champion. Originally, the league was split with rounds 1 – 5 played October to December in a year and rounds 6 – 10 plus the grand final played in February to March of the next following year. This format with a break for the whole of January was to allow national team players selected for the Australia Cup tournament to participate fully in the league.

In 2003, the format changed so that league ran from 18 October 2003 to 20 December 2003. The compressed draw was at the request of the National Coach whose international program in preparation for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games commenced January 2004 with the Australia Cup.

For the most recent and 9<sup>th</sup> season in 2004, the team from Western Australia joined the WNSL and participated only in the 1<sup>st</sup> round. Each team played each other twice (with the exception of Western Waves who played each opponent once). The reason Western Waves only played each team once was purely financial, given that all other teams were located on the east coast of Australia. There were 11 matches for each team (except Western Waves, which only played 6). The points that were delegated to teams for the matches involving the Western Waves did not count to the overall league. The league began on Saturday 9 October and ended with a one-off grand final on 19 December 2004.

The timing of the WNSL season was that traditionally there were no FIFA events during this time and the focus of WNSL had been around the national team commitments. Traditionally, the format of the league depended on opinion or views of the National Coach at the time.

### **5.3 Key Issues With Structure and Format**

The 3 key issues with the structure and format of the WNSL are:

- (d) the season is too short;
- (e) the season is structured around national team commitments; and
- (f) the teams are NTC based.

Each of these issues are discussed below.

#### **5.3.1 Length of season**

Since its inception, each team has played a maximum of only 10 and then 11 matches per season (with Western Waves only 6 matches in the most recent season). This is not enough matches either from a high performance or playing perspective or from an ability to generate revenue and grow the game perspective.

Our elite players need a forum to play highly competitive Football on a regular basis. An analysis of international leagues is undertaken in Section 12, but the range of those league matches is from 18 to 35 matches per season. We think the Australian league should have matches at least at the lower end of this international trend.

The WNSL is (or should be) the showcase of women's Football in Australia. Each team only has 5 home matches a season and this makes it difficult to connect with the local community or fan base. It also limits revenue generation through gate receipts and sponsorship dollars.

There has always been a one off grand final between the 2 highest placed teams. The disadvantage of this structure is that many teams know early on in the season that they will not be in the final. This reduces the meaning of the league. The league has also been relatively uneven over the years and dominated by those teams with a full time NTC program (being Queensland Sting and NSW Sapphires). We think this could be overcome by introducing a top 4 finals series, which would also provide more matches.

The Review Committee recommends that the length of the season be increased by introducing another round that adopt a top 4 finals series structure is adopted.

### **5.3.2 National team commitments**

The format of the WNSL season has been very closely linked to national team commitments. While it is appreciated, that there needs to be careful co-ordination between a domestic national league and the commitments of the national team, the sole focus of the format of the league on the national team is not appropriate. A national team has 15 players with a larger squad as required. There were, however, at least 140 players in the WNSL, assuming each of the 7 teams had 20 player squads. To a large extent, this national team focus is historical given the original purpose of the WNSL was to select the national team.

The disadvantage of this format, is that it depends too much on the view of an individual (being the National Coach at the time) and it does not allow the league to meet all 4 purposes or objectives of a national domestic league. A compressed league format or a league with a substantial break in the middle to account for national team commitments, does not assist in the aim of the development of women's Football.

The Review Committee recommends that the timing of the league season be determined in the best interests of the development of women's Football. It should not be determined by national team commitments, but determined in co-operation and consultation with the national team. As with the A-League, known dates of national team activity may be avoided where possible, such as Asian Championships.

### **5.3.3 NTC based teams**

The most significant issue with the WNSL structure is that its participant teams are NTC program teams. Over time, this has meant that players in the WNSL are very young and there is no place for 'older' or non-NTC program players from the State Federations. In addition, the priorities or purposes of NTCs may not directly accord with the FFA's or State Federation's purposes.

These issues have meant that the WNSL has become more of a development league rather than a league for the best players in Australia. To this extent, it has lost any real meaning.

It is vital at the outset to clarify that this issue is not disparaging of the NTCs nor dismissive of the key role they have played and will continue to play in the development of women's Football at the elite level. The issue is simply that it should not be solely the NTC squads that form the WNSL teams. This view was in fact raised by an NTC coach as one that needs addressing. Moving forward, any WNSL team would of course need to work closely with the NTCs. This is particularly so given the NTCs would be focussed on senior national team members and candidates for the Young Matildas.

#### *Age of players*

The average age of WNSL players is about 19 years of age, with many WNSL teams being littered with 15 to 18 year olds. The main reason for this is the NTC link. There are 2 aspects to this. First, female

players are amateurs. The time commitment required for the NTC program and then the WNSL, has meant that many 'older' players (being those in the mid-twenties) could not commit due to work or study requirements. Second, the NTC program accepts only the elite players, being the members and potential members of Matildas and Young Matildas. The 2 national teams would comprise 30 players (and possibly squads of 40) and so the remaining 100 or so WNSL players are made up of the young, development players at the NTCs rather than the best players playing in the State Federation premier or super leagues.

Over time, this has meant that the players are too young and the WNSL has largely become a development league. The national team players consider the league to have lost meaning and attribute this in part to having to play against such young girls. A preference for completing against the best State Federation league players was virtually unanimous. In 2004, many national team players chose not to play in the WNSL given its perceived lack of meaning and because of a hectic 2004 Olympics and 2003 Women's World Cup schedule. This further exacerbated the age issue as these players were replaced with younger players.

Women's Football in Australia no longer caters for the elite player who is not of national team standard or who has retired from representative Football. Remembering, the senior national championships were abolished when the WNSL was introduced on the basis that the WNSL would be a forum for senior players. With the connection of the WNSL with the NTC, these players no longer have a place to play at the elite level. In contrast, the men's National Soccer League only had 1 national team member in Australia's last World Cup campaign. While the quality of players in the upcoming A-League has certainly improved, the vast majority of players are still not national team players. Despite this, the A-League has a vital role to play as the "shopfront" of elite men's Football.

The fact that there are very few players in their mid-twenties playing in the league, deprives the league of its best players. In addition, there are no role models for the younger players. Substantial feedback was received on the lack of a pathway for female coaches, referees, selectors or administrators. For example, as of 2005 there is not one female coach of an NTC or WNSL team. One of the contributing factors could be that we are losing players at a relatively young age.

Over time, the young age of the WNSL players and the fact that the WNSL has been used almost exclusively to select national team players, has meant the average age of the senior women's team is relatively young. At the 2003 Women's World Cup, the average age of the Australian team was 24 (and this is allowing for a couple of players in their early 30s). To put this in perspective, the average age of the top 3 teams was 26 years 4 months for Germany, 25 years 10 months for Sweden and 28 years for USA. Having said that, Australia certainly proved they are a team for the future.

#### *Difference of purpose*

The NTC Head Coach is also the Head Coach of the WNSL team. This has the potential for actual (or at least perceived) conflict of interest. While it is possible for the NTC coach when coaching the WNSL team to choose outside his or her NTC team, this rarely if ever happened in practice. In part, this is linked to the key performance indicators or KPIs of the NTCs.

For example, the Queensland Academy of Sport target athlete group is members and potential members of Matildas and Young Matildas. The KPIs are for QAS players to comprise 25-30% of players in senior and youth national teams. Interestingly, the program purpose is silent on the WNSL and focuses only on the national teams. When the QAS coach is then required to select the Queensland Sting WNSL team, the KPIs mean there is an incentive on that coach to select his own young, elite player (who could potentially become a Young Matilda), than for him to attend Queensland Soccer's premier league to determine the best female players for the WNSL team.

From an FFA perspective, this means that not all the objectives of a national league are being met because the WNSL/NTC teams are purely national team selection focussed. There are a further 2 aspects to this. First, is that there is a slight difference of purpose. The NTC coach is focussed on development while the WNSL coach *should* be focussed on winning. Problems arise because the NTC and WNSL coach are the same person. Provided an NTC coach's players are making national teams, that NTC coach is not necessarily concerned with winning the WNSL (particularly as it does not form part of his KPIs). This affects decisions about who plays as well as the style of play.

