



FOOTBALL  
**SOUTH  
AUSTRALIA**

# Future Direction of Senior Men's Competitions in Greater Adelaide

Final Independent Review

December 2025



**Future Direction of Senior Men’s Competitions in Greater Adelaide:**

**Independent Review**

Final Report – December 2025

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Football South Australia (**'FSA'**) is committed to enhancing the pathway from junior to senior men's football competitions across metropolitan Adelaide. In line with this strategy, FSA has commissioned this independent review to recommend competition structures that maximise player transition from junior to senior football, provide a pathway for aspiring clubs and facilitate the continued growth of all senior football competitions in metropolitan Adelaide.

This Report details several key insights based on data analysis, stakeholder consultation and industry benchmarks, including:

- (a) There is a critical bottleneck for players transitioning out of underage/youth competitions, which is limiting player retention and growth.
- (b) The current senior men's structure limits growth in players and teams within FSA clubs.
- (c) Structural misalignment between CSL, SAASL, and FSA is creating confusion and inefficiency, and is behind that of other states such as WA and VIC.
- (d) CSL serves a unique and valuable purpose for social players; however, many CSL stakeholders wish to revert to its traditional 'collegiate' roots, whilst the SAASL competition provides an alternative environment for amateur senior players.
- (e) There are aspirational clubs that want to develop within the elite competition pathway, and the expanded FSA men's competition structure has provided opportunities for these clubs.
- (f) There is a lack of clear player development and exposure opportunities for players and coaches; however, the expanded FSA competition structure is supporting these players and coaches.
- (g) Increasing costs are threatening club sustainability and investment into growth.
- (h) Junior-to-senior player transition is hindered by the current fragmented structure.
- (i) The SAASL operates largely in isolation from the rest of the football ecosystem in metro Adelaide and would benefit from greater alignment.
- (j) The EDJSA presents a significant opportunity to enhance the pathway and improve player transition to senior football.
- (k) Club support staff lack the tools and expertise to support high performance, leading to volunteer fatigue.
- (l) Clubs are critical of FSA's running of the NTC program and misunderstand the funding and operational model.
- (m) Facility, coach and administration shortages threaten growth and sustainability.
- (n) The CSL and SAASL are both increasingly reliant on FSA resources and support for its operations.

This Report proposes several key recommendations, including:

- (a) FSA should restructure the underpinning NPL/ State League First team competitions to U18s, U20s, U23s to maximise player retention, enhance player development and align to FA's Player Roster Principles.
- (b) FSA needs to offer a senior community 'amateur' competition structure for FSA clubs to facilitate team growth and maximise player retention.
- (c) If the CSL and SAASL wish to continue to operate independently as an affiliated association, they should do so with greater alignment and collaboration with FSA, including through adoption and consistent application of Rules and Regulations to reduce administrative burden on clubs.
- (d) FSA should continue to expand the current State League competition structure to facilitate growth and support developing clubs.
- (e) FSA continues to require that only clubs participating in NPL/State League may field teams in the YCC.
- (f) Volunteer burden could be minimised, participation maximised and club sustainability enhanced if consistent policies were enacted for and embraced by all football stakeholders.
- (g) The EDJSA be incentivised to become affiliated (either directly through FSA or via SAASL).
- (h) Greater investment in referee development and club support staff to accommodate and drive growth.
- (i) FSA should work with stakeholders to develop and implement an overarching regulatory framework statewide to provide consistency, improve efficiency and ensure alignment.
- (j) FSA needs to better educate stakeholders on the NTC program.
- (k) FSA should implement a salary cap across the NPL and State League competitions to enhance club sustainability.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Sports Advisory Partners Australia ('**SAPA**') is a sports advisory firm with offices currently in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart and Adelaide. SAPA offers a full range of advisory services to sporting organisations across Strategy, Commercialisation, Legal, Regulatory, Governance & Integrity, Advocacy and Leadership & Culture.

SAPA has been engaged by FSA to conduct an independent review of the current Senior Men's Competition landscape ('**the Project**'). The Project will examine opportunities to better align senior structures across the State, with the aim of building a more balanced, connected pathway and safeguarding the long-term viability and integrity of affiliated bodies.

### 3. SCOPE & PROCESS

#### a. Background

FSA's senior men's competitions have grown rapidly, with over 250 new teams introduced in 2024 alone – the majority at junior levels. This growth, alongside the recent expansion of State League 2, has raised concerns about competition sustainability, player retention, and the transition from junior to senior football. To address these challenges, FSA has commissioned this independent review.

#### b. Purpose

The purpose of the Project is to identify what the optimum structure for the competition is, which aligns with the semi-professional game and ensure the viability of the competition's operation and growth within metropolitan Adelaide.

#### c. Scope

The review covers all senior men's competitions under FSA and affiliated associations (South Australian Amateur Soccer League ('SAASL'), Collegiate Soccer League ('CSL') and others as relevant). It examines structural alignment, competition tiers, player pathways, and administrative frameworks. Women's and junior-only competitions are outside this scope.

#### d. Process

The Review followed four phases:

##### a. Analysis and Consultation:

- Online survey involving FSA participants, administrators and board, Semi-Professional Club working group and SAASL and CSL administration and club working groups
- Meetings with key stakeholders identified by FSA
- Review FSA's existing senior men's competition framework

##### b. Summarise Key Insights:

- Review data provided from online survey and meetings with key stakeholders
- Identify major themes and key insights
- Test key insights with key stakeholders

##### c. Frame Key Recommendations

- Identify and develop potential recommendations based on key insights
- Test key recommendations with key stakeholders

##### d. Finalise Summary Report including Key Recommendations:

- Present key findings and proposed framework to FSA Administration and Board
- Host workshop with the affiliated associations to present the report and key recommendations

#### e. Stakeholder Consultation

To ensure the review reflected the opinions and needs of those most impacted, SAPA conducted extensive stakeholder engagement. This included:

- In-person workshops with the Boards, staff and club representatives of FSA, SAASL, and CSL across two days; and
- An online survey, completed by 1,552 stakeholders, included players (59.7% of respondents), coaches (21.8% of respondents), administrators and board members (13% of respondents), and officials/referees (5.3% of respondents).

Who	When
FSA Board & Staff	30 June at 3:00pm
SAASL Board	30 June at 5:00pm
SAASL Clubs	30 June at 6:30pm
FSA Clubs	1 July at 6:30pm
CSL Board	1 July at 3:00pm
CSL Clubs	1 July at 5:00pm

Table 1 – Stakeholder Consultation Schedule

The stakeholder groups represented three different associations – FSA, SAASL and CSL, including board members and club representatives. The following figure outlines the respondent data in further detail:

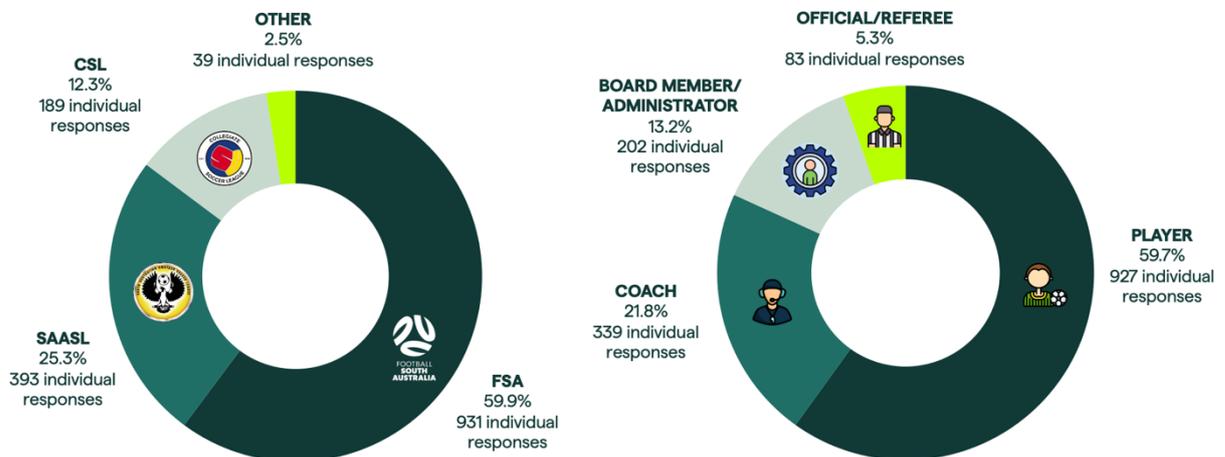


Figure 1 – Survey Participation Data

The facilitated workshops focused on testing 12 key insights from the survey data and invited open discussion to uncover deeper perspectives depicted in Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends. Common themes from the stakeholder consultations included volunteer burnout, facility resourcing limitations, structural misalignment, and a critical gap for players between the ages of 16 to 23 years old. Stakeholders also raised the importance of preserving club identities and creating clearer pathways between amateur and semi-professional competition tiers.

The consultation ensured that the review’s recommendations were grounded in the lived experience of those directly running and participating in senior football across Greater Adelaide.

Please refer to Appendix L: Stakeholder Survey Questionnaire for further information on the stakeholder survey.

## 4. BACKGROUND

### a. Football South Australia



#### General

FSA is the official governing body for association football (soccer) in South Australia. As a member of Football Australia (**‘FA’**), FSA oversees the state’s semi-professional and amateur men, women, junior and inclusive football competitions.<sup>1</sup> FSA plays a vital role in managing the sports administration, supporting affiliated associations, and driving football development at both grassroots and elite levels for players, coaches, referees and clubs alike.

Affiliated clubs and leagues benefit from a wide range of services and resources through their alignment with FA and FSA, including but not limited to:

- Access to FA and FSA policies, procedures and governance frameworks
- Regulatory and administrative support and advisory services
- Including under the FA Member Protection Framework
- Eligibility for national competitions such as the Australia Cup
- Ongoing development opportunities for players, coaches and match officials

South Australia continues to lead the way as a competitive and successful football state, with strong foundations and participation across all levels of the game. Over 19,000 senior and junior males are registered to play or coach Soccer in metropolitan Adelaide.<sup>2</sup>

#### Current Structure

Incorporating Seniors, Reserves and Under 18 teams across the following competitions:

- National Premier League (**‘NPL’**)
  - 676 players / 36 teams (senior, reserves and U18)
- State League 1
  - 684 players / 36 teams (senior, reserves and U18)
- State League 2 (North and South)
  - 905 players / 48 teams (senior, reserves and U18)
- Youth Club Championship (**‘YCC’**)
- Youth State League (**‘YSL’**)
- MiniRoos (under 6 to under 11)

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1: Briefing Paper

FSA's NPL and State League men's competition structure operates as a promotion and relegation system within a closed league structure. Clubs are eligible to participate pursuant to a club participation agreement issued by FSA and must comply with minimum standards under the agreement and Football Australia's Club Licensing Regulations. Each club participating in these NPL/State League competitions fields teams in the Seniors, Reserves and Under 18 competitions.

With respect to the eligibility for Players to play in the Seniors and Reserves teams in the NPL or State League competitions, the Senior Player Roster rules limit Player Rosters to 23 Players and only permits players which are not listed on the Senior Player Roster to players that are 20 years of age or younger (within the year of competition) to be able to play for the First Team. There are no regulations that stipulate the Reserves is U20s, however in practice this has resulted in the Reserves teams being comprised of largely under 20s as it affords clubs the better flexibility of larger squad sizes of eligible players.

Over the last three years (2023 – 2025), FSA team participation has grown 22.5%<sup>3</sup> (across both Junior and Senior structures) and has seen a 10.8%<sup>4</sup> increase in senior men's players participation. As of 2025, there are now 1,583 registered FSA Senior Men's players, representing 19% of all senior men's players across metropolitan Adelaide.<sup>5</sup>

### **FSA's National Training Centre Program**

Since 2011, FSA has delivered the National Training Centre ('**NTC**') program – a full-time elite youth development pathway for players aged 12 to 17.<sup>6</sup> At age 18, NTC graduates have the opportunity to progress into the professional game with Adelaide United, another A-League club, or an international football organisation.

FSA invests circa \$1.1-1.2 million annually<sup>7</sup> to the NTC, ensuring South Australia's most talented young players have access to a high-performance environment that accelerates their development and supports their professional ambitions.

The total investment is funded as follows:

- 10-15% from FA;
- 65% from NTC program participant fees;
- 20-25% from FSA's operating surplus including commercial revenues.

Over the last 15 years, the NTC has produced outstanding outcomes, including:

- 32 male players selected for the Joeys and Young Socceroo's
- 21 female players selected for the Young Matilda's
- 78 players across both genders contracted to A-League clubs
- 17 male players signed to overseas clubs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Appendix D: Competition Data Senior Players per Association 2025

<sup>3</sup> Appendix B: Total Team Participation Growth Per Association 2023-2025

<sup>4</sup> Appendix C: Total Player Participation Growth Per Association 2023-2025

<sup>5</sup> Appendix D: Competition Data – Senior Players Per Association 2025

<sup>6</sup> Appendix N: Football SA's NTC Program Information

<sup>7</sup> Appendix N: Football SA's NTC Program Information

<sup>8</sup> Appendix N: Football SA's NTC Program Information

This record highlights the significant impact of FSA’s investment, establishing the NTC as one of the strongest and most effective professional pathways in Australia. Importantly, FSA does not receive any Domestic Training Compensation for players who progress from the NTC to professional contracts with Adelaide United, other A-League clubs, or international clubs.

**Expansion**

Until this year, the FSA men’s competition structure has remained steady for many years. Over recent years, FSA had received several enquiries from Clubs seeking an opportunity to join the State League 2 competition. In 2024, FSA called for expressions of interest to expand the State League 2 competition into North and South divisions. Once new teams were confirmed, and license agreements had been signed, the split was introduced in the 2025 playing season.

In doing so, FSA received expressions of interest from clubs from the South Australian Amateur Soccer League (or SAASL) and Collegiate Soccer League (or CSL). Considering such interest, FSA expanded State League 2 from a single division 12-team competition in 2024 to 16 teams across two divisions (8 teams in State League 2 – South and 8 teams in State League 2 – North) in 2025 with the introduction of 4 SAASL clubs. SAASL has raised concerns about the detrimental effect further expansion of State League 2 may have on the viability of their competitions. The State League 2 competition will expand in 2026 to 20 teams across two divisions (10 teams in State League 2 – North and 10 in State League 2 – South) with the introduction of 3 SAASL clubs and 1 CSL Club. FSA has expressed an intention to further expand Stage League 2 to 24 teams in 2027 (12 teams in each of State League 2 – South and North).

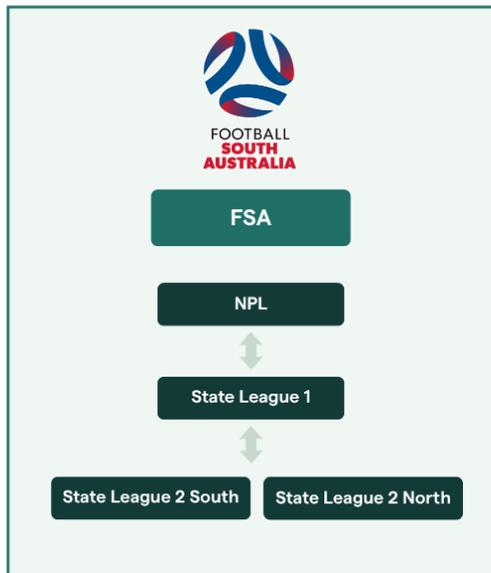


Figure 2 - Football South Australia Competition Structure (Men's)

To facilitate a clear pathway within semi-professional competitions, only Senior Clubs that compete in NPL/SL/WNPL/WSL competitions may nominate junior teams within the YCC competitions. The YCC is the premier tier of junior competition in South Australia, while the second tier, YSL, offers a valuable pathway for aspiring players to develop their skills and progress to higher levels of the game.

SAASL and CSL clubs are permitted to field junior boys' and girls' teams in the YSL competition, while the YCC is reserved exclusively for clubs in the FSA managed NPL and State League competitions. When clubs submit an expression of interest to join FSA senior competitions, their application is assessed based on several factors including the size and number of junior teams and players to ensure the club has a sustainable pathway into NPL and State League competitions.

South Australia's sole A-Leagues Club, Adelaide United, field teams in the NPL competition with additional player roster restrictions, whilst FSA operates the SA NTC teams in the YCC.

### **Women's Competitions**

The FSA women's competition is structured under a single-tiered pyramid system that encompasses the Women's National Premier League ('**WNPL**') and the Women's State League ('**WSL**'). These competitions are supported by a community league, the Women's Community League, which exists for participation and social benefits in Metropolitan Adelaide.

Both the WNPL and WSL offer promotion and relegation, ensuring pathways for ambitious clubs to progress.

The Women's Community League also offers promotion and relegation, but with greater flexibility – clubs can decline promotion, and teams have the option to nominate for an alternative division. Additionally, clubs in these WNPL and WSL competitions may also field teams in the Women's Community Competition, with player movement between competitions permitted and regulated under the FSA competition rules. This flexibility is vital in ensuring players have opportunities to participate at the level best suited to their development, and remain engaged in the game, while also supporting clubs in fielding competitive teams across multiple divisions.



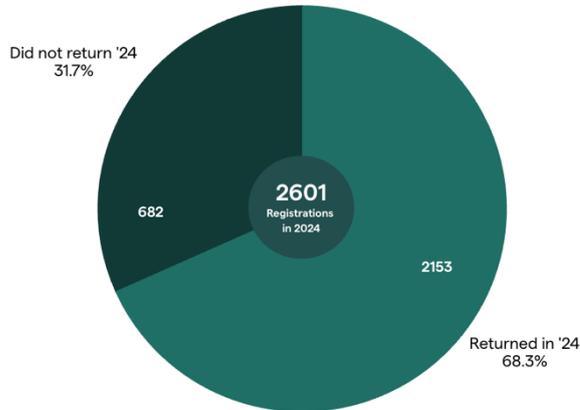
Figure 3 - Senior Women's Competition Structure in Metro Adelaide

The FSA Women's competitions operate under a unified framework, consistent governance and clear pathways from grassroots to elite levels. This structure maximises player development, provides certainty for clubs, and ensures that competition standards are upheld by all tiers of competition. By having one governing body oversee the entire structure, there is greater consistency in rules, regulations, and long-term strategic planning. Between 2023 and 2025, we have seen a growth of 31% (664 registrations) in senior Women's players (U16s to Seniors competitions) within the FSA competition.<sup>9</sup> Figure 4 below provides further data specific to players who have returned or not returned during this same period, noting that, on average, 68% of players are returning year on year.

<sup>9</sup> Women's competition data provided from Dribl via FSA

**FSA Registrations YoY (2023-2024)**

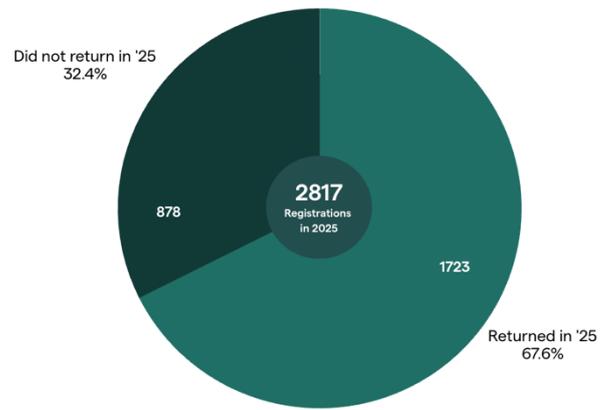
Under 16s to Senior Womens's



We saw 448 new player registrations, that were not registered in 2023.

**FSA Registrations YoY (2024-2025)**

Under 16s to Senior Womens's



We saw 984 new player registrations, that were not registered in 2024. However 110 players where registered in 2023, and returned to play in 2025.

Figure 4 – FSA Women’s Player Retention Data 2023-2025 (U16s to Seniors)

**b. South Australian Amateur Soccer League**



The SAASL affiliated with Football South Australia, has been a cornerstone of community football for over 60 years.<sup>10</sup> Operating independently, SAASL has established itself as the leading organisation for non-professional soccer in the state. The league oversees a broad range of competitions, including<sup>11</sup>:

- Saturday Premier A, B and C: Division 2, 3Red, 3Blue, 6, 7 and 8
  - 2053 players / 104 teams
- Sunday Premier A, B and C; Division 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8
  - 1905 players / 94 teams
- Over 35's
  - 334 players / 17 teams

In 2025, SAASL had 4,295 players registered in its competitions, which is 53% of senior men’s players in metropolitan Adelaide.<sup>12</sup> However, between 2023 and 2025, SAASL has seen a 6.3% decrease in team participation<sup>13</sup> and a 21.1% decrease in players<sup>14</sup> across this period. This data suggests that although SAASL has the majority of Senior players, their declining participation suggests that players are moving away from the SAASL competition, and/or leaving the game.

SAASL coordinates teams and competitions across an expansive region - from Port Pirie in the north to Victor Harbour in the south, and from Murray Bridge in the east to the

<sup>10</sup> <https://saasl.com.au/about/>

<sup>11</sup> Appendix A: Briefing Paper

<sup>12</sup> Appendix D: Competition Data – Senior Players Per Association 2025

<sup>13</sup> Appendix B: Total Team Participation Growth Per Association 2023-2025

<sup>14</sup> Appendix C: Total Player Participation Growth Per Association 2023-2025

coast<sup>15</sup>. With such a broad jurisdiction, the SAASL is committed to promoting an inclusive, accessible and community-driven soccer experience for senior players of all skill levels and backgrounds.

The SAASL operates largely in isolation from other football leagues, including those administered by Football SA, CSL and EDJSA. For example, SAASL rules do not permit the movement of players within the same club between teams participating in SAASL and FSA or CSL competitions during the season. Football SA provides the administrative function of appointing match officials to the top 4 Divisions of SAASL Competitions and has also negotiated on SAASL’s behalf the use of Dribl (the competition management software) used by Football SA. The SAASL does not currently offer women’s or junior age group competitions; however, it has sought expressions of interest from clubs for both senior women’s and U18s boys’ competitions for 2026.

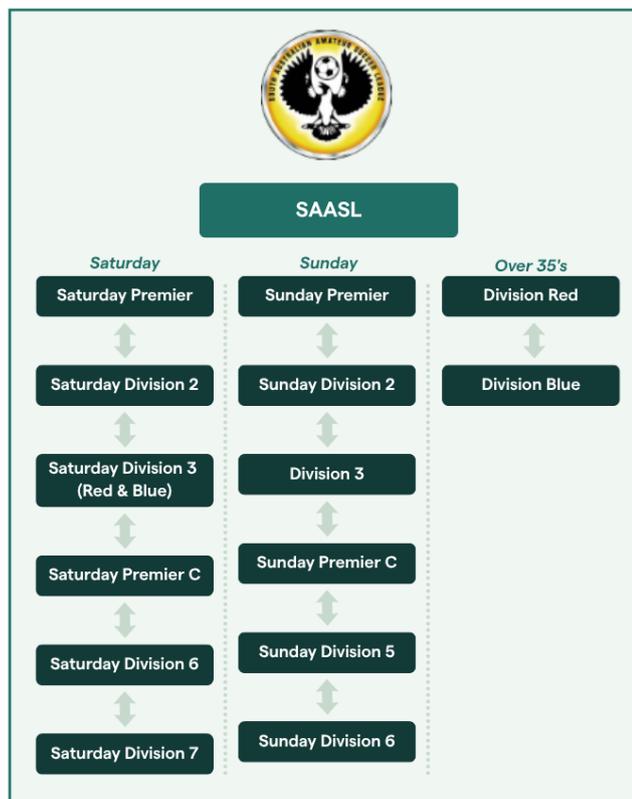


Figure 5 – Football South Australia Competition Structure (Men’s)

### c. Collegiate Soccer League



The CSL originated as an inter-collegiate senior men’s competition and has since grown to include both federation and community clubs, operating as an affiliated association under FSA.<sup>16</sup> CSL is comprised of traditional ‘collegiate’ and ‘university’ aligned clubs, as well as an increasing number of FSA clubs that field lower division teams beneath the NPL and State League. CSL is committed to fostering an environment that champions

<sup>15</sup> <https://saasl.com.au/club-directory/>

<sup>16</sup> “Our History”: <https://www.collegiatesoccerleague.com.au/wp/>

respect, inclusion and fair play, while upholding strong social and community values. CSL provides accessible community-based amateur soccer for approximately 2,285 players<sup>17</sup> across 7 divisions.<sup>18</sup>

The CSL runs Saturday competitions spanning across the following divisions:

- Divisions 1 and 2 feature both Senior and Reserve teams
  - 676 players / 40 teams
- Division 3 offering Senior, Reserves and C Grade teams<sup>19</sup>
  - 664 players / 36 teams
- Division 4-7
  - 752 players / 39 teams

The current structure of the CSL is displayed in Appendix K.

Competition data shows team growth of 1.8% between 2023-2025 in the CSL.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, as of 2025, CSL now represents 28% (2,285) of senior men’s players in metropolitan Adelaide.<sup>21</sup> However, CSL has stated that it is not actively seeking to grow beyond its current competition structure.

CSL continues to be a pillar of inclusive, recreational football in Adelaide, bridging education institutions and local communities through the game. The CSL does not currently offer Women’s or junior competitions.