The second relates to FFA's input to a uniform and appropriate player pathway. The NTC sits outside the Football family in a sense that it is not a member of FFA like the State Federations and so is not subject to FFA's rules and regulations. This is to some extent being changed since the introduction of FFA's High Performance Unit and the current negotiations with each State Academy/Institute. FFA can seek input and direction through contractual negotiation. It is important that the NTCs have the same content (but different coaching styles etc) in terms of minimum standards on fundamental skills based on international levels.

From a State Federation perspective, the close link between the WNSL and NTC program makes ownership of the league at a local level amongst supporters difficult to develop. The WNSL team is viewed to be an institute team, not a team that represents local clubs. In some cases, NTC players are not allowed to play in local leagues.

#### *Recommendation*

The Review Committee recommends that the WNSL teams should not be the NTC teams. The teams should be State Federation based, with a close link to the local NTCs. This is discussed further at length under Section 13 recommendations.

## 6 High Performance

In 2004, FFA established a High Performance Unit headed by John Boulton (previously Director of the Australian Institute of Sport). The HPU is responsible, in part, for the elite player pathways and the international competitiveness of our National Teams. Key members of FFA's HPU are the National Women's Coach (Tom Sermanni) and the Manager, National Women's Teams (Jo Sanders).

### 6.1 Elite Player Pathways

In reviewing women's Football, it is important to be cognisant of the elite player pathways. Attached is a copy of the Pathway to the Matildas 2001-2004 (Attachment F). In essence, there are 3 separate pathways:

- (a) the school system (with national and state championships run by the relevant Australian and State Secondary Schools Sports Associations);
- (b) the club system at the State Federation level (with national and state underage championships run by FFA and State Federations respectively); and
- (c) NTC programs at the State Institutes or Academies level (which doubles as the WNSL teams and selection for national teams).

There is some confusion or lack of cohesion between these pathways and overlaps necessarily exist. Given the age of our elite players, many of them participate in all 3 pathways and some do so concurrently (such as Sally Shipard). This equates to a huge time commitment on the part of players and cost commitment on the part of their parents.

While pathways will never be overly clear, the challenge for FFA is managing the player's workload. Players need to be monitored to ensure there is no burn out or increase of injury and that their non-Football career or education is not adversely affected. To some extent, the multiple pathway issue for females is more complex because females physically develop earlier and so can play at a higher level earlier than boys. For example, it would be much more difficult for a school boy to play in the A-League against men than for young women to play at the WNSL level.

We appreciate that currently our women's NTC program needs to look after the elite players (and not just development players). This reflects that the female game is amateur at all levels, whereas in the men's pathway the NTC players are younger (all under 18 years of age) because they are prepared for professional and semi-professional leagues at a later age.

The Review Committee recommends a structure that is inclusive of all pathways, but with a need to prioritise a particular pathway that accelerates development to compete for the national team at an international level. In our view, a stand alone, strong domestic league is integral to this pathway.

We recommend that a fourth pathway be inserted that refers to the WNSL. The WNSL players could come from the preceding 2 pathways (being the NTCs and the clubs within the State Federations) and, in the exception, from the schools system.

### 6.2 Competitiveness of National Team

It is important for FFA to have a highly competitive national team. Australia are currently ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the FIFA world rankings and are becoming increasingly competitive on the world stage. For the first time, the Matildas reached the quarter-finals of the Olympic Games in 2004.



As at 22 August 2004, the Matildas had played 169 full internationals, winning 66, drawing 29 and losing 74. The placings of the Matildas at key international events have been:

- (a) 1991 Women's World Cup (China) - DNQ;
- (b) 1995 Women's World Cup (Sweden) - 12<sup>th</sup> (from 12 teams);
- (c) 1996 Olympics (Atlanta) - DNQ;
- (d) 1999 Women's World Cup (USA) - 11<sup>th</sup> (from 16 teams);
- (e) 2000 Olympics (Sydney) - 7<sup>th</sup> (from 8 teams);
- (f) 2003 Women's World Cup (USA) - 13<sup>th</sup> (from 16 teams); and
- (g) 2004 Olympics (Athens) - 5<sup>th</sup> (from 10 teams).

In addition, the Young Matildas were 7<sup>th</sup> from 12 teams in the 2004 Under 19 Women's World Championships and 5<sup>th</sup> from 12 teams in the 2002 Under 19 Women's World Championships.

The aim of the national team is stated to be in the top 4 at the 2007 Women's World Cup (China) and the 2008 Olympics (Beijing). A strong domestic league is a precursor to the achievement of this aim. National team members need to be playing high level Football in a competitive environment on a regular and consistent basis. As noted by FIFA in its report on the 2003 Women's World Cup, it was no coincidence that Germany and Sweden were the finalists given that they "both invest heavily in league structures".

## 7 Competition Considerations

For all of the reasons specified above in relation to the restructuring of the game in Australia, the organisations of and logistics for the WNSL were below standard. Many, if not all, of the criticisms made throughout the received submissions were well founded. The Review Committee has not, however, placed too much emphasis on these organisational issues, because they are all easily overcome.

For completeness, we identify the following key issues with the WNSL from a competitions perspective:

- (a) match scheduling;
- (b) sub-standard venues and facilities; and
- (c) poor organisation with lack of central direction.

It is important to identify these issues to ensure they are not carried forward in any new national league. They are also relevant from a contextual perspective when reviewing the commercial arrangements of the WNSL in the next section.

### 7.1 Match Scheduling

One of the key issues related to match scheduling. There was no consistency from week to week in match days or times. Match days ranged from Thursday to Sunday and the times from 9.30 am to 7 pm. No home matches were ever at the same time from fortnight to fortnight. This made it very difficult to plan and to attract spectators.

By way of example, the Northern NSW Pride draw for 2004 was:

Home Matches	Away Matches
Saturday 4 pm	Sunday 3 pm
Thursday 4 pm	Friday 7 pm
Saturday 4 pm	Sunday 7 pm
Sunday 5 pm	Friday 7 pm
Sunday 9.30 am	Sunday 4.30 pm
Saturday 5 pm	

In places, the match schedule did not give enough time for players to recover between matches or flights and caused a fatigued and below standard performance. Although the Western Waves was appreciative of its inclusion in the WNSL, its schedule was gruelling. Western Waves played all of its three away matches in the one week, playing Tuesday in Queensland, Thursday in Northern NSW and Sunday in Sydney. The introduction of the Western Waves also led to double headers (being 2 games over the same weekend in different states). These were strongly disliked by all stakeholders.

Another frequent comment was that the time and monetary commitments of the WNSL, meant 'older' women did not play. To some extent, the time commitment is not as easily addressed when dealing with

amateur leagues. It would mean that all games must be scheduled on Saturdays or Sunday before evening so as not to impact on Fridays and Mondays.

## 7.2 Venues and Facilities

Most of the venues were not centrally located, which added to the logistics problems with the league. The location of the venue was based in part on the cost of venue hire, in that venues that were out of town were usually provided to the team free of charge. Western Waves played at Members' Equity Stadium, which is an excellent stadium and is centrally located, but the venue hire fees were high and accounted for a majority of the team's budget. A balance needs to be maintained between locality and quality and cost.

The Review Committee recommends that FFA develop minimum venue standards for host venues. Once implemented, it is equally important that these standards are enforced by FFA. As part of these standards, consistency in match presentation could be addressed. FFA has already developed these standards for the A-League, which could be readily adapted to the WNSL.

## 7.3 Organisation

Although the WNSL came under the auspices of the national governing body, little direction was provided from the head office. There was no centralisation on the sponsorship, marketing or promotional front. The teams were essentially left to themselves to find sponsors, promote the matches and procure match venues and training grounds.

FFA was responsible for the match schedule and the rules and regulations. It is noted that these were often distributed *after* the league started. This obviously not only impacts on planning, but on possible revenue generation activities.

FFA was also responsible for the match referees. Although the pathways of female referees is outside the scope of this Report, consistent feedback included that the WNSL should not be used as a development path for referees. Instead, the Friendship Games (ie under 14) could be utilised. The WNSL and its teams need the best available referees for the best female athletes, regardless of gender.

It is noted that FIFA has a policy of using only female referees for its international female events. Our view is, however, that female referees should not be used simply because they are female. If our female referees are not up to the standard of the WNSL, then FFA needs to initiate pathways to urgently address this lack of quality. This pathway should also ensure that if a female referee or assistant referee is of sufficient skill and quality, that that referee should referee in the A-League.