#### d. Elizabeth & Districts Junior Soccer Association



Elizabeth & Districts Junior Soccer Association (**EDJSA**) is an unaffiliated organisation that delivers grassroots football across the Northern suburbs of Adelaide – serving areas from Athelstone through to Kilburn, Virginia, Angle Vale, Nuriootpa and Tea Tree Gully as shown below:

<sup>17</sup> Appendix C: Competition Data – Total Player Participation Growth Per Association 2023 - 2025

<sup>18</sup> Appendix K: Football South Australia Competition Structure (Men’s)

<sup>19</sup> Appendix A: Briefing Paper

<sup>20</sup> Appendix B: Competition Data - Total Team Participation Growth Per Association 2023-2025

<sup>21</sup> Appendix D: Senior Players Per Association 2025

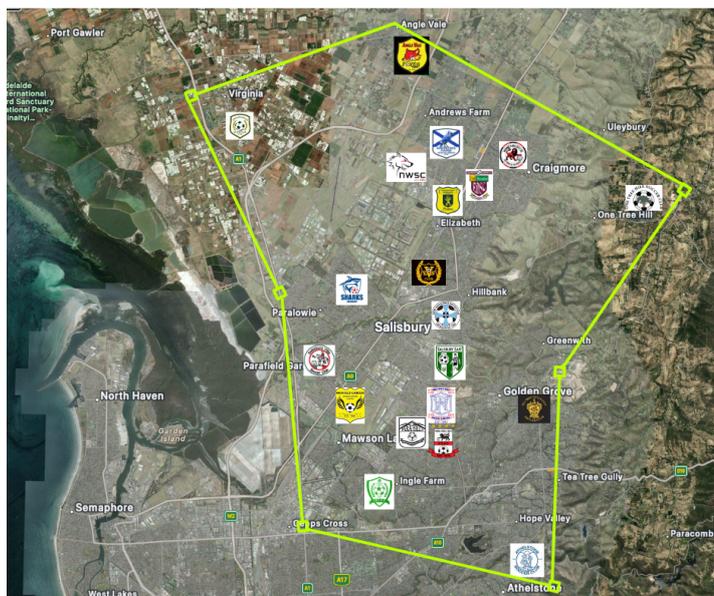


Figure 6 – EDJSA Geographical Club Competition Map

The competition caters to boys and girls in junior divisions, starting from development squads for ages 3-5 (MiniRoos), and includes official age-group teams ranging from Under-6 to Under-18 years. The EDJSA ensure clear and inclusive development pathways for all participants, regardless of skill or experience.<sup>22</sup> With the EDJSA situated in a somewhat lower socioeconomic area, registration fees are modest, with its primary focus on offering community and participation level rather than offering elite pathways.<sup>23</sup> EDJSA’s primary focus is on community engagement and participation, rather than providing elite development pathways.

EDJSA comprises of 20 affiliated clubs<sup>24</sup>, supporting a vibrant grassroots structure across the region. It is reasonable to estimate that 3,900 players are engaged each season within the competition.<sup>25</sup> The association has existed independently for over 15 years, facilitates coaching and refereeing and encourages personal development over elite or high-performance, making it a vital part of local sport. The main role of the EDJSA is to play a vital role in helping junior athletes fall in love with the game, play with friends, encourage community engagement and promote the growth of Football in Northern Adelaide.

### e. South Australian Masters Soccer League



South Australian Masters Soccer League (**SAMSL**) is one of the official FSA-affiliated over-35s football competition in South Australia.<sup>26</sup> The league expands across a 2 Division structure to better cater for different abilities, and games are held on Sunday mornings. FSA provide match officials, venues, training and support for registration of players on PlayFootball, and assists with competition management, fixturing and results via Dribl. The SAMSL exists to give mature-age players a structured yet social avenue to continue

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.elizdists.com.au/about>

<sup>23</sup> Information provided by FSA regarding NRF and FSA costs

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.elizdists.com.au/clubs>

<sup>25</sup> Insight provided by FSA via Dribl

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/SAMastersSoccerLeague/>

playing competitive football in a supportive environment. The league encompasses approximately 380-400 players.<sup>27</sup> Clubs have the flexibility to field multiple teams where participant numbers allow, with optional mid-week training sessions offered to promote fitness, skill development, and teamwork.

The competition is effectively administered by the SAMSL Committee, which seeks guidance and support from FSA as needed. Players are permitted to dual register with the CSL to enhance participation and enjoyment, however, a strict policy prohibits dual registration with any other competitions, including Masters. The SAMSL maintains a successful and candid community football culture across South Australia.

## 5. REVIEW OF OTHER COMPETITION FRAMEWORKS

### a. Football New South Wales



Football NSW (*'FNSW'*) governs football across metropolitan and regional New South Wales (excluding Northern NSW). The men's competition structure provides a clear player development pathway from grassroots to semi-professional levels, feeding into the A-League system.

At the top of the Football NSW men's competition structure is the National Premier League (NPL), followed by League One and League Two, each fielding a 1<sup>st</sup> Grade and U20's Squad.<sup>28</sup> These tiers align with Football Australia's national structure to connect to A-League clubs via talent identification and transfer pathways.<sup>29</sup>

The youth structure includes Boys Youth Leagues One to Three (U13-U18), an Association Youth League (U13-U16), and Junior Development Leagues (U9-U12) - all fostering local development and high-performance progression. In 2024, FNSW reached record-breaking participation numbers, having over 262,946 registered participants across both its men's and women's junior and senior competitions.<sup>30</sup>

The Football NSW men's competition structure supports the greater Sydney-based A-League clubs (Sydney FC, Western Sydney Wanderers, Central Coast Mariners and Macarthur FC) by providing elite youth talent through the NPL and youth leagues. Furthermore, association academies and Football NSW's Talent Support Program (TSP) further strengthen the player development pipeline, making NSW a major contributor to Australia's football ecosystem.

<sup>27</sup> Information provide by FSA via Dribl

<sup>28</sup> Appendix I: Football NSW Competition Structure

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nationalpremierleagues.com.au/about-npl>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2025-02/21307\\_FA\\_Participation%20Reports\\_2024\\_High%20Res\\_FULL.pdf](https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2025-02/21307_FA_Participation%20Reports_2024_High%20Res_FULL.pdf)

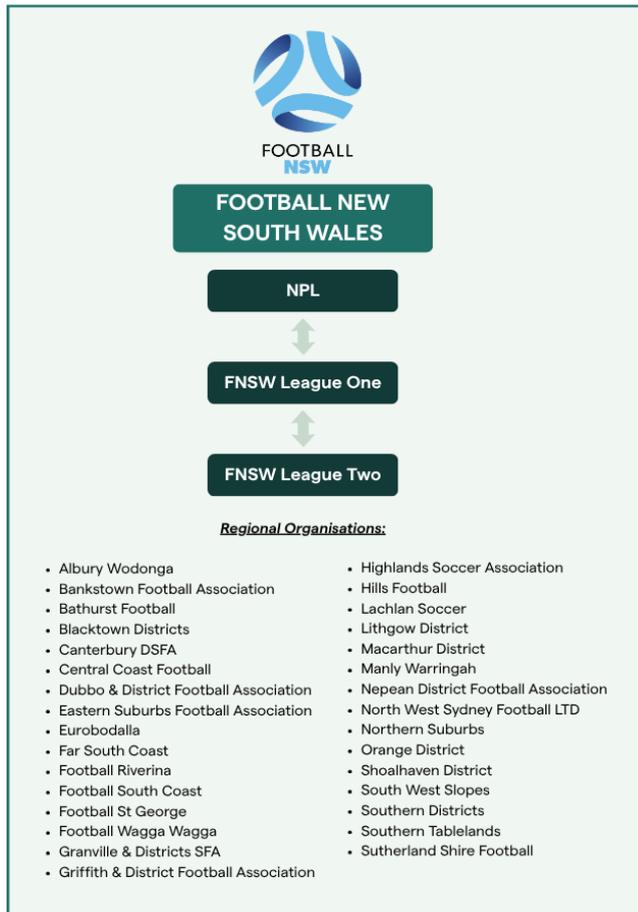


Figure 7 - Football NSW Competition Structure

## b. Football Victoria



Football Victoria (**'FV'**) oversees the state's most expansive and deeply structured football ecosystem, reflecting its vast football participation rates. FV has more than 370 clubs and over 91,000 registered participants across men's, women's and junior competitions.<sup>31</sup> Coach and referee development is emphasised through Football Victoria's partnerships with Football Australia and A-League academies, offering FA coaching licenses and referee qualifications to build capacity.

The FV men's competition structure is led by the NPL (1<sup>st</sup> Grade, U23's, U19's), followed by the Victorian Premier League's (VPL) One and Two, and then the Vito Sports State Leagues One to Five, which are segmented into North, South, East, and West regions. Both the VPL and State League offer competitive first-grade and reserves football. The NPL Men's, VPLM1 and VPLM2 are referred to as professional competitions of FV, which field three teams - Seniors, Under 23's and Under 20's. These competitions are bound by the First Team Roster, however, the Under-23s are permitted to have four overage players drop down from the senior roster each week, and Under 20s no overage players

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2025-02/21307\\_FA\\_Participation%20Reports\\_2024\\_High%20Res\\_FULL.pdf](https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2025-02/21307_FA_Participation%20Reports_2024_High%20Res_FULL.pdf)

are permitted. The State League competition (including division 1-7) is open age, and field Senior and Reserves teams.

For juniors, elite pathways include Junior Boys NPL 1 and NPL 2 (U14-U17), which act as feeders into senior levels and are regionalised to increase accessibility. Beneath these are Junior Boys and Mixed League (U12-U18), and MiniRoos (U7-U12's), supporting foundational skills and participation. Talent development aligns closely with the Victorian-based A-League clubs (Melbourne Victory, Melbourne City, and Western United), with academy pathways and scouting networks drawing from NPL Senior and Junior competitions. This structured and extensive ecosystem ensures Football Victoria remains a national leader in both participation and elite development.

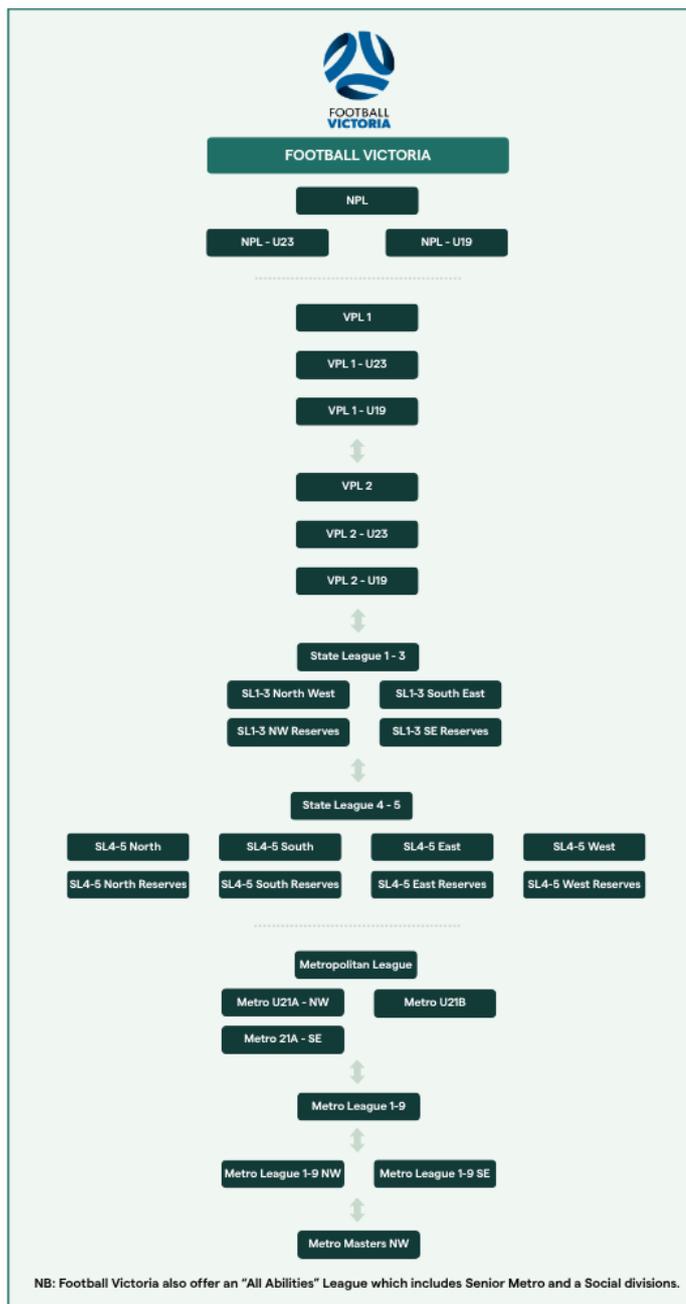


Figure 8 - Football Victoria Competition Structure

### c. Football West



Football West (**'FW'**) is the governing body for football in Western Australia, overseeing competitions from grassroots to semi-professional levels. With over 230 clubs and more than 51,000 registered junior and senior men's and women's players, Football West continues to grow.<sup>32</sup> Referee and coaching education is delivered through accredited programs aligned with national standards, promoting talent retention and advancement as referred to in Appendix N: Football West Competition Structure.

At the top of the Football West men's pyramid is the NPL (1<sup>st</sup> Grade, U23's, U18's), directly linking to national competitions and talent identification pathways towards A-League clubs. Beneath the Men's NPL sit the State League Divisions One and Two (1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Reserves, U18's), followed by the Belt Up Amateur and Belt Up Metropolitan Leagues that support broader participation for adult players.

The Belt Up Amateur competition features five divisions, with 12 teams and prohibits clubs from contracting professional players. Matches are played on Sundays, with promotion and relegation operating across all divisions. Every club must field both a First Team and a Reserves side. While there is an annual process for top-performing clubs to enter the State League, participation in this process is optional. However, it allows ambitious clubs and teams the opportunity. Clubs can enter more teams, though, where possible, preference is given to new clubs over multiple entries from the same club.

In contrast, the Belt Up Metropolitan League is a social competition, and games are also played on Sunday. There is no requirement for clubs to field a reserve team, resulting in a mix of standalone clubs and clubs with multiple teams. The league is split into North and South divisions, and clubs with more than one team in the same division must submit player rosters and comply with stricter player movement regulations.

Additionally, the Master's Leagues provide structured competition for older players over 35, promoting lifelong football engagement.

FW has implemented a consistent rule across all competitions to prevent larger clubs with multiple teams from gaining an unfair advantage. Under this rule, if a player participates in a higher division a set number of times, they become ineligible to play in a lower division. This approach ensures players develop at a sustainable pace, while maintaining competitive balance throughout the season.

Before FW's formation in 2006, each competition was governed by separate bodies with their own entry rules and conditions, leading to confusion and increased administration burden for clubs fielding teams in multiple competitions. Thus, FW has mandated licensing criteria for new clubs, requiring representation across a broad cross-section of the community competitions – such as women's and junior leagues - before being granted entry. Being active across more community competitions strengthens a club's player

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<sup>32</sup> [https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2025-02/21307\\_FA\\_Participation%20Reports\\_2024\\_High%20Res\\_FULL.pdf](https://www.footballaustralia.com.au/sites/ffa/files/2025-02/21307_FA_Participation%20Reports_2024_High%20Res_FULL.pdf)

pipeline, fosters inclusive participation opportunities and builds stronger community connections that contribute to the long-term sustainability of a club/s.

Youth competitions include Junior Development Leagues (U13-U16) and Junior Community Leagues (U13-U18), which are both split regionally for accessibility across a large geographical area (refer to Appendix K: Football West Competition Structure). Lastly, MiniRoos (U8-U12) fosters early participation and skill development for entry-level players. It must be noted that Football West doesn't have a Junior NPL pathway, ultimately missing the opportunity to create a seamless pathway for elite junior players into the senior NPL competition. Through Perth Glory's Academy program and interstate partnerships of FW NPL clubs with interstate clubs and programs, WA players are provided with national opportunities and pathways to A-League clubs. Initiatives such as the Hyundai Talent Support Program (TSP) and National Training Centre (NTC) programs ensure elite youth are scouted and developed for higher competition.

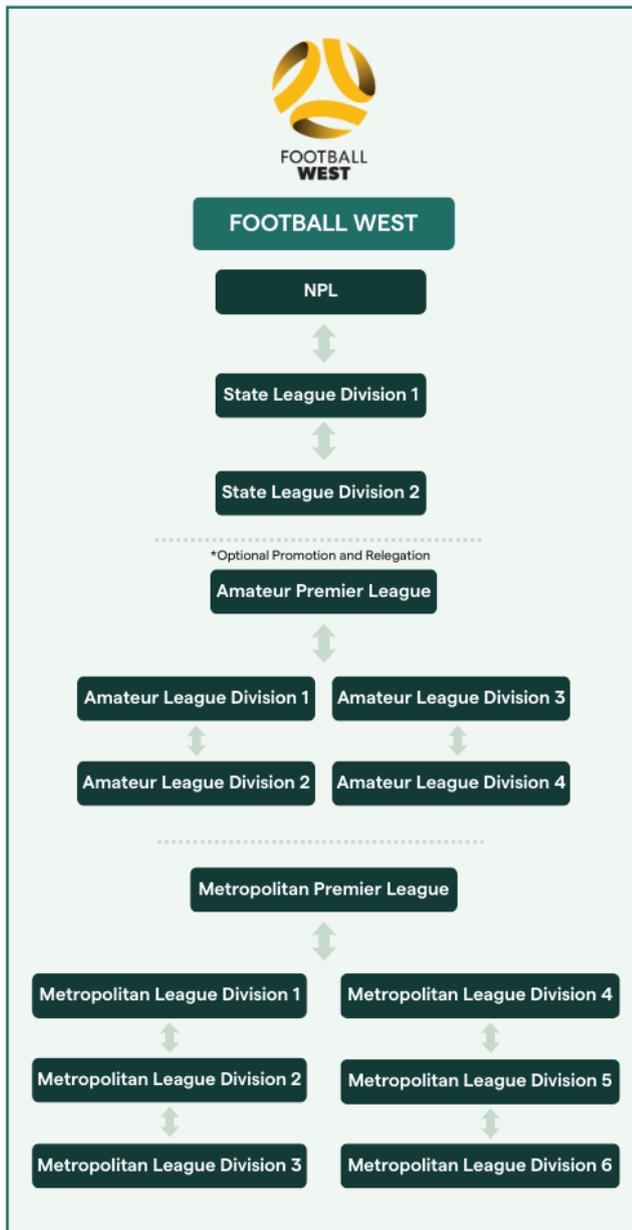


Figure 9 – Football West Competition Structure

**d. Comparison – FSA v Others**

Overall, while FSA’s structure mirrors many features of other state bodies such as FNSW, FV, and FW, it faces the unique challenge of integrating its rapidly growing junior members with a relatively narrow senior competition system. Unlike WA, NSW and Victoria, where vertically integrated competition models allow for promotion and relegation across multiple tiered senior divisions, and/ or aligned metro amateur competitions for clubs to retain players exiting the elite pathway and grow by fielding additional amateur teams, Adelaide’s senior Men’s football landscape remains fragmented across three separate competitions: FSA, SAASL and CSL. Critically, there is no promotion or relegation between these three systems, limiting club mobility and player progression.

This FSA structure places pressure on the retention of players graduating from a fast-growing junior base, where competition data suggests FSA is seeing an average 8% junior participation growth since 2023-2025.<sup>33</sup>

FSA must look to retain its booming junior participation in long-term, scalable senior opportunities, as shown in the more mature and integrated systems of FNSW, FV, and FW.

State Body	No of Elite Divisions (Promotion/Relegation)	NPL/ SL Comp below First Team	Top Youth Age Comp	Aligned Amateur Metro Comps
<b>FSA</b>	4	Reserves (primarily U20s with overage players in practice)	U18s	No
<b>FV</b>	9	U23s (4 overage players from Senior List)	U19s (moving to U20s in 2026 – no overage permitted)	No
<b>FNSW</b>	3	Reserves (7 players must be U20)	U18’s	No
<b>FW</b>	3 (plus 10 indirect tiers)	U23s (open age reserves)	U18s	Yes

*Table 2 – State Body Competition Structure Comparison*

*Note: We have focused our benchmarking review on the two largest state bodies – NSW and VIC – and the state that has the most analogous population and participation base to SA/ Adelaide – WA/ Perth.*

<sup>33</sup> Competition Data provided from FSA via Dribl

## 6. KEY INSIGHTS

The following insights summarise the most significant challenges and opportunities identified through stakeholder consultations, survey data, and comparative analysis of other state competition frameworks.

Each insight reflects both the lived experiences of stakeholders and the broader trends impacting participation, retention and competition sustainability. They form the foundation of recommendations in Section 7.

### a. There is a critical bottleneck for players transitioning out of underage / youth competitions which is limiting player retention and growth.

- FSA and SAASL clubs raised concerns about players dropping out post-U16/17 due to a lack of clear progression and development (stakeholder consultation).

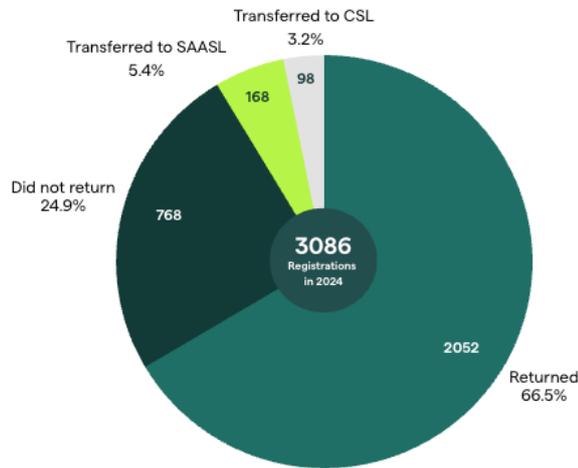


Figure 10 – FSA Men's Player Retention 2023 – 2024 (U16-Seniors)

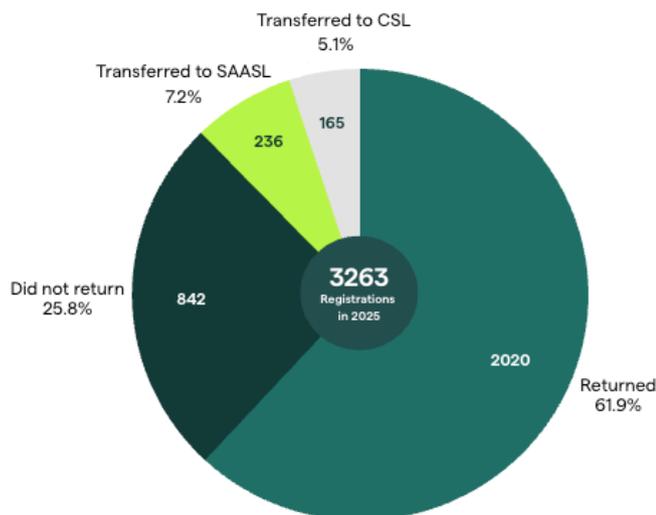


Figure 11 – FSA Men's Player Retention 2024 – 2025 (U16-Seniors)

- FSA's NPL/ State League competition structure provides less age scale compared to most other state structures.

- The U17s competition is seen as largely futile and ineffective, as the better players are playing U18s or Reserves.
- There is currently a perception that U17 players are not good enough for U18's, and playing in CSL after being affiliated with an FSA club is too "casual" (stakeholder consultation).
- Multiple stakeholders support introducing U19/U23 to bridge this gap and retain late-developing players in the sport (stakeholder consultation).
- Football Australia's new Player Roster Principles (PRPs) promote both an U23s competition (with limited overage players) and U20s competition underpinning the NPL First Team.
- Several other states offer U23s and U20s or U19s competitions underpinning the NPL and State League first team, which provides a greater age span opportunity for late-developing players, increased player retention opportunities and greater scale.

**b. The current senior men's structure limits growth in players and teams within FSA clubs.**

- FSA does not currently offer an amateur men's competition for such FSA clubs to field more social senior men's teams outside the NPL/ State League structure (unlike FSA's Women's Competitions Structure and other states such as FW).
- Currently, 2025, 35 of 57 (61%) FSA-registered clubs' field 95 social or amateur teams across SAASL and CSL competitions outside of the NPL/State League structure.

**FSA Clubs also competing in SAASL & CSL**

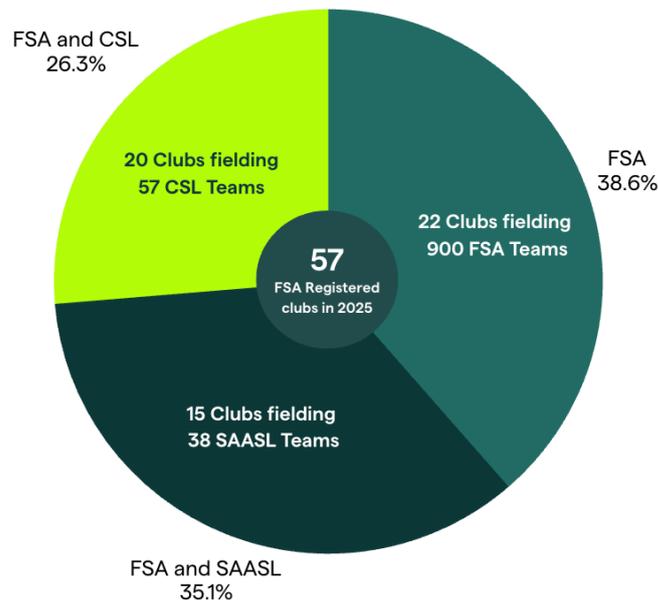


Figure 12 – FSA Clubs Competing in SAASL & CSL Competitions in 2025

- The majority of stakeholders agree that players who do not make the NPL/ State League senior teams often leave football altogether, as there are no clear alternate pathways for players to remain in to continue to have a go. This is supported by Figures 9 and 10 above, where on average, 25.35% of players did

not return to the game from 2023-2025.

- FSA clubs cannot grow within the existing FSA structure and must field amateur or community teams in CSL or SAASL, which creates a burden on administrators to work across multiple associations, and issues with respect to player eligibility across multiple associations (FSA and SAASL in particular).
- This FSA structure places pressure on the retention of players graduating from a fast-growing junior base, where competition data suggests FSA is seeing an average 8% junior participation growth since 2023-2025.
- FSA must look to retain its booming junior participation in long-term, scalable senior opportunities, as shown in the more mature and integrated systems of FNSW, FV, and FW.

**c. Structural misalignment between CSL, SAASL, and FSA is creating confusion and inefficiency, and is behind that of other states such as WA and VIC.**

- Clubs want one strategic direction, unified rules and coordinated development. CSL and SAASL clubs expressed concern over differing systems and competition overlaps (stakeholder consultation).
- FSA clubs favour more flexible, scalable structures to help their clubs remain sustainable and progressive (stakeholder consultation).
- SAASL and CSL want a clearer separation between amateur and semi-professional tiers, to reflect resources and club ambitions respectively (stakeholder consultation).
- SAASL clubs want club identity and history to be retained - SAASL called for “respectful integration” that retains legacy, culture and player milestones (stakeholder consultation).
- The current three-association model limits club growth and strategic alignment.
  - Only 27% of administrators and board members believe the current FSA/SAASL/CSL model supports strategic alignment.<sup>30</sup>
  - The SAASL rules are not aligned to FSA or the CSL regulatory framework.
- There should be a closer relationship between SAASL and CSL clubs within the Metro Adelaide competition structures.
  - More than 61% of respondents support a closer relationship between SAASL and CSL Clubs.<sup>31</sup>
- As shown in Figure 13 below, 39 clubs are fielding teams in multiple competitions due to the different offerings of associations, which increases inefficiency and volunteer burden.