## 7.4 Recommendation

The Review Committee recommends that FFA allocate a specific resource to the women's league from an operations and co-ordination perspective. FFA needs to ensure all matches are conducted in a professional manner in line with a new, mass entertainment product. To this end, the FFA needs to formulate and enforce central operational policies. Each WNSL team would then be responsible for conducting their own home matches under these central policies.

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## 8 Commercial Arrangements and Opportunities

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There were few commercial arrangements for the WNSL, which was largely reflective of the poor organisation and lack of centralisation from the national and state governing bodies. Again, those issues are highlighted here from the point of view of ensuring they are overcome in any future national league. For completeness, we comment on some future commercial opportunities from the FIFA, FFA and domestic league perspective.

### 8.1 WNSL Commercial Arrangements

FFA controls the WNSL and retains all commercial rights. The regulations state that FFA may obtain sponsorship of the league and, if so, could require teams to affix corporate logos on playing strips. Teams could obtain local sponsorship provided that such sponsorship is not in conflict with major sponsors of the league. In reality, there were no league sponsors (but also no evidence that sponsors were even sought).

Home teams could retain all revenue from gate receipts, catering, program sales and other match day sources. FFA (for some unknown reason) dictated that the maximum admission price for a WNSL match could not exceed \$5.50 (including GST).

Opportunities for commercialisation by teams was, however, limited, particularly given the late notice of match schedules and regulations. There is a notable exception to this general principle. The Western Waves only received 3 months notice of its inclusion in the WNSL, but managed to raise \$74,000 in sponsorship (cash and contra). This reflects the hard work of the personnel involved, but also provides optimism for the future.

The other issue was that although the WNSL did not come within the FFA sponsorships (and hence received no direct benefits from partners), the WNSL was tied to those FFA partners (and hence carried the burden). For example, the WNSL and its teams were required to use Qantas as the airline because Qantas are an important FFA partner. This was so even though the WNSL team received no direct benefits (such as VIK flights) and it cost more to fly with Qantas than with its competitor, Virgin Blue.

In summary, little effort was provided by any party to obtain commercial benefit from the league. This reflects partly the lack of resources provided by the national body, the NTC team focus being on elite player development and not the promotion or commercialisation of women's Football and the organisational issues arising from what was a very short season.

### 8.2 Future Commercial Opportunities

Every stakeholder in the game seems to support the promotion of the development of women's football. The challenge is to convert this support into a commercial reality, or the words into action. This section briefly reviews some commercial statistics and key developments in this area both internationally and domestically. The point is to highlight the view that commercial opportunities are available.

#### 8.2.1 FIFA tournaments

After each FIFA international event, it produces a report of the statistics from that event. The following is a summary of the key commercial statistics from FIFA Women's World Cup 2003. When reviewing the

statistics, it is important to bear in mind that the USA only had 4 months preparation time because the WWC moved from Beijing, China due to health concerns with SARS virus. USA had very successfully hosted the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup.

- Broadcast into 140 countries;
- Final between Germany and Sweden was watched by over 13 million people in Germany (which was considerably more than the men's Euro 2004 qualifier the day before) and 4 million in Sweden (being 40% of the population);
- 2,500 media and 150 photographers;
- 679,663 spectators, at an average of 21,240 per match (which due the limited lead in time was down on the 1999 figures of 1,214,209 at an average of 37,944 per match and an audience at the final of about 90,000);
- Website had over 50 million hits from over 200 countries and had live coverage of all 32 matches; and
- 13 of FIFA's official partners also partnered the women's with MasterCard stepping up as Presenting Sponsor.

The FIFA Women's World Cup is a massive, international event and ranks within the top 5 international sporting events. There is clearly a commercial value attached to these statistics. It seems only a matter of time before this value is crystallised in the form of qualification or appearance fees for the women's teams in the Women's World Cup.

### **8.2.2 FFA national team sponsors**

FFA's major commercial partners are Qantas (naming rights of the national teams, eg Qantas Socceroos and Qantas Matildas), Hyundai (naming rights of the men's domestic league, eg Hyundai A-League), Coca-Cola, Telstra and Nike for national teams' kit and Reebok for Hyundai A-League teams' kit. The Australian Sports Commission is also a significant contributor and important partner.

The FFA partners have already demonstrated a real interest in female players, at least at the national team level. For example, both Coke and Telstra have appointed a male and a female ambassador. Further, at an FFA Partner Workshop held in April 2005, a summary of the winning ideas from the previous workshop included a "link of the Qantas Matildas/WNSL to the Hyundai A-League".

At the national team level, one advantage is that the women are in Australia and, to a large extent, play in Australia. Therefore, they are more visible and provide a greater opportunity for promotional work (such as attendance at clinics). The other appeal is in the community involvement. As discussed earlier, it is thought that the nexus between the junior participant and the FFA customer, could best be met through a high profile, domestic league.

SBS is the official broadcaster of the men's senior team. SBS has recently indicated that it would be "delighted" to televise the women's senior team upcoming matches against Asian countries in July. With international matches now scheduled well in advance, there appears to be significant potential for women's matches to be televised, at least on a delayed basis. In the sporting environment, where television remains the key, this would have significant positive impact on revenue generation opportunities.

### **8.2.3 New women's domestic league**

From reviewing international experience and from speaking with key commercial and sponsorship personnel, the Review Committee is certainly optimistic that there would be commercial opportunities available if the women's league was professionally conducted and presented.

There is optimism that television rights to the league could be sold (or at least on production or cost neutral basis). There is also an indication from sponsors that they target the women because it is perceived that it is the women in the family that make the buying decisions. Accordingly, Midland Brick sponsored the Western Waves team because its research showed that it was the females who made the decisions when buying bricks.

At the moment, there is real commercial interest in female Football at the grass roots and at the national team level. A connection between community and elite Football would be made through a national domestic league. We think there would be value in a top down sponsorship that provides opportunities at all 3 levels. This is even more applicable to the women's game because almost all of our national players would participate in the domestic league.

None of FFA's partner agreements incorporate or apply to the WNSL. The Review Committee recommends that a partnership prop for women's Football is prepared and presented to each of the existing FFA Partners. Each of these partners would be offered the rights to the WNSL on the same terms as their existing deals, but for an additional sum of money. FFA is confident that most sponsors would opt for this top up sponsorship. If not, the WNSL is not tied to these partners and so FFA would be free to negotiate with third parties, including competitors of the FFA partners.

## 9 Investment costs

Given the lack of information received from the submissions in the area of budgets, it was difficult to gauge how much money was spent in total on the conduct and operations of the WNSL. In this section, we look at FFA's direct costs in running the WNSL, some sources of funding for the WNSL or any future national league and finish with a brief review of the national leagues of other female sports in Australia.

The budgets or costs of a national league were certainly the key concern amongst stakeholders and, in particular, the smaller or new State Federations.

### 9.1 WNSL Costs

As a general overview comment, the direct costs of conducting the WNSL were relatively small and almost all of them could be attributed to flights.

In 2003/04, Soccer Australia allocated \$145,592 towards the base running costs of the WNSL. The base costs totalled \$229,592 and were comprised of:

▪ Flights costs	\$191,192
▪ Road costs	22,000
▪ Referee costs	12,400
▪ Technical and admin	1,000
▪ Functions/promotions/awards	3,000

The shortfall of \$84,000 was divided equally amongst the 6 teams. Accordingly, a "franchise" fee of \$14,000 was payable from each team. This fee has been separately referred to in documentation as a franchise, affiliation or participation fee. Irrespective of the name of the fee, it appears to be the difference between FFA's total direct costs and FFA's desired allocation to its direct costs, divided amongst the participating teams.

For the year ending 30 June 2005, the budgeted total WNSL costs were \$268,617 (with airfares contributing \$194,176 of this) and revenue was \$110,000 (which included affiliation fees of \$84,000). The WNSL regulations stated a participation fee of \$16,500 (excluding GST) for the existing 6 teams and \$10,500 (excluding GST) for Western Waves was payable to FFA.

In addition to the franchise fee, each WNSL team was required to arrange at its own expense:

- (a) transport costs above the 16 person quota;
- (b) accommodation and meals;
- (c) match venue for home matches, including venue management and administration staff; and
- (d) player uniforms and all other team equipment.