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<sup>30</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

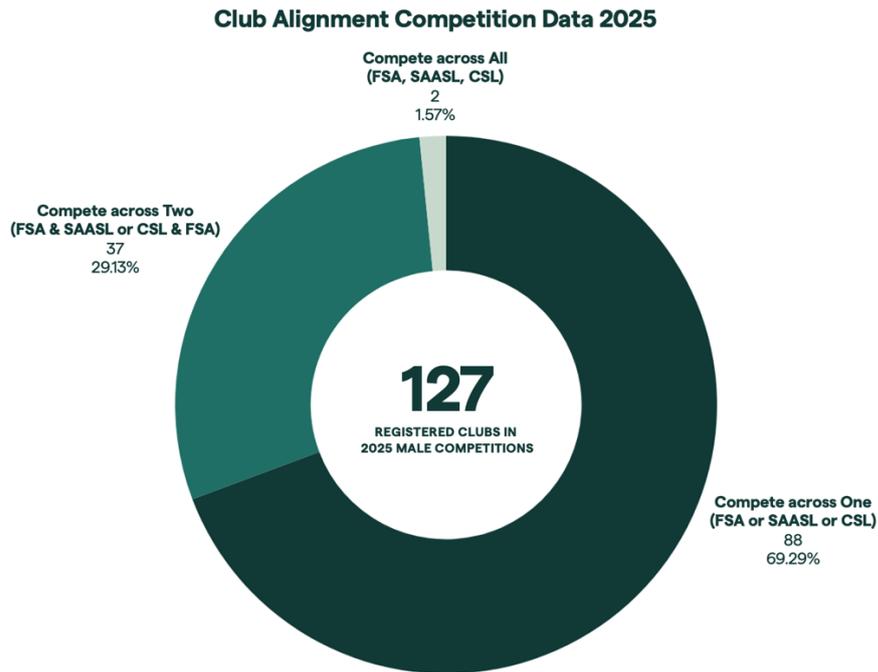


Figure 13 – Club Alignment Competition Data 2025

**d. CSL serves a unique and valuable purpose for social players; however, many CSL stakeholders wish to revert to its traditional ‘collegiate’ roots, while the SAASL competition provides an alternative environment for amateur senior players.**

- Historical identity matters, but not at the expense of progress.
  - Only 35% of respondents agree that it is important to maintain the independence of the three-association competitions.<sup>i</sup>
  - 53% of respondents agreed it is important to acknowledge and safeguard the history of the different leagues.<sup>34</sup>
- FSA and CSL agree that CSL clubs are increasingly absorbing players who do not fit into the elite FSA pathway (stakeholder consultation), whilst acknowledging that others are presumably lost to the game.
- CSL provides an essential social/community competition space but fears capacity strain and not operating under its true principles (stakeholder consultation).
- The majority of CSL clubs do not want non-collegiate ‘suburban’ FSA clubs in their competition, but the CSL Board is committed to including such clubs if aligned to CSL’s values.

**e. There are aspirational clubs that want to develop within the elite competition pathway, and the expanded FSA men’s competition structure has provided opportunities for these clubs.**

- FSA’s expansion of State League 2 is largely seen as positive and has generated significantly greater interest, however the SAASL has been critical given that several SAASL clubs moved across in 2025 and others have been confirmed for 2026.

<sup>34</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

- FSA’s decision to expand the FSA men’s competition structures was necessary and important to meet club and player demand in the context of participation growth.
- Players and Clubs overwhelmingly support further expansion of FSA competition, albeit anecdotal feedback was that the NPL/ SL1 clubs were less supportive, likely because it threatens to diminish their relevance.
  - 77% of FSA respondents support expanding FSA competition structures.
  - 45% of SAASL respondents agree that the three-association competition model limits the club’s ability to reach its full potential.<sup>35</sup>
- The splitting of State League 2 into two divisions has created some competitive balance and club development challenges.
- The newly admitted State League clubs would appreciate a more phased implementation of State League club licensing standards.
- Several of the newly admitted clubs – and clubs at the bottom of State League 2 – would prefer a State League 3 to give them more time to develop at the appropriate level and improve player retention and recruitment by being more competitive.
- Once the current phase of State League expansion is complete and clubs find their level, separating into State League 2 and State League 3 in the future may provide a better platform for developing clubs.

**f. There is a lack of clear player development and exposure opportunities for players and coaches; however, the expanded FSA competition structure is supporting these players and coaches.**

- There is a lack of clear player development and exposure opportunities.
  - 57% of FSA, 60% of SAASL and 73% of CSL responders don’t agree there are sufficient opportunities for player development and exposure within their respective leagues.<sup>36</sup>
- Junior to senior player transition is hindered by the current fragments structure (Survey Insight 4)
  - 75% of all players and coaches agree that a single pathway from junior to senior football within the same club would promote player development.<sup>37</sup>
  - Only 26% of respondents agreed that the current three-association model for football in Metropolitan Adelaide maximises player transition from youth to senior teams.<sup>38</sup>

**g. Increasing costs are threatening club sustainability and investment into growth.**

- Clubs are facing increasing sustainability challenges.
- Junior programs like YPL are expensive and perceived as exclusive (FSA and SAASL stakeholder feedback).
- MiniRoos competitions have high registration fees that vary between clubs and

<sup>35</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>36</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>37</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>38</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

age groups, and facility upkeep costs were cited as unsustainable for participants and clubs (stakeholder consultation).

- CSL is currently the cheapest competition with respect to registration costs, but that gap is also narrowing (stakeholder consultation). Many clubs need to increase registration fees to fund increasing operational costs, which will impact player growth over time.
- Costs for additional resources which clubs are incentivised with bonus points, to invest in within the YCC competition, administrator welfare and coaching training and VEO Cameras. These are not attainable for smaller clubs, creating an uneven playing field and giving larger clubs an unfair advantage (stakeholder consultation).
- Clubs believe that there is a need to address increasing player payments across FSA and SAASL competitions.
- There was consistent feedback from SAASL clubs that some SAASL players are paid - allegedly up to \$400-500 per game in Division 1 - with a few of the smaller SAASL clubs stating that they cannot compete with the increasing player payments and believe this is not consistent with amateur status (stakeholder consultation).
- FSA's salary cap was in place until the end of the 2020 Season (NPL: \$150,000 and SL1 & SL2: \$90,000) and disbanded due to challenges in monitoring compliance and club feedback.
- Several SAASL Clubs are concerned about inflationary player payments despite the so-called amateur status.
- Lower division senior teams enhance club sustainability as such teams are more cost effective to operate (all players pay registration fees, no player payments, lower coaching costs and less medical/ strength and conditioning expenses), however FSA clubs are relatively small at senior level (~2-4 men's teams) and many do not have lower division social teams given the current FSA men's competition structure.

#### **h. Junior-to-senior player transition is hindered by the current fragmented structure.**

- 75% of all players and coaches agree that a single pathway from junior to senior football within the same club would promote player development.<sup>39</sup>
- 45% of respondents associated with the SAASL competition believe the three-league competition model limits their club's ability to reach their full potential.<sup>40</sup>
- Only 26% of respondents agreed that the current three-association model for football in Metropolitan Adelaide maximises player transition from youth to senior teams.<sup>41</sup>
- 57% of respondents agree that there would be benefits for clubs and stakeholders if one or more of the existing three association competitions were unified, whereas 61% agree there should be a closer relationship between SAASL and the CSL clubs with the FSA competition structure.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>40</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>41</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>42</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

**i. The SAASL operates largely in isolation from the rest of the football ecosystem in metro Adelaide and would benefit from greater alignment.**

- The SAASL is deeply skeptical of FSA and has a general resistance towards FSA.
- The SAASL rules are not aligned to FSA or the CSL regulatory framework.
- There are minimal rules across the SAASL competitions to facilitate club sustainability or competitive balance.

**j. The EDJSA presents a significant opportunity to enhance the pathway and improve player transition to senior football.**

- The EDJSA is the largest unaffiliated association in metropolitan Adelaide.
- These players operate outside the affiliated system and are therefore less likely to transition to senior football.
- If affiliated, the EDJSA would represent approximately 26% of junior participants in Metro Adelaide.

**k. Club support staff lack the tools and expertise to support high performance, leading to volunteer fatigue.**

- Club administrators are burdened by the three-association structure.
  - Circa 40% of club and association board members and administrators believe that the current independent three-association competition imposes an additional burden on club administrators.<sup>43</sup>
- Administrative performance and communication vary significantly between associations.
  - 60% of CSL responders agreed that CSL provides timely and effective administration and communication, whereas this number falls to 43% for FSA and 40% for SAASL.<sup>44</sup>
- All stakeholder groups cited a reliance on aging volunteers, a lack of succession planning and increasing administrative burdens (e.g. tech, compliance) (stakeholder consultation).
- CSL and SAASL clubs stressed that volunteers are the backbone of the sport (stakeholder consultation).

**l. Clubs are critical of FSA's running of the NTC program and misunderstand the funding and operational model.**

- Clubs see the NTC program as competing with them and that the rules are designed to advantage the NTC.
- Clubs consider that they indirectly fund the NTC program via affiliation fees and misunderstand that the NTC program is largely funded by the participant, Office

<sup>43</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

<sup>44</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

for Recreation Sport and Racing, and FSA.

- Clubs misunderstand that FSA is not entitled to training compensation via the NTC (or at all), and any such entitlements go to the players immediately preceding junior club.

**m. Facility, coach and referee shortages threaten growth and sustainability.**

- Growth in player numbers in the sport is not matched by infrastructure, coaching capacity or referee support (stakeholder consultation).
- Clubs are not currently sufficiently incentivised to drive referee recruitment.

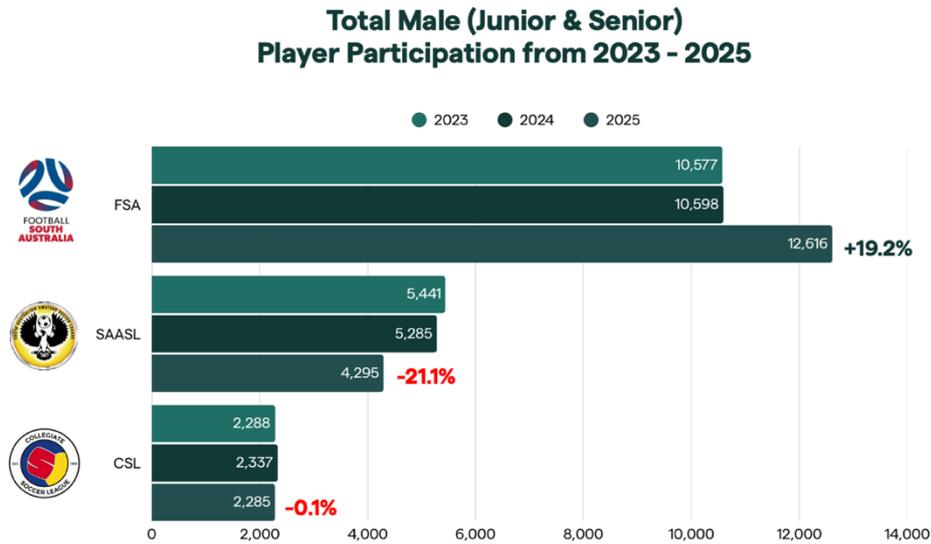


Figure 14 - Total Player Participation Growth 2023-2025

- FSA acknowledges clubs already struggle to meet existing demands, raising concerns about further expansion (stakeholder consultation).
- Competing against other codes for funding and grounds development/upkeep is prominent (stakeholder consultation).
- There is a need to improve geographic balance to minimise travel requirements across the entire competition.<sup>45</sup>

**n. The CSL and SAASL are both increasingly reliant on FSA resources and support for its operations,**

- FSA appointed accredited referees to 90% of SAASL competitions from Division 1 to Division 4.
- FSA appointed accredited referees to 80% of CSL competitions.
- SAASL and CSL clubs (including coaches, players and officials) benefit from greater coverage and discounted premiums under the group insurance program including Public Liability Insurance of \$20 Million, Directors & Officers Insurance, and Personal Accident Insurance for players, match officials and non-playing officials including coaches, managers and volunteers.
- Access to a \$50,000 coaching development funding pool;

<sup>45</sup> Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

- Assistance in applying for grants including the provision of support letters;
- Access and training to competition systems including the MyFootballClub National Registration System and PlayHQ;
- Ongoing support from FSA across club development, disciplinary and regulatory matters. Eligibility for affiliated clubs to participate in the Australia Cup.

## 7. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **a. FSA should restructure the underpinning NPL/ State League First team competitions to U18s, U20s, U23s to maximise player retention, enhance player development and align to FA's Player Roster Principles.**

- Transition the existing Reserves competition (and associated rules which promote participation of U20s) to an U23s competition (with a certain number of overage players – such as max 4 on the Team Sheet), move U18s competition to an U20s competition and U17s to an U18s competition.
- This will align with FA's NPL Player Roster Principles and to maximise player development.
- This will help maximise scale and extend the participation lifecycle of players between 20-23 years to remain participating with their club.
- This structure better aligns with most NPL/ State League competitions nationally.
- This change should operate effectively with the introduction of FSA community competitions, where players over 23 years who are not selected in U23s (as overage players) or First Team can play in that competition.
- This will help address the current issues between the U17s and U18s competitions. The newly structured U18s division should remain within the YCC competition structure.

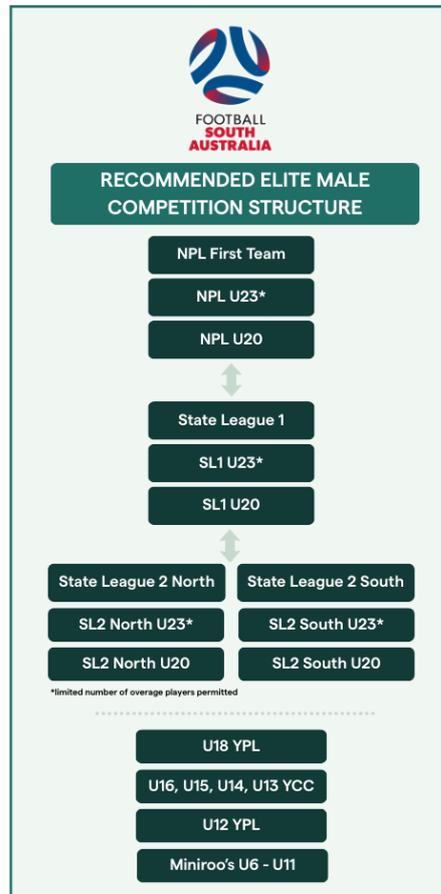


Figure 15 – Recommended Elite Male Competition Structure

**b. FSA needs to offer a senior community ‘amateur’ competition structure for FSA clubs to facilitate team growth and maximise player retention.**

- This is required to extend the participation lifecycle of players who are no longer at NPL/ State League level, as they currently must leave their FSA clubs, or FSA clubs need to field teams in other associations, imposing additional volunteer burden.
- The community competition should sit below and separate to NPL/SL structure.
- Like the FW structure, there would be no promotion and relegation between the NPL/State League semi-professional competition structure and the community competition structure.
- This competition will help facilitate FSA Clubs adding lower division or more “social” senior teams, which will enhance club sustainability, given that such teams are more profitable.
- This will enable growth of FSA Club teams in addition to those participating in NPL/SL (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) as per FSA’s Women’s competition structure and FW competition structure.
- The “FSA community football league” would be open to FSA clubs *only* to safeguard the CSL and SAASL competitions (although FSA clubs could bring teams across from the CSL).
- The “FSA community football league” should not have the word “amateur” in its name to avoid competition with the SAASL or “metro” given this was an

- unsuccessful working title of a previously proposed FSA community competition.
- FSA should offer free team registration/affiliation for the inaugural season with the aim of establishing an 8-team competition in 2026.
  - This may create some tension with SAASL and CSL by virtue of being an “amateur community competition” and potentially perceived as a direct competitor; however, it should be clearly communicated that:
    - This is a necessary and appropriate step to facilitate player and team growth, noting that the CSL is not focused on growth;
    - This is consistent with the FSA women’s and other state member federations’ competition structures;
    - This competition is limited to FSA Clubs only to safeguard the SAASL and CSL;
    - The growth in FSA Clubs via additional teams will enhance their sustainability.



Figure 16 – Current v Recommended FSA Senior Men’s Competition Structure

**c. If the CSL and SAASL wish to continue to operate independently as an affiliated association, they should do so with greater alignment and collaboration with FSA, including through adoption and consistent application of Rules and Regulations to reduce administrative burden on clubs.**

- FSA to not allow standalone CSL clubs to join the new FSA community competition to safeguard the CSL competition.
- FSA should consider funding a CSL administrator role to ensure better alignment with administrative processes (whilst maintaining the relative simplicity of CSL rules).
- In return, CSL should appoint an FSA representative on the CSL Board to assist with ensuring strategic alignment, including ensuring that FSA is not 'competing' with CSL.

**d. FSA should continue to expand the current State League structure to facilitate growth and support developing clubs.**

- FSA should proceed with its plans to further expand the State League structure with the introduction of 8 teams in 2026.
- The revised State League 2 conference model reduces the travel burden on clubs and should be monitored to understand the impact on player and volunteer enjoyment and retention.
- Once the current phase of State League expansion is complete and the State League 2 conferences are established, FSA should consider the merits of separating State League 2 – South and State League 2 – North into State League 2 and State League 3 to provide a better platform for developing clubs. Additionally, to accommodate geographical considerations and anticipated demand, SL3 could be divided into North and South divisions – mirroring the current SL2 structure.
- For example, the 5 bottom teams from each conference could go into State League 3, with the top 5 teams in both State League 2 – South and State League 2 – North in 2025 automatically going into State League 2 in 2026, with a play-off between teams placed 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> in both conferences facing a play-off match (6<sup>th</sup> in South vs 7<sup>th</sup> in North and vice versa), subject to clubs meeting the applicable minimum standards of competition.
- FSA should refine and reduce the standards applicable to Clubs in State League 2 (and State League 3 in future) to allow such clubs to develop appropriately.

**e. FSA continues to require that only clubs participating in NPL/State League may field teams in the YCC.**

- This promotes the talented player pathway.
- This strategy has been an extremely effective mechanism to maximise transition from junior to senior teams in FSA clubs.
- Aligned governance and administration help ensure consistency in administrative and operational processes for clubs.

**f. Volunteer burden could be minimised, participation maximised, and club sustainability enhanced if consistent policies were enacted for and embraced by all football stakeholders.**

- SAASL should, where possible, align its rules and processes with FSA and CSL to help minimise volunteer burden for clubs competing across multiple competitions and make it easier for players to move across different associations when competing for the same club.
- SAASL should introduce a player points system for its division 1 and 2 competitions to address increasing player payments, safeguard club sustainability and enhance competitive balance.
- SAASL should also monitor and audit player payments to ensure that the players and clubs are maintaining amateur status (or otherwise ensure players are appropriately contracted as professionals).

**g. The EDJSA to be incentivised to become affiliated (either directly through FSA or via SAASL).**

- The EDJSA represents circa ¼ of junior participants in metro Adelaide.
- An aligned junior-to-senior pathway will maximise player transition to senior football.
- The business case will require FSA and FA investment to subsidise the cost of player and team registration to ensure no increase to the participant.

**h. Greater investment in referee development and club support staff to accommodate and drive growth.**

- FSA should invest in greater referee development resources to help meet the increasing demand for match officials due to participation growth, noting that there is typically a lag in recruiting new match officials.
- FSA should employ club development staff to work with individual clubs to ensure that their operations are as efficient and effective as possible, reduce volunteer burden and ensure plans exist to grow.
- To incentivise referee recruitment, FSA should consider providing clubs with affiliation fee subsidies based on the number of registered referees also registered to that club.

**i. FSA should work with stakeholders to develop and implement an overarching regulatory framework statewide to provide consistency, improve efficiency and ensure alignment.**

- FSA should conduct a review of the current regulatory framework applying statewide – and in other states as a benchmark – to identify a best practice model for consistency.
- This model occurs in most other sports – such as the AFL and Cricket – and other football states.
- The regulatory framework would be able to be supplemented by association/league-specific rules that are not inconsistent with the state rules.

- FSA would need to invest in resources to ensure enforcement.

**j. FSA need to better educate stakeholders on the NTC program.**

- FSA needs to develop an FAQ document with respect to the NTC program.
- Amongst other things, the FAQs document should explain that Clubs consider that the NTC program is largely funded by FA and that FSA is not entitled to training compensation via the NTC (or at all), and any such entitlements go to the players immediately preceding junior club.

**k. FSA should implement a salary cap across the NPL and State League competitions to enhance club sustainability.**

- FSA should introduce a salary cap across NPL and State League competitions to protect clubs' financial sustainability and spread talent more evenly across the competition, enhancing competitive balance.
- This will help to address the wealthier clubs overspending on player payments and dominating the competitions, while smaller clubs stretch their budgets and resources to keep up, leading to financial challenges and a reduction in expenditure in other areas such as coaching and youth development.
- Introducing a salary cap encourages clubs to invest in youth development and other growth initiatives.

Recommendation	Aligned Key Insight(s)
a) FSA should restructure the underpinning NPL/ State League First team competitions to U18s, U20s, U23s to maximise player retention, enhance player development and align to FA's Player Roster Principles.	a) There is a critical bottleneck for players transitioning out of underage / youth competitions which is limiting player retention and growth.
b) FSA needs to offer a senior community 'amateur' competition structure for FSA clubs to facilitate team growth and maximise player retention.	b) The current senior men's structure limits growth in players and teams within FSA clubs.
c) If the CSL and SAASL wish to continue to operate independently as an affiliated association, they should do so with greater alignment and collaboration with FSA including through adoption and consistent application of Rules and Regulations to reduce administrative burden on clubs.	c) Structural misalignment between CSL, SAASL, and FSA is creating confusion and inefficiency, and is behind that of other states such as WA and VIC.  d) CSL serves a unique and valuable purpose for social players; however, many CSL stakeholders wish to revert to its traditional 'collegiate' roots whilst the SAASL competition provides an alternative environment for amateur senior players.

	<p>g) Increasing costs are threatening club sustainability and investment into growth.</p> <p>n) The CSL and SAASL are both increasingly reliant on FSA resources and support for its operations.</p>
<p>d) FSA should continue to expand the current State League structure to facilitate growth and support developing clubs.</p>	<p>e) There are aspirational clubs that want to develop within the elite competition pathway, and the expanded FSA men's competition structure has provided opportunities for these clubs.</p> <p>h) Junior-to-senior player transition is hindered by the current fragmented structure.</p>
<p>e) FSA continues to require that only clubs participating in NPL/State League may field teams in the YCC.</p>	<p>c) Structural misalignment between CSL, SAASL, and FSA is creating confusion and inefficiency, and is behind that of other states such as WA and VIC.</p>
<p>f) Volunteer burden could be minimised, participation maximised and club sustainability enhanced if a single set of policies were enacted for and embraced by all football stakeholders.</p>	<p>g) Increasing costs are threatening club sustainability and investment into growth.</p> <p>m) Facility, coach and administration shortages threaten growth and sustainability.</p> <p>n) The CSL and SAASL are both increasingly reliant on FSA resources and support for its operations.</p>
<p>g) The EDJSA to be incentivised to become affiliated (either directly through FSA or via SAASL).</p>	<p>j) The EDJSA presents a significant opportunity to enhance the pathway and improve player transition to senior football.</p>
<p>h) Greater investment in referee development and club support staff to accommodate and drive growth.</p>	<p>f) There is a lack of clear player development and exposure opportunities for players and coaches; however, the expanded FSA competition structure is supporting these players and coaches.</p> <p>k) Club support staff lack the tools and expertise to support high performance, leading to volunteer fatigue.</p>
<p>i) FSA should work with stakeholders to develop and implement an overarching regulatory framework statewide to provide</p>	<p>c) Structural misalignment between CSL, SAASL, and FSA is creating confusion and inefficiency, and is behind that of other states such as WA and VIC.</p>

<p>consistency, improve efficiency and ensure alignment.</p>	<p>i) The SAASL operates largely in isolation from the rest of the football ecosystem in Metro Adelaide and would benefit from greater alignment.</p> <p>c) Structural misalignment between CSL, SAASL, and FSA is creating confusion and inefficiency, and is behind that of other states such as WA and VIC.</p>
<p>j) FSA need to better educate stakeholders on the NTC program.</p>	<p>l) Clubs are critical of FSA’s running of the NTC program and misunderstand the funding and operational model.</p>
<p>k) FSA should implement a salary cap across the NPL and State League competitions to enhance club sustainability.</p>	<p>g) Increasing costs are threatening club sustainability and investment into growth.</p>

*Table 3 – Key Insights and Recommendations Summary*

## Appendix A: Briefing Paper



### Senior Men's Competition Alignment Strategy

#### Background

Senior men's competition structures have evolved in the past 10 years with continued steady growth which has welcomed new teams to the semi-professional competition and amateur competitions.

Participation growth in the game has consistently been between 6 and 8% year on year, however in 2024, 250 new teams were formed across all age groups with a large percentage of those teams coming from junior boys. In 2025, we expect a similar result with 200 plus teams expected to be welcomed to the FSA managed competitions. Once again, a large percentage will be junior boys. The pipeline of players entering the competitions is significant, however the opportunity for players to transition to senior football needs to be reviewed to ensure retention of players is given the greatest opportunity.

A review into the senior men's football environment is required to explore options for alignment within senior structures in the State and in doing so create a connected senior structure.

In 2024 Football South Australia called for expressions of interest to expand the State League 2 competition. The creation of two conferences of 10 clubs each, has drawn clubs from the South Australian Amateur Soccer League (SAASL) and Collegiate League. SAASL has raised concerns about the detrimental effect further expansion of State League 2 may have on the viability of their competitions.

The proposal of a connected senior structure is to be explored to ensure the prolonged viability and integrity of the competitions of the affiliated bodies. Linking to this, opportunities for players to transition from junior Football to Senior Football, ensuring maximum retention of players across the affiliated bodies will also be considered.

## **Senior Men's Competitions in Metropolitan Adelaide**

### **Football South Australia**

Football South Australia (FSA) is the governing body for the game in the state. The FSA manages and coordinates competitions for the semi-professional arm of

Football in the State. The FSA managed competitions are as follows;

- RAA National Premier League
- State League 1
- State League 2 – North
- State League 2 - South

**NOTE:** Each of the competitions have Seniors, Reserves and Under 18's. There are currently 40 clubs participating in the competition structure, further expansion will take place in 2026, however, the objective is to expand to 48 teams when the North/South Conference System is complete.