The costs of the WNSL team were treated differently on a State by State basis. In some instances the NTC also provided funding to the WNSL operational costs and some State Federations passed the cost on to players. For example, the Adelaide Sensation players had to pay \$1,000 each to participate in the WNSL. Given other teams were cost-neutral for players, this created fairness and equity issues.

The Review Committee recommends that additional funding is provided to the league and that the players be able to participate in the national league on a cost-neutral basis.

## 9.2 Funding Sources

There are a number of sources of funding for the development of women's Football in Australia. This section identifies some of those funding sources and suggests that work is undertaken to ensure the funding available is maximised to achieve the objectives of a national league. The point in identifying some sources of funding is to highlight that money is already being spent on, or is available to, the women's game at the elite level. If the view that a domestic national league is crucial to further develop women's Football and to ensure international competitiveness is accepted, it may be that some sources of funding need to be re-distributed to the league.

### *FIFA*

As discussed below in Section 11, FIFA provides every member association with USD \$250,000 each year, 10% of which must be invested in women's Football. It is also inevitable, that FIFA will provide prize money to the FIFA women's events.

### *Australian Government*

The Australian Sports Commission provides each sport with funding for high performance programs and, more recently, grass roots or sports participation programs.

In addition, the State Government NTCs provide funding for their Football programs. There was a concern that if the WNSL teams moved away from being NTC teams, that the NTC funding would be lost. FFA is, however, confident that this would not be the case. FFA can require it of the NTCs as a condition of the significant funding provided by FFA to the NTCs. The NTC funding for elite and development players would remain because the NTCs would continue to have the same function.

### *FFA*

FFA budgets allocate a significant proportion to the national teams. In the proposed budgets for the 2005/2006 financial year, the budget for the Matildas is \$1,160,344 and the Young Matildas is \$618,662. FFA also contributes to each NTC in the amount of \$50,000 if a full time program and \$10,000 if a part time or non-Institute program (being WA, VIC, TAS and NT). Full time funding must be matched by the State Academies/Institutes.

A National Registration Fee is payable to FFA for each registrant and those fees are \$5.40 for juniors, \$12 for senior amateurs and \$35 for contracted players. This fee is the same for males and females.

### *State Federations*

In section 4.4.2, we examined the tremendous rate of growth in female participation numbers. This also leads to a corresponding increase in revenue as males and females pay the same registration fees.

### *Commercial Opportunities*

In addition, we think there are distinct commercial opportunities in the professional conduct and presentation of a domestic national league. At the very least, some of the key costs of airfares and player uniforms and equipment could be met through sponsorship arrangements.

The recommendation of the Review Committee that a strong, domestic national league is required may be met with opposition on the basis that FFA does not have the budget. FFA does not necessarily need to substantially increase its budget, and it could redistribute sources from other areas. By way of example only, if it is agreed that a strong domestic league is our greatest priority for the strength of the national team then it may be that the Young Matildas playing in a regular, high level competition would be more beneficial than an overseas tour or camp. If this is the case, then a proportion of the Young Matildas budget could be moved to the WNSL.



### **9.3 Other Female Sports**

It is important to briefly identify the funding arrangements of other female sports leagues in Australia because they are competitors for elite female players and, to a lesser extent, for the sponsorship or commercial dollar. It also highlights that female sport in general in Australia struggles to provide a financial return on the investment provided.

The sports reviewed were Netball, Basketball, Softball and Cricket because they each stage a domestic, national league. There were 2 key findings. First, all of these leagues are heavily reliant on ASC funding. Second, all of these leagues are cost-neutral to its participants (that is the player do not play to participate in them). The leagues vary on the extent of the commercialisation, with Netball leading the way in this area. None of them, however, provide a return to the national governing body.

Accordingly, the Review Committee does not think the fact that a women's league is unlikely to provide a financial return to FFA is a reason to not have a league at all. FFA will need to spend money to increase the professionalism of the product to maximise commercialisation opportunities.

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## 10 Player Welfare Considerations

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An important part of this review process, was obtaining the feedback and opinions of the players themselves. This feedback was largely in the area of player career and welfare issues, including impact on non-Football career and education, time and monetary commitment and aspirational and enjoyment considerations. Feedback was obtained through meeting with the national team and through a Player Survey, which is attached as Attachment G.

The feedback from the players was consistent with other stakeholders. In summary, they felt the WNSL:

- (a) had lost meaning in the sense that it really did not matter who won or lost;
- (b) season needed to be longer, including the introduction of a finals series;
- (c) players were too young and they would prefer to play against the best, more experienced players from the State Federations than the 16 to 18 year old players from the NTC;
- (d) double headers were difficult in terms of travelling, recovery and time commitment;
- (e) match scheduling meant they had to take too much time off work or study; and
- (f) timing of matches in the middle of the day in summer, was too hot and not conducive to their best performance.

Players were also keen to play curtain raisers or double headers with the A-League teams. Some had experienced this in the WNSL playing before the Adelaide United game in front of about 6,000 people. This is an avenue that deserves further consideration.

Essentially, players want to play in a forum that is conducive to their best performance. This relates to all aspects, including operations, venue and facilities, equipment and a female specific uniform. Although playing a uniform that fits may be perceived as a small issue, it is still important. Having females play in oversized men's shirts also does not assist the professionalism and commercialisation goals. FFA needs to ensure that it does the small things well.

The impact on player welfare was given due priority in making the recommendations in Section 13 below.

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# 11 Status of Women's Game within FIFA and the Confederations

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In 2002, the President of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, declared that “the future of Football is feminine.” Since that time, FIFA has been proactive in the development of women's Football around the world. This has subsequently been endorsed by Confederations and member associations. In this section, we examine some recent initiatives undertaken by FIFA and the Confederations.

## 11.1 FIFA

For completeness, this section provides a brief overview of the structure of FIFA. It then goes on to summarise FIFA's recent initiatives in the development of women's Football.

### 11.1.1 Overview of FIFA

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association or FIFA was founded in 1904 and is the international association responsible for Football worldwide. FIFA has 205 member associations, of which 121 have a FIFA ranked women's national team.

To assist FIFA in the administration and promotion of Football, there are 6 Confederations. The Confederations are the umbrella organisations of the national Football associations on each continent and are:

- Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in Asia;
- Confederation Africaine de Football (CAF) in Africa;
- Football Confederation (CONCACAF) in North and Central America and the Caribbean;
- Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL) in South America;
- Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA) in Europe; and
- the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) in Oceania.

All Confederations provide support to FIFA without encroaching on the rights of the national associations. In addition, the Confederations stage their own competitions at club and international level.

Australia is a currently a member of OFC, but is likely to move to the AFC effective from 1 January 2006. The implications of this are discussed later in this section.

### 11.1.2 Women's Football initiatives

FIFA is currently undertaking a review of the progress of the development of women's Football and it expects to have this distributed by the end of this year. In summary, FIFA's key initiatives have been to:

- (a) establish a women's committee and women's unit within FIFA;
- (b) stage women's Football symposiums;
- (c) stage open and underage international championships; and
- (d) provide funding.

In terms of women's Football, FIFA has established a “Committee for Women's Football and FIFA Women's Competitions” and has employed a General Manager of Women's Football, Tatjana Haenni.

FIFA has also recently appointed 15 famous players as FIFA Ambassadors of Women's Football (including Julie Murray).

FIFA has staged 3 FIFA Women's Football Symposiums that usually coincide with the timing of the Women's World Cups. The objective of the Symposiums are to present issues and challenges relating to the global advancement of women's Football. The Mission Statement is:

"FIFA supports the development of women's Football and is committed to creating increased opportunities for female players, coaches, referees and administrators to participate in the game of Football."

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> FIFA Women's Football Symposium held in USA in 2003, the 126 member associations unanimously agreed, amongst other things, to:

- (a) commit themselves to increase their activities, programs and funding to raise the quality and quantity of female Football players;
- (b) create Football competitions at national and regional level, where they do not already exist; and
- (c) emphasise the importance of having female athletes, coaches, referees, administrators and executives as role models for women and girls.

In addition, FIFA Futuro III: is organised by FIFA on a regional basis (involving up to 10 countries) and involves teach the teachers coaching courses or a specific women's Football coaching course on a country level.

Since 1991, FIFA has staged a FIFA Women's World Cup every 4 years. With the specific aim of the development of women's Football, FIFA launched the under 19 Women's World Championships in 2002 (in Canada). These championships are staged every 2 years. FIFA reports indicate these championships have had a positive impact on women's Football development world-wide.