FSA sought expressions of interest from clubs wishing to participate in FSA managed competitions by introduction into State League 2. As a result, several clubs have applied to join State League 2 for the 2025 season and more clubs have expressed an interest to do so. Accordingly, State League 2 is expanding from a one division 12 team competition in 2024 to 16 teams across two divisions (8 teams in State League 2 – South and 8 teams in State League 2 – North) in 2025 and with an ultimate objective to expand to 12 teams in each of State League 2 – South and North.

The current participation licenses of all senior clubs in FSA-managed competitions expire at the end of the 2028 season.

### **South Australian Amateur Soccer League (SAASL)**

The SAASL is affiliated to FSA, however, runs autonomously, and has paid full time staff to manage their competitions. Competitions managed by SAASL include;

- Saturday Premier A, B, and C; Divisions 2, 3Red, 3Blue, 6, 7 and 8
- Sunday Premier A, B and C; Division 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8
- Over 35's

### **Collegiate Soccer League (CSL)**

The CSL is a FSA affiliated association and offers participation in Football for approximately 2,500 senior men in metropolitan Adelaide.

The CSL offer competitions as follows;

- Saturday Division 1 – 7

**NOTE:** Division 1 & 2 have seniors and reserves, while Division 3 has Senior, Reserves and C Grade.

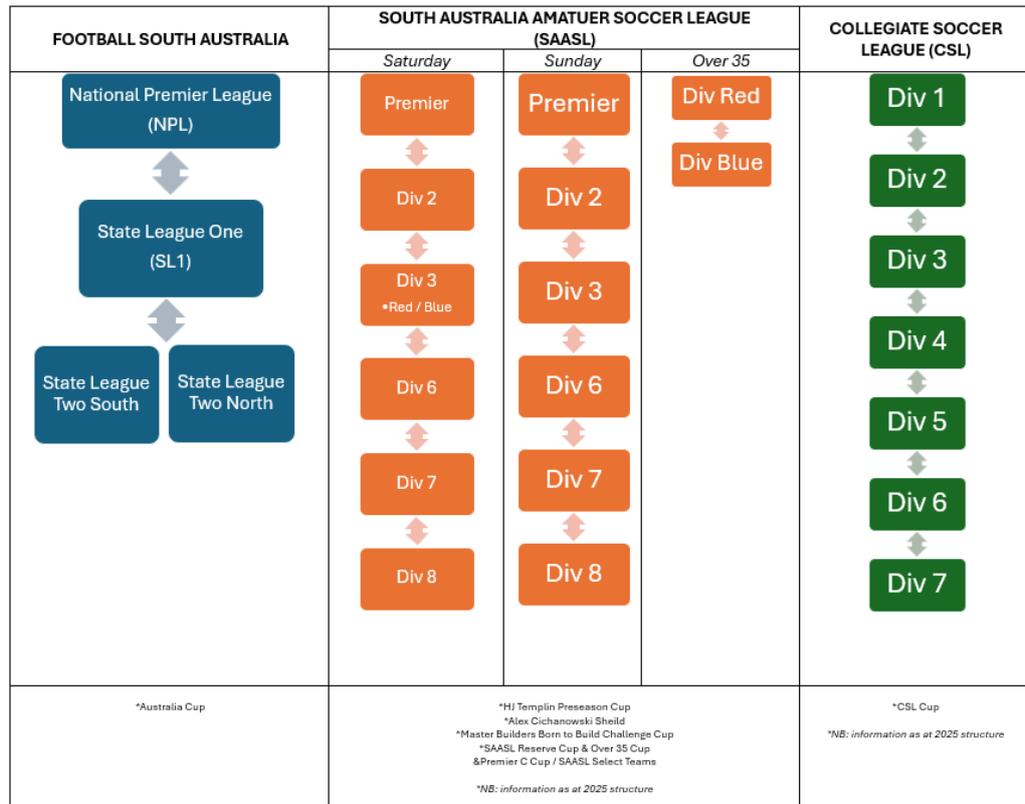
### **FSA Affiliation Support**

FSA affiliated leagues (and their clubs) such as the SAASL and CSL receive several benefits of affiliation with Football Australia (FA) and FSA including but not limited to:

- PlayFootball registration platform;
- Dribl competition manage system;
- Access to FSA accredited and appointed Match Officials;
- Access to the National Insurance Program for clubs, players, officials etc;
- Eligibility to participate in the Australia Cup (senior teams only);
- Access to the FA Member Protection Framework;
- Access to FA and FSA policies and procedures and associated regulatory and administrative support and advice;

Various other benefits as outlined.

## SENIOR MENS STRUCTURE



**NOTE:** Promotion and relegation **does not** exist between competitions, however does exist within each isolated jurisdiction.

### Purpose of the Review

FSA’s objective is to expand their State League 2 competition to two conferences of 12 clubs. However, taking into account concerns raised by SAASL in particular, in relation to the impact of such an expansion on the viability of their competition, it is intended that this review will examine each of the three senior men’s competitions (FSA, SAASL and CSL) in metropolitan Adelaide. The review will explore the optimum structure for the competitions that aligns the semi-professional game with the amateur competitions offered by the affiliated associations.

### **Key Considerations**

1. Governance, Administration Capacity & Efficiency and each association.
2. The optimum structure and procedures that would enable the promotion of clubs to the semi-professional sphere without disrupting or compromising existing league structures.
3. Willingness of each association to challenge existing structures and create an alignment from the top to the bottom.
4. Structures for the transition of junior players into senior ranks, ensuring retention and opportunities for development.
5. Creating an efficient structure that enables the maximum coverage of Match Officials for top end competitions.

### **Stakeholder Engagement Recommended**

1. FSA Administration
2. FSA Board of Directors
3. Semi Professional Club Working Group created for the review
4. SAASL Board
5. SAASL Administration
6. SAASL Club Working Group created for the review
7. CSL Board
8. CSL Club Working Group created for the review

### **Review Phases:**

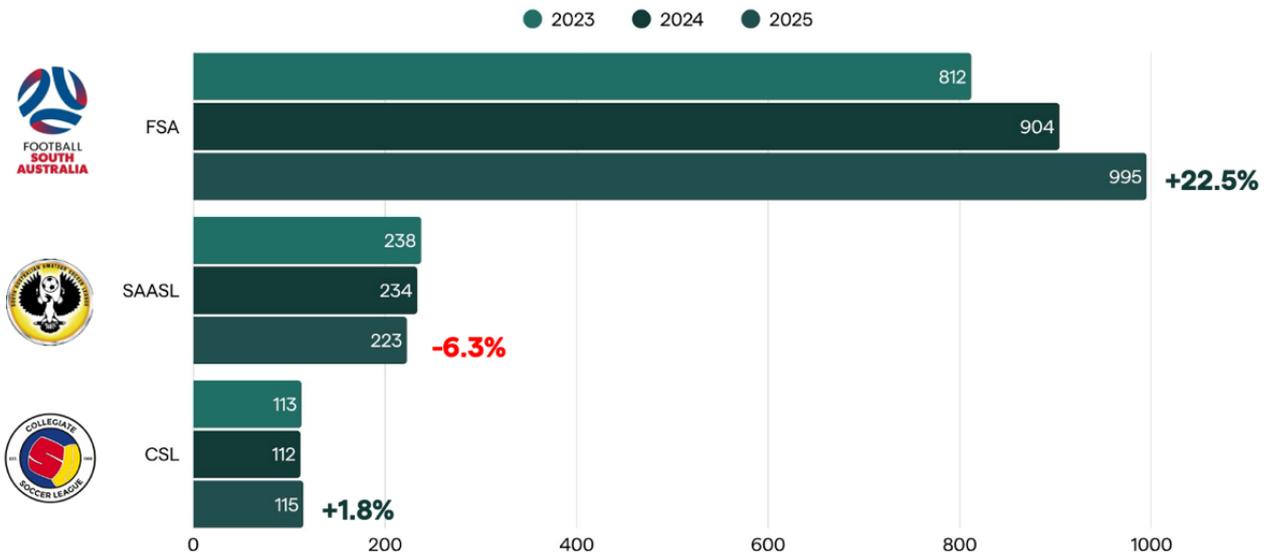
The process will involve 4 phases across 3-4 months as follows:

1. April – May: Stakeholder Consultation and Analysis (online survey, face to face meetings, video meetings etc. with key stakeholders as per the Briefing Paper)
2. May – June: Identifying Key Insights
3. June – July: Test Key Insights and Frame Key Recommendations
4. End of July: Finalise Summary Report including Key Recommendations

At the completion of the project, a workshop with affiliated associations will be held to present the report and key recommendations.

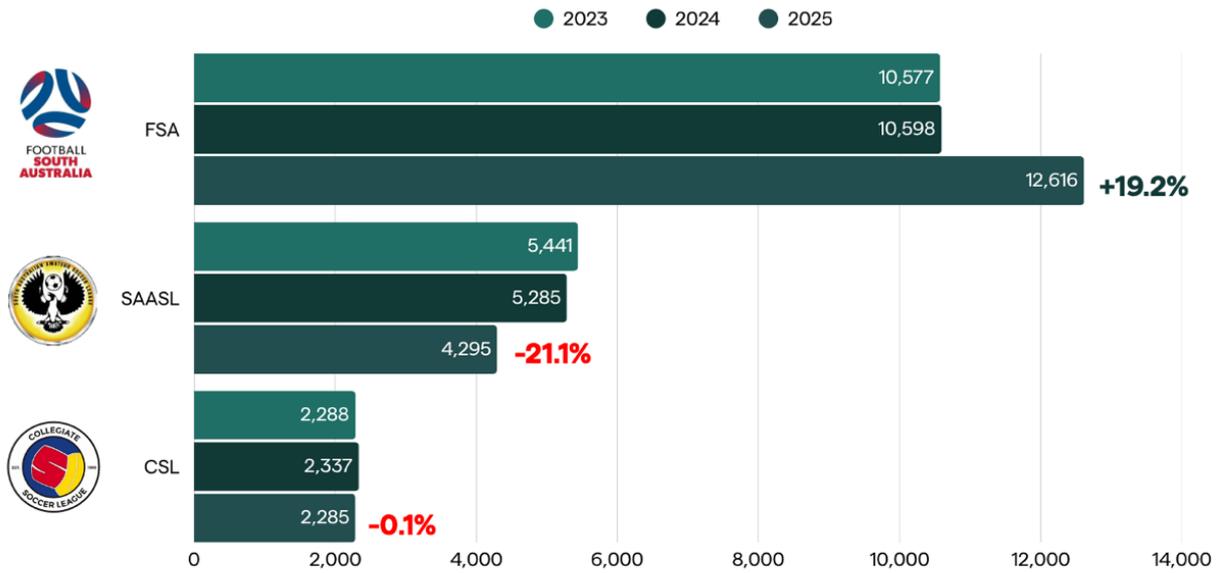
## Appendix B: Competition Data – Total Team Participation Growth Per Association 2023 - 2025

### Total Male (Senior & Junior) Team Participation Growth from 2023 - 2025



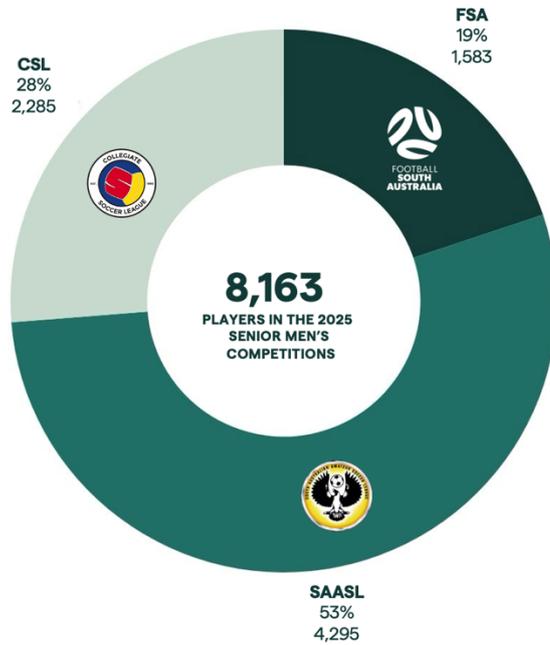
## Appendix C: Competition Data – Total Player Participation Growth Per Association 2023 - 2025