As of the 2006 event in Russia, the FIFA U-19 Women's World Championships will be an under-20 competition and the number of participating teams will be increased from 12 to 16 (3 to AFC and 1 to OFC). In March 2005, the Committee for Women's Football backed a proposal for the possible creation of a new FIFA women's competition at youth level in line with the under-17 competition in the men's game.

In terms of funding, every member association receives USD \$1 million over a period of 4 years (payable as USD \$250,000 each year). Every Confederation receives USD\$10 million over 4 years. FIFA has directed that 10% of this funding must be invested in women's Football.

In the last 2 years, the Japanese Football Association has used this money to support the women's national team (2003 and 2004) and the women's league (2004). Similarly, the USA in 2003 used 50% of this money for its under 19 women's team to assist in the preparation of its 2004 under 19 world championships defence. The USA lost to eventual winners Germany in the semi-final and beat China for 3<sup>rd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> play off.

Accordingly, at the international level, FIFA is committed and remains committed to the development of women's Football. In this context, it is certainly an appropriate time for FFA to be reviewing its own women's Football initiatives.

## **11.2 Confederations**

There was not much information available on the development of women's Football at the Confederation level. In this section, we briefly review the position of FFA's current and future Confederations and examine the impact of our imminent move to Asia.

### **11.2.1 Oceania**

The OFC itself does not appear to have any women's Football development initiatives. In its report on the 2004 Under 19 Women's World Championships, FIFA commented that Australia showed that OFC is developing players but that "the Confederation needs to provide more competitive opportunities for players if a team is to advance even further in the next tournament".

### **11.2.2 Asia**

AFC is the governing body of Football in Asia, and the largest of FIFA's 6 confederations representing over half the world's Football fans with a population of 3.7 billion people within its 45 member associations.

AFC Vision Asia is the AFC's grand plan for a continent-wide program to raise the standards of Asian Football at all levels, be it on the field of play, administration or sports science. There are 11 elements, one of which relates to Women's Football. Asia feels it holds great promise in the women's game and it represents a "key element" in the framework of Football development in Asia.

"The objective of women's Football within Vision Asia is to promote the game throughout Asian countries extensively, provide development plans, introduce amateur, semi-professional and professional Football competitions, intensify educational programs for players, women coaches, women referees and women administrators, create a strong following and fan base and exploit marketing opportunities for the game.

We realise that there are social and cultural issues which minimized the development of the women's game, however, AFC is optimistic that women's Football can bring Asia to the limelight."

Accordingly, the women's game is given great priority in Asia. This poses both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity relates to Australia's ability to engage with Asia on both a high performance and commercial level. The threat relates to AFC's objective of "semi-professional and professional Football competitions". If Australia were unable to provide a viable alternative for our elite players, there is a possibility they may choose to play in Asia.

### **11.2.3 Impact of Asia for Australia**

AFC has unanimously resolved to accept Australia as a member of the AFC and the OFC has unanimously resolved to accept Australia's resignation. The remaining step is for the move to be FIFA endorsed, but there are perceived to be no issues given both Confederations unanimous position. This would mean that as from 1 January 2006, Australia would be a member of Asia.

This creates many positive opportunities on a high performance and commercial return basis. It does, however, mean that our female and underage teams will have a more difficult qualification path to FIFA international events.

The difficulty for Australia having to qualify through Oceania is that it did not provide any competitive matches. For example, in the 2003 World Cup qualifiers, the Matildas won on an aggregate of 45-0. At the 2004 U19 qualifiers, Australia played Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands in the qualifiers for a 27-1 aggregate and in the 2002 U19 qualifiers against Samoa and New Zealand for 26-0 aggregate. This meant Australia is under prepared at those international tournaments. To this extent, Australia's move to Asia is very positive.

As at March 2005, Australia is ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the FIFA rankings with 3 Asian countries above us, including, Korea DPR at 8, China PR at 9 and Japan at 12. The FIFA qualification path will be more difficult, but Australia will be much better prepared once it qualifies.

There are some timing implications to Australia's move to AFC. The next Women's World Cup is in China in 2007. The Asian qualification championships are in June 2006 with the preliminaries to be staged from 12 to 24 June 2005 in Vietnam (as at the time of writing, it was not evident whether Australia would have to compete in the June 2005 preliminaries or whether it would be seeded direct into Asian qualification championships).

The Asian Championships (or preliminaries) are held in June of each year. The under 19s are held every second year in April (in the even years) and the under 17s every second year (in the odd years).

As we saw with FFA's strategic priorities, the engagement with Asia is very important for FFA. Given the importance of women's Football to Asia, a strong domestic league has the potential to create great synergy with this Asian engagement.

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# 12 Structure of Women's Football Leagues Internationally

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We have conducted a brief review of the leagues of some overseas countries. We think this review is important from 2 perspectives. First, the establishment of professional and semi-professional leagues overseas provides a threat to the availability of Australian players to play in Australia. Second, we can learn from international experience, and particularly from the top ranked countries. In this section, we look at some examples from America, Europe and Asia.

An AIS Women's Football SWOT Analysis conducted on 15 June 2004 found that the greatest threats were the establishment of professional leagues overseas and the resulting drain of available athletes and that increased funding being provided to the women's game in USA, Europe and Asia created the potential for Australia to fall behind.

## 12.1 America

In the United States, there are 3 main levels of women's leagues: WUSA, the fully professional women's league; W-League, an all women league in the United Soccer Leagues that is semi-professional; and the amateur Women's Premier Soccer League and Colleges (which are scholarship based).

The impetus for the establishment of Women's United Soccer Association or WUSA was the fact that the 1999 Women's World Cup final between USA and China was played in front of more than 91,000 people and a television audience of 40 million. WUSA involved an 8 team league with funding of \$5 million for each team. Several Australian players played in the WUSA. WUSA folded for financial reasons with teams not operating within budgets. There are, however, currently renewed efforts headed by Women's Soccer Initiative Incorporated to establish a new, professional league in the United States.

The W-League began in 1994 and is semi-professional. There are 19 teams in W-1 League and 18 teams in the W-2 League.

WPSL is a regional, amateur league. The college system in the USA is enormous, and several Australians have or are currently playing in the College system. There are 915 US colleges that have women's Football programs, 301 of which are in Division 1.

Canada has 7 Canadian club teams playing in the USA's W-League. The players receive accommodation and expenses, but cannot be paid for college eligibility issues. Canada also stages a national club championships, known as the Jubilee Trophy, with a top club representing 10 of the provinces across Canada.

Efforts have been launched to get professional leagues underway in Brazil and Mexico.

## 12.2 Europe

In its report on the 2004 Under 19 Women's World Championships, FIFA identified Europe as the continent that showed the greatest level of development, both individually and collectively. This section briefly looks at 5 countries within Europe.

Denmark (Elitedivisionen): was established in 1974 and has 8 teams playing 21 matches each. Most clubs are affiliated with 1<sup>st</sup> division men's clubs, but only 2 to 3 can afford to pay salaries to players. The DBU provides financial grants to clubs that have a least 3 national team players. It is interesting to note that Denmark has more females than males as registered players.

England (FA Women's Premier League): was established in 1984 and has 10 teams playing 18 matches each. There are also 2 lower divisions of 12 teams each, with promotion and relegation of 2 teams. The FA organises all aspects of the league and covers all travel costs and provides marketing and public relations support. FA also provides USD \$75,000 in prize money. Most of the teams have a connection with the men's premier league. There is also a FA Women's Cup.

Research in England has shown that professionalism in women's Football is inevitable and that the FA must lead the development to ensure it is structured and will survive long-term. Fulham FC showed how standards can be raised dramatically with their 3-year spell as full time professionals between 2000-2003. There are now 5 sides within the 10-team national division who pay their players to play Football.

The women's game faces many challenges to taking steps towards professionalism, but by increasing participation and providing platforms to generate interest in the women's game as a spectator sport, the FA is driving forward the development of the game at the elite level. In 2001-02, Football became the top female sport in England. In 2002-03, the registered players totalled 85,000. This is a 38% increase in the last year.

Germany (Frauen-Bundesliga): was established in 1991 and since 1997 has had a 12 team Bundesliga playing 22 matches each. There are 2 lower divisions of 12 teams each, with promotion and relegation between the divisions. The DFB organises all aspects of the league. Many teams have a connection with the men's Bundesliga teams. Most players are part-time professionals. The DFB provided 15,000 euros to each of the 2003 Women's World Cup players. In 2003, there were over 850,000 registered female players.

Norway (Norwegian Women's Football League): was established in 1984 and has 10 teams playing 18 matches each. All clubs are affiliated with 1<sup>st</sup> division men's clubs. The Federation oversees the administration of the league and provides USD \$80,000 per team to offset team operations. Women's Football is the number 1 female sport in Norway with over 80,000 active players. Norway's motto is "Football for all", an all-inclusive Football family offering membership to everybody irrespective of race, gender, colour or background.

Sweden (Allsvenskan premiership): was established in 1973 and has 12 teams playing 22 matches each. The clubs ending up 11 and 12 are relegated and replaced by the winners of the 2 division leagues. The Swedish Federation oversees the League. 4 teams are affiliated with men's 1<sup>st</sup> division clubs and players are professional, semi-professional or amateur. National team players receive a stipend of between 5,000 to 10,000 euros each. The Swedish league is known as the strongest league in the world.

## 12.3 Asia

In Asia, we review the leagues of the 3 countries that are currently ranked above Australia in the FIFA rankings.

China: was established in 1984 and has 8 division 1 (super league) and 12 division 2 (W-League) teams playing 35 matches (with promotion and relegations between the two divisions). The W-League falls under the CFA for all administration and operations.

Japan (L-League): was established in 1989 and has 11 teams playing 14/15 matches. 3 of the 14 L-League teams are within the same organization as J-League teams. The League reports into the JFA.

Korea (K-League): was established in 1994 and has 13 teams playing 20 matches each. The KFA provides minimal financial support for teams in their 1<sup>st</sup> 3 years of operation.



# 13 Review Committee Recommendations

The Review Committee recommends that the WNSL in its current structure and format be discontinued, largely because it no longer meets the desired objectives of a national domestic league. The WNSL needs to be replaced with a proper home and away national domestic league involving teams representing the State Federations. For the purposes of this Section 13 and to differentiate the recommended format from the WNSL, we refer to the proposed domestic league as the W-League.

## 13.1.1 Charter of the W-League

The recommended charter or purpose of the W-League is:

- (e) to form part of the national team selection process;
- (f) to provide regular and high level competition for elite players, and particularly the national team players;
- (g) to provide a platform by which players can test themselves against the best; and
- (h) to assist in the development and promotion of women's Football generally by showcasing Australia's best players in a professional environment.

## 13.1.2 Structure and format

The recommended structure and format of the W-League is:

- (a) 6 teams\*.

It is noted that the most recent season of the WNSL had 7 teams. In order to ensure a high playing standard and to eliminate the previous unevenness of the competition, the Review Committee prefers to start with 6 teams with a view to increasing this number to 8 teams in the medium term.

Given one of the objectives of the W-League is to promote and advance women's Football, a team is required in each of the States. Although Western Australia has only participated in one round of one WNSL, we think a presence in the west of Australia is vital to further develop women's Football. The women's game also enjoys great support in the west. South Australia and Victoria have traditionally been the weaker teams in the WNSL and further work is required to ensure they become more competitive (rather than omit them based on results). The only State with 2 teams is NSW and so it is recommended that this is where one of the teams be dropped from. Given Soccer NSW has the largest number of participants, the team from Northern NSW is the most likely team to be not included in the W-League. That Federation also does not itself stage a senior women's competition. Given Northern NSW's relatively close proximity to Soccer NSW, the best players in the Northern NSW team would be able to play for Soccer NSW.

Accordingly, we recommend that the 6 team league be comprised of one team from each from the following State Federations; Capital Football, Football Federation Victoria, Football West, Queensland Soccer, Soccer NSW and South Australian Soccer Federation.

- (b) 3 rounds
- Therefore a total of 15 matches, with 7/8 being home matches.
- (c) finals series of 4 matches
- Major and minor semi finals of 1 vs 2 and 3 vs 4 respectively, with a preliminary final of the loser of the major semi and the winner of the minor semi and the grand final.
- (d) players are the best players available from the State Federation leagues and the local NTC program. Each team must have a formalised relationship with the NTC in its jurisdiction to ensure a co-ordinated approach to player pathways and development.
- (e) measures need to be introduced to ensure there is an even spread of national senior and youth players across each team, including a combination of restrictions on player movements and financial incentives. This is particularly important given the bulk of national team players come from NSW.
- (f) Summer season
- The timing of the W-League should be in summer so that cross-promotional activities with the men's A-League are available. The season should start in October and finish at the end of January or early February of the following year to account for a Christmas and New Year break. The final series of 4 matches would be conducted over February and early March in line with the finals series of the A-League.
- This season timing also fits with the timing of the State Federation leagues which usually run from March to September. This means that there would be no issue in State Federation players being available for the W-League.
- The season timing fits with international commitments, especially at the under age level. The Asian Championships for the under 20 and under 17s are staged in April and so the Australian team would be in a competitive position having just completed its domestic league.
- The only adverse impact of this timing is that historically, the national team has had commitments in January with the staging of the Australia Cup (a 3 to 4 national team tournament staged in Australia). The timing and format of the Australia Cup is currently being re-visited, but it does not have to be staged in January. As the traditional January camp was tied in with the Australia Cup commitments, it similarly does not need to be in January.
- (g) The W-League team should form a relationship with the A-League club in its jurisdiction to investigate the possibility of playing curtain raisers and other cross-promotional opportunities. The women's team from Canberra has no corresponding men's team and so could form an alliance with either Newcastle Jets or Central Coast Mariners.
- (h) Match scheduling needs to take into account the fact it is an amateur league with participants who have career and education requirements.
- (i) FFA needs to allocate a specific resource to the co-ordination of the W-League operations so that a more centralised approach is undertaken.
- (j) FFA should centrally market and promote the W-League.

- (k) FFA should implement and enforce minimum standards for the venue, facilities and match presentation.

\*It is acknowledged that there may be a backlash associated with the omission of Northern NSW, especially since it has been involved in the WNSL since its inception. The Northern NSW team was also a finalist in 2004 (although arguably this was more due to the return of key Matildas, being Cheryl Salisbury and Joanne Peters). If this hurdle proves to be too difficult to overcome, we would recommend 8 teams with the 8<sup>th</sup> team coming from one of the following (in order of preference):

- the Young Matildas (who would need to be based in camp at the AIS for the duration of the league season for this option to work). This option requires further consideration because it involves changes to the AIS program. The advantages are that it would greatly increase the competitiveness of the Young Matildas through the Asian qualifying championships and at the FIFA World Championships. It would also increase the competitiveness of the W-League by having another strong team to match the NSW and Queensland teams and assist in the redistribution of elite players.
- New Zealand senior women's team (provided the costs of its participation were met by New Zealand Soccer). Given Australia's impending move to AFC, there would be no issues of international competitiveness and it could be viewed as a good faith measure by FFA in assisting OFC. Furthermore, there is a New Zealand men's team in the A-League and hence cross-promotional opportunities would be available.
- A second team from Soccer NSW be selected, based on the fact that Soccer NSW has about half of the total registered participants. The advantages are that this would be the simplest option to implement and it would assist in the redistribution of elite players given NSW's dominance in the national teams. These teams would be divided on an east and west basis.

### **13.1.3 Cost implications**

The largest cost implication is the introduction of a 3<sup>rd</sup> round, but this is partially offset by the elimination of one of the teams. Accordingly, the Review Committee does not think there are any major adverse cost implications of its recommended structure and format. All of the funding sources remain the same, ie FIFA, Australian Sports Commission, FFA, State Federations (including from registration fees) and NTCs.

In addition, with the professional conduct and presentation of the W-League, we think there is real possibility of generating revenue, especially through sponsorships.

### **13.1.4 Timing implications**

The most difficult decision for the W-League is when it should be launched. A careful balance needs to be maintained between not losing the momentum and ensuring the W-League is given every opportunity to succeed. The most recent WNSL finished at the end of 2004 and so the options for the W-League are to start in October 2005 or to wait until October 2006.

Football in Australia is currently undergoing significant change and it is tempting to continue that process by changing the structure of the women's league. It is vital that the momentum generated by this review process is not lost.