### Total Male (Junior & Senior) Player Participation from 2023 - 2025



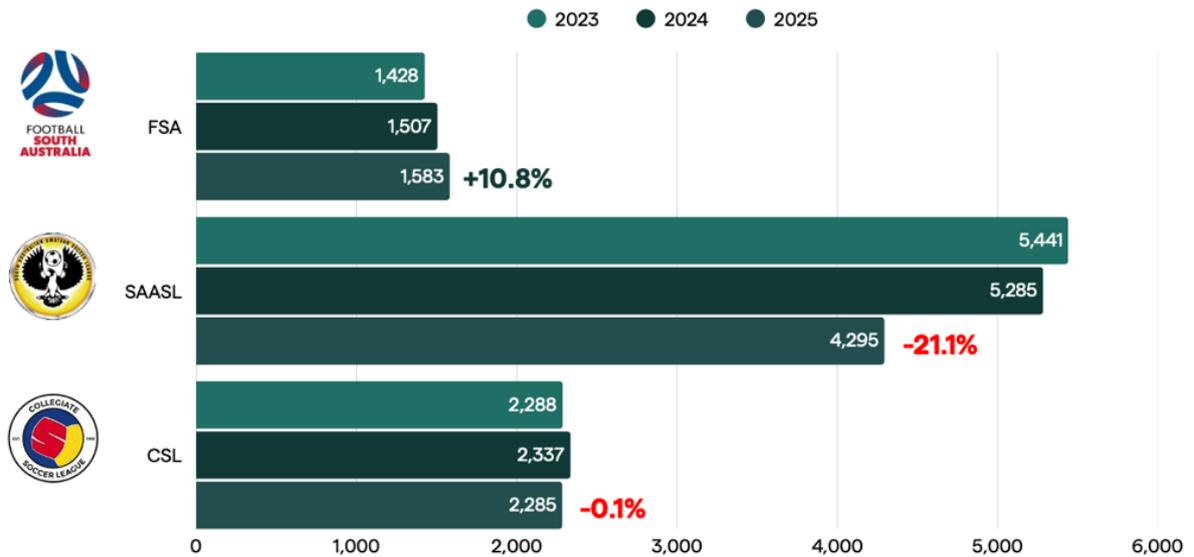
## Appendix D: Competition Data – Senior Players Per Association 2025

Senior Men's Players Per Association 2025



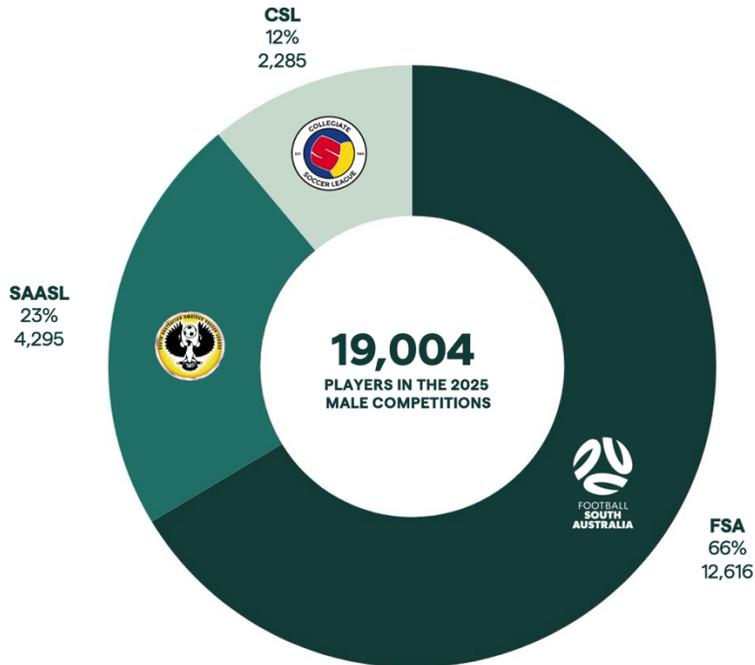
## Appendix E: Competition Data – Senior Players Per Association 2023-2025

### Senior Men’s Player Participation from 2023 - 2025



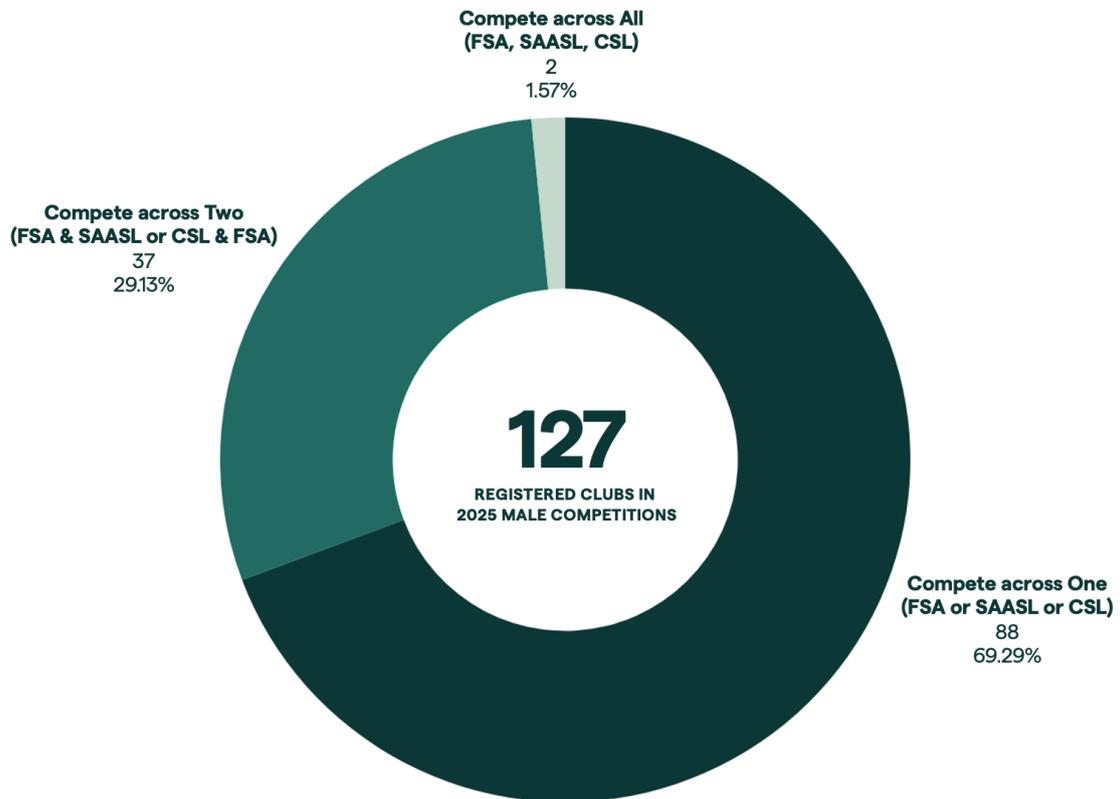
## Appendix F: Competition Data – Total Players Per Association 2025

**Total Male Players Per Association 2025**



## Appendix G: Club Alignment Competition Data 2025

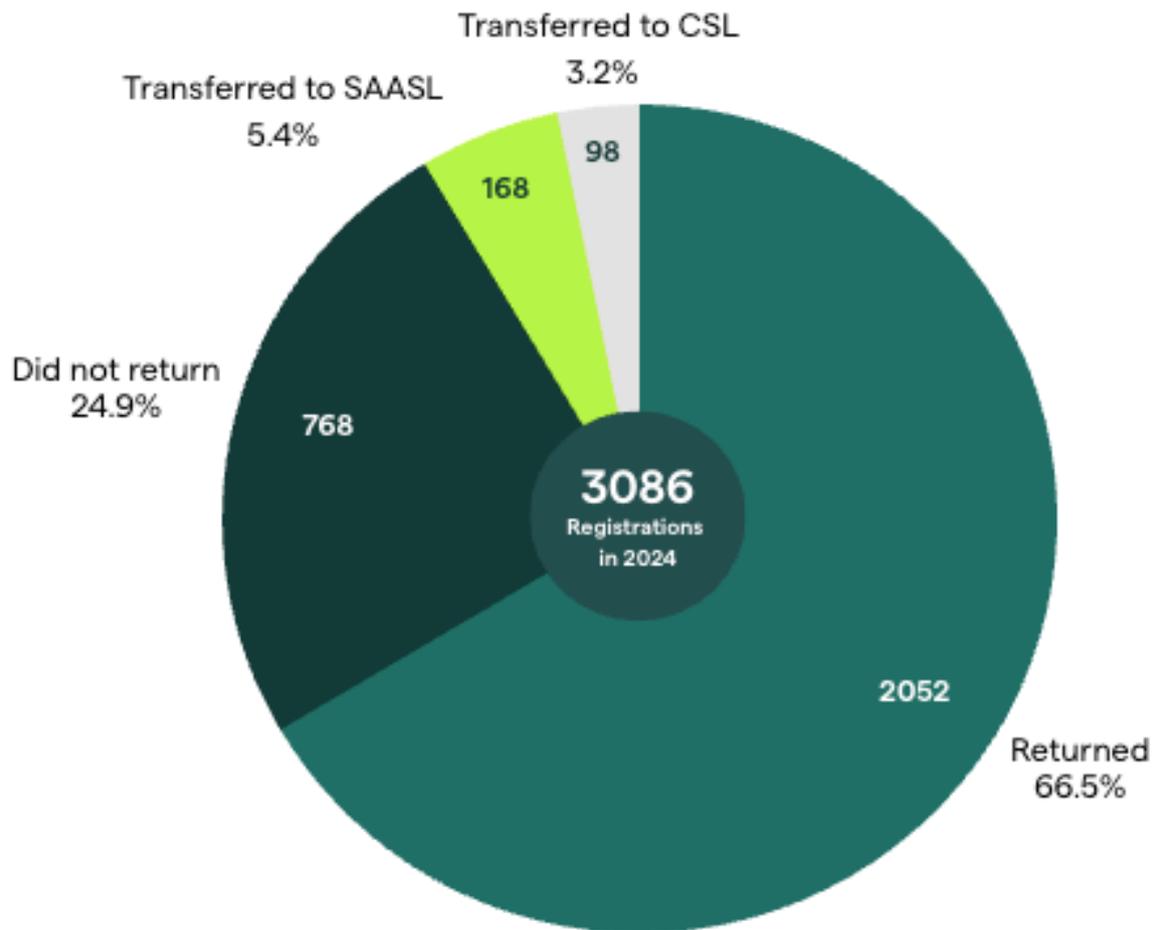
### Club Alignment Competition Data 2025



## Appendix I: FSA Registrations 2023-2024 (U16 - Senior Men)

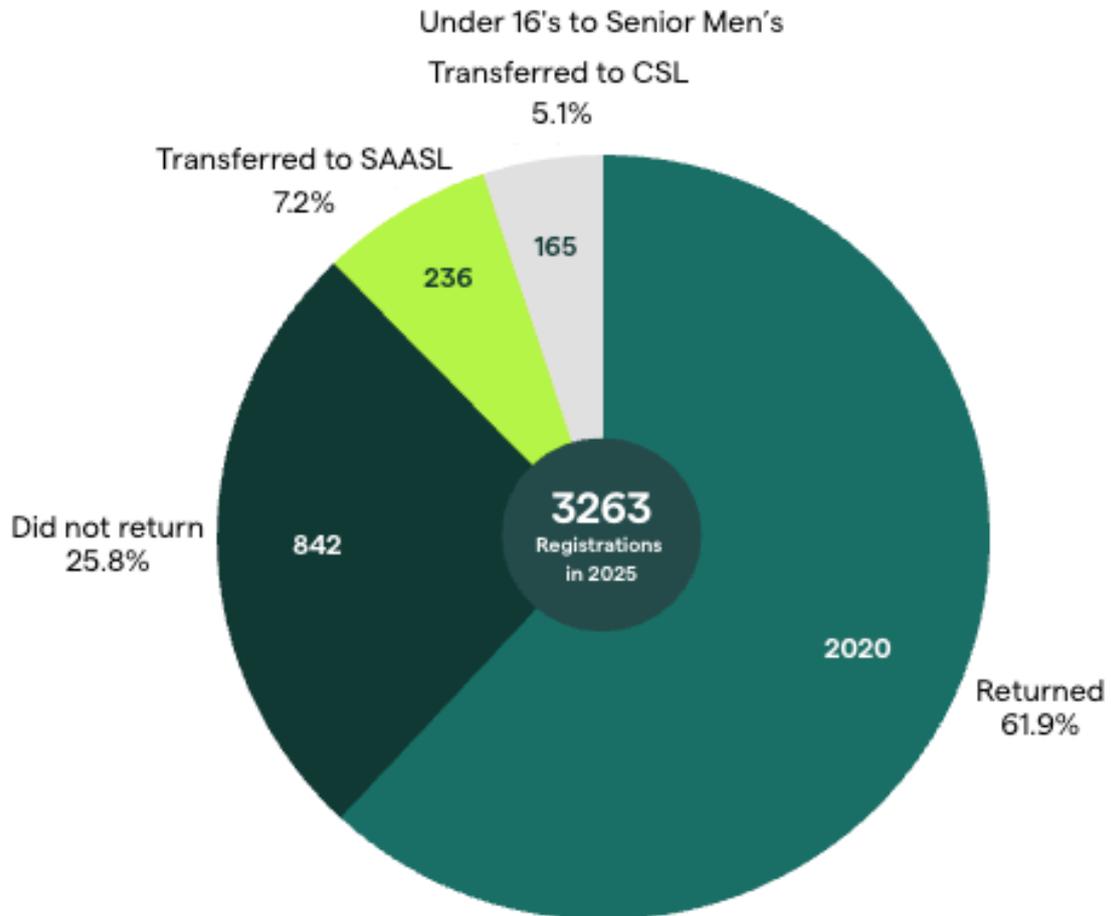
### FSA Registrations YoY (2023-2024)

Under 16's to Senior Men's



## Appendix J: FSA Registrations 2024 to 2025 (U16 - Senior Men)

### FSA Registrations YoY (2024-2025)



## Appendix K: FSA Competition Structure (Men's)



## Appendix L: Stakeholder Survey Questionnaire

### **Future Direction of Senior Men's Competitions in Greater Adelaide:** **Independent Review**

#### **Online Stakeholder Survey**

**To:** FSA Stakeholders, CSL Stakeholders, SAASL Stakeholders, competition players and officials/referees