As at the date of this Report, however, there are only 5 months until October 2005. There is also no resource dedicated to the W-League. We do not think that 5 months is an adequate lead in time to change the structure of the women's league, particularly as the constitutional reform is not complete.

For example, FFA is currently in the process of establishing a new entity in South Australia and it would be too burdensome to expect that new entity to be in a position to select a representative female side let alone host league matches. In contradistinction, the men's A-League teams are not State Federation based, but are privately owned. Accordingly, they are largely unaffected by the constitutional reform process.

In addition, the 2005 calendar year is already a massive year for Football in Australia. In line with FFA's strategic priorities, FFA will launch the A-League in August 2005 and the senior men's team will complete the World Cup qualifiers against the 5<sup>th</sup> placed COMNEBOL team in November 2005. Both of these initiatives have and will continue to dominate FFA's resources and time. It is likely that the restructure of the women's league would be lost in this environment.

An October 2006 launch is the most appropriate time to launch a new women's league because:

- (a) in the lead up to that time in June 2006, the FIFA World Cup would have taken place in Germany in June and the Matildas would (hopefully) have competed in the Asian Women's World Cup qualifiers. Both of these events, even if Australia do not qualify, would have attracted substantial domestic interest in the game;
- (b) the A-League would have completed its inaugural season and so FFA could devote more time and resources to the W-League. FFA would also be in a position to learn from the experience of having launched the A-League.
- (c) constitutional reform would be complete, which is important because the W-League teams are State Federation based.

It is imperative that everything that FFA undertakes, it does well and in a professional manner. For these reasons, we recommend that the W-League commence not in 2005, but in October 2006. To ensure, however, that the momentum is not lost, we recommend that FFA commit to the following 3 stage process.

### **13.1.5 3 stage process**

The Review Committee recommends that FFA appoint a dedicated resource as soon as possible to manage the following 3 stage process to the launch of the W-League in October 2006.

For stage 1, we recommend a 10 day tournament comprising State Federation teams be staged in 2005. The structure and format would be:

- (a) 8 teams (comprised of one team each from the following State Federations that previously had WNSL teams; Capital Football, Football Federation Victoria, Football West, Northern NSW Soccer Federation, Queensland Soccer, Soccer NSW and South Australian Soccer Federation, as well as the Young Matildas).
- (b) 14 matches in total, with 5 matches per team.
- (c) 2 pools of four teams, with each team playing each other team in its pool once. From there, the winner of pool A plays the second placed in pool B and vice versa. The winners of these matches play each other to determine the winner and runner up of the tournament and the losers of these matches play off for 3<sup>rd</sup> vs 4<sup>th</sup>. The same occurs with the bottom 2 in each pool to determine placings 5 to 8.
- (d) players are the best players available from the State Federation leagues and the respective NTC program. Each team must have a formalised relationship with the

NTC in its jurisdiction to ensure a co-ordinated approach to player pathways and development.

- (e) the timing of the tournament should be late September to early October to ensure it does not overly interfere with a player's educational commitments and it is outside the State Federation's seasons.
- (f) location of the tournament to be Sydney based because New South Wales has the largest participant base, 3 of the 8 teams are within driving distance to Sydney (and hence considerable savings on airfares) and FFA is based in Sydney.
- (g) FFA to centrally market and promote the tournament.
- (h) FFA to implement and enforce minimum standards for the venue, facilities and match presentation.

To provide the tournament with additional meaning, we recommend a second stage be implemented in late November or early December 2005 where FFA invites 3 Asian clubs (and perhaps the most recent winners of China's Super League, Japan's L-League and Korea's K-League) to compete with the top 3 Australian teams in a round robin, 6 team tournament.

The third stage is the launch of the W-League in October 2006. The work required to professionally conduct, present and promote the W-League would be occurring simultaneously to stages 1 and 2.

### **13.1.6 Other options considered**

From completeness, we briefly note some of the other options put forward and considered by the Review Committee:

- (a) Senior national championships. If the W-League is implemented in accordance with the above recommendations, we do not think an additional senior women's national championships is required because we would have a more appropriate forum for the senior players to compete in. The disadvantages of a tournament are that it does not assist in the general promotion of the women's game because it is staged only in one city. It also does not improve the standard of women's Football because players are not engaging in regular, high level competition.
- (b) Gala weekends. This involves one city hosting other teams in a weekend, tournament style competition. Although it is more cost effective than a national league, it suffers the same disadvantages as national championships.
- (c) female A-League teams. While the Committee is very supportive of informal links between W-League and A-League teams, we do not think requiring each A-League club to have a women's team is a viable option in the medium term. It acknowledges there are substantial cost saving advantages and cross-promotional opportunities. The main impediment is that A-League clubs are privately owned with investors expecting a return on that investment. In the short term, women's Football is unlikely to generate a return.

# 14 List of Attachments

For ease of reference, the following is a List of Attachments referred to in the body of this Report with applicable section and page numbers were that document was referenced.

ATTACHMENT NO.	NAME OF ATTACHMENT	SECTION NO.	PAGE NO.
A	Terms of Reference	1.1.1	1
B	List of Verbal Submissions or Information Received	1.1.4	2
C	List of Written Submissions Received	1.1.4	2
D	List of Documents Reviewed	1.1.4	2
E	2004 Participation Numbers	4.2	11
F	Pathway to the Matildas 2001-2004	6.1	19
G	Player Survey	10	29

# 15 Attachment A: Terms of Reference

Football Federation Australia Limited (FFA) wants to conduct a review into the structure, administration and promotion of its Women's National Soccer League (WNSL), with particular emphasis on the role it plays in the elite player pathways of female Football players in Australia.

FFA has established a Review Committee who will receive submissions and collate information in order to prepare a written report and recommendations to FFA in line with the following Terms of Reference:

- I. current status and structure of female teams, leagues or competitions within Australia, including at the national, state and district level;
- II. investment costs in women's Football in Australia, including costs of FFA, the State and Territory Federations and Institutes and Academies;
- III. strategic objectives and priorities of FFA;
- IV. national competition considerations, including venues, match schedules and logistics, management and operational issues;
- V. commercial value and opportunities, including potential revenue from broadcast, spectators, sponsorship and merchandise and licensing and media interest;
- VI. player career and welfare issues, including impact on non-Football career and education, time and monetary commitment and aspirational and enjoyment considerations;
- VII. development pathway for elite female players, coaches, referees and team support staff;
- VIII. current status and structure of female teams, leagues or competitions outside of Australia;
- IX. standard and competitive results of Australia's female teams at international level; and
- X. status of the women's game within FIFA and its Confederations and member associations.

## 15.1 Methodology

The Review Committee:

- (a) will have access to all results, budget and statistics and information relating to the WNSL from its inception;
- (b) may receive written or verbal submissions from any interested party, including FFA's high performance unit, State Federations, administrators, players, coaches, match officials and government representatives; and
- (c) may contact FIFA and its Confederations and member associations to ascertain international aspect of women's Football.

## 15.2 Committee Members

FFA has appointed the following 4 members to the Review Committee:

*Eugénie Buckley* (Chair) – Eugénie Buckley is Legal Counsel at Football Federation Australia and was previously Head of Legal and Commercial, Rugby World Cup 2003 and CEO of the

Professional Footballers' Association. She is a member of the Court of Arbitration for Sport, a Senior Fellow of the University of Melbourne where she lectures in *Event Management Law* and *Sports Marketing Law* and is the author of *Sports Law: Name and Image*.

*Susan Crow* (Competitions) – Susan Crow is the Chief Executive of Softball Australia. From 1995 – 2000, she was Executive Director of Women's Cricket Australia where she initiated the Women's National Cricket League and gained corporate sponsorship. In 1989, Susan was the first female employed in development in Australian Football and was later employed as National Development Officer with the National Australian Football Council (now the AFL).

*Patrick Hunt* (High Performance) – Patrick Hunt has coached at Olympic Games, World Championships and World University Games coaching over 350 games representing Australia. He is a former Head Coach of the Australian Institute of Sport Men's Basketball Program and Canberra Cannons National Basketball League Team. Currently he is Basketball Australia's Manager, National Player and Coach development, Head Coach of the National Intensive Training Centre Program and is an Executive Member of the FIBA World Association of Basketball Coaches.

*Julie Murray* (former Player) - Julie Murray is one of Australia's most respected Football players, having previously captained the senior women's side and competed in the 1995 and 1999 FIFA World Cups and the 2000 Olympic Games. She was the first female Footballer to receive a professional playing contract and competed in the first year of the WUSA Professional Women's Soccer League, winning the championship and Most Valuable Player award. In 1999, Julie was selected in the inaugural FIFA World All Stars team and was the winner of Australia's inaugural International Player of the Year Award. She has 67 A internationals and 19 goals.

### **15.3 Timeframes**

The following timeframes apply to the Review Committee:

- initial teleconference as soon as possible in March 2005 to discuss Terms of Reference and methodology and to agree on approach;
- obtain all relevant information and submissions by 31 March 2005; and
- final report to FFA due by 30 April 2005.



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# 16 Attachment B: Verbal Submissions or Information Received

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- Alagich, Di - Matilda and assistant coach Canberra Eclipse
- Bettel, Andrew - Football West, Education and Development Manager
- Boulton, John - FFA Head of High Performance
- Burrows, Leslie - Football Federation Victoria, Head of Development and Programs
- Carroll, Matt - FFA Head of Operations
- Carter, Wendy - South Australian Women's Sports Association, Executive Officer
- Chalkitis, Harry - Football Federation Victoria, Head Women's Coach
- Connell, Ann - Capital Football, Canberra Eclipse Manager
- Dower, Fay - Women's Soccer Queensland, Executive Officer
- Edwards, Alistair - Under 19 National Women's Assistant coach and coach of Western Waves, WNSL team
- Friend, Peter - FFA Chief of Staff
- Graham, Brett - Adelaide United FC, Financial Controller
- Haennie, Tatjana - FIFA, Manager Women's Football
- Harper, Andy - Sydney FC, Chief Executive Officer
- Hayward, Tess - Football Association, Women's League Co-ordinator
- Hooker, Robbie - Australian Capital Territory Academy of Sport Women's Head Coach
- Kay, David Soccer - Queensland, Chief Executive Officer
- King, Tom - United States Soccer Federation
- Khoumi, Maggie - Football Federation Victoria, commissioner and member of Women's Standing Committee
- Matildas - March camp squad members
- Miller, Bill - Northern Territory Football Association, Chief Executive Officer
- Neuss, Katrina - Capital Football, Coach and former player
- Oudendyk, Lawrence - Queensland Roar, Chief Executive Officer
- Parmenter, Geoff - FFA Head of Marketing and Strategy
- Phillips, Michelle - Football West, Chief Executive Officer
- Pignata, Tony - Football Federation Victoria, Chief Executive Officer
- Reid, Heather - Capital Football, Chief Executive
- Sanders, Jo - FFA National Women's Team Manager
- Screen, Garry - Northern New South Wales, Chief Executive Officer

- Selby, Connie – FFA, Coaching and Development Co-ordinator
- Selby, Jim – FFA Coaching and Development Manager
- Sermanni, Tom – AIS and FFA National Women's Head Coach
- Simpson, David - Capital Football, previously General manager of Canberra Eclipse
- Smith, David - Northern New South Wales, Football Manager
- Spencer, Janette - Acting Chair, FFA Women's Standing Committee
- Sullivan, John - FFA Head of Commercial Operations
- Thomson, Michael - FFA Head of Sponsorship & Licensing
- Waddell, Robert - Soccer NSW, Chief Executive Officer
- Williams, John - Capital Football, Women's League Manager

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# 17 Attachment C: Written Submissions Received

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- Capital Football
- Edwards, Alistair Under 19 National Women's Assistant coach
- Football Federation Victoria (contributors: Leslie Burrows, Head of Development and Programs; Maggie Koumi, Victoria Visions Team Manager and FFV Commissioner; and Julie Ryan, Female Development Co-ordinator)
- Football West (contributors: Andrew Bettell; Janette Spencer; Steve McGrath; and Alistair Edwards)
- 20 Matilda player survey results
- McCormack, Kevin - South Australian Sports Institute, Head Coach Women's Soccer
- Mulvey, Michael - Queensland Academy of Sport, Head Coach Women's Soccer
- Northern NSW Soccer Federation
- Sermanni, Tom - FFA National Women's Head Coach
- Soccer NSW (contributors: Rob Laws, Director Soccer NSW; Branko Culina, Technical Director; Norm Boardman, Asst Technical Director; Neisha Klessattel, Female Participation Officer; Belinda Wilson, Female Participation Officer; Alen Stajcic, Coach NSWIS Women's Team; Taryn Rockall, former Matilda)
- South Australian Women's Soccer Association (contributors: Wendy Carter, SAWSA Executive Officer; Sports Institute representatives, SAWSA representatives)
- Spencer, Janette

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# 18 Attachment D: Documents Reviewed

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- [www.the-afc.com](http://www.the-afc.com);
- AFC Vision Asia;
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS Directions and Data Collections in the Area of Sport and Recreation (September 2002);
- AIS Men's & Women's Football Program 1 July 2005 – 30 June 2009 Agreement;
- Australian Sports Commission, Business Plan 2005-2008 FreeKick, Targeted Sports Participation Growth Program;
- [www.canadasoccer.com](http://www.canadasoccer.com) (Canada);
- Constitution of Football Federation Australia Limited;
- [www.dbu.dk](http://www.dbu.dk) (Denmark);
- [www.dfb.de/bliga/frauen](http://www.dfb.de/bliga/frauen) (Germany);
- [www.fa.org.cn](http://www.fa.org.cn) (China);
- Football Association, Women's Pyramid of Football Re-Structuring;
- [www.fifa.com](http://www.fifa.com) - women's Football;
- FIFA, National Associations Survey Women's Football in 2003;
- FIFA, Women's World Cup USA 2003 Report & Statistics;
- FIFA, U-19 Women's World Championships Thailand 2004 Report & Statistics;
- FIFA, U-19 Women's World Championships Canada 2002 Report & Statistics;
- [www.footballaustralia.com.au](http://www.footballaustralia.com.au) - women's Football;
- [www.fotball.no](http://www.fotball.no) (Norway);
- FFA, Australian Football Brand Assessment (October 2004);
- FFA budgets financial year 2005 – 2006 and budgeted profit and loss statements for the year ending 30 June 2005;
- FFA, Elite Female Coaches and Support Personnel – Development and Retention Memorandum (4 June 2004);
- FFA Planning Conference, Summary of Strategic Priorities (October 2004);
- FFA Planning Workshop “The New Era – Female Coaches” 14-16 June 2002;
- FFA Strategic Business Plan 2003 – 2007 “Creating a sustainable, flourishing game”;

- FFA Women's National Junior and Youth Championships Aims;
- FFA Women's Standing Committee, Strategic Plan for Women in Soccer 2004 – 2008;
- Four Year Sport Agreement Football Program Overview 1 January 2005 – 31 December 2008 (entered into between FFA, the State Academy or Institute and State Federation);
- Hennies, Rainer, "Women's Football at its finest – in deserted stadiums", FIFA Magazine April 2005 46;
- [www.jfa.or.jp/e/index](http://www.jfa.or.jp/e/index) (Japan);
- Matildas and Young Matildas 2005 event schedule;
- National Talent Identification Standard Procedures Rules and Regulations 2004;
- Pathway to Matildas 2001-2004
- [www.soccertimes.com/proleagues/wusa](http://www.soccertimes.com/proleagues/wusa);
- [www.svenskfotboll.se](http://www.svenskfotboll.se) (Sweden);
- [www.thefa.com/womens](http://www.thefa.com/womens) (England);
- [www.uefa.com](http://www.uefa.com);
- University of Leicester, Centre for Sociology of Sport, "A brief history of female Football fans";
- University of Leicester, Centre for Sociology of Sport, "Women and Football";
- [www.ussoccer.com](http://www.ussoccer.com) (USA);
- Various media articles on women's Football;
- Watson, Elaine, Australian Women's Soccer The First 20 Years (1994);
- WNSL Draw 2004;
- WNSL Franchise Agreement 2003/04;
- WNSL Competition Regulations 2004;
- WNSL Competition Rules and Guidelines Season 2003/04;
- WNSL Media Guide 2003/04 Season; and
- WNSL Summary Ground Information 2004.

# 19 Attachment E: 2004 Participation Numbers

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# 20 Attachment F: Pathway to Matildas 2001-2004

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## 21 Attachment G: Player Survey

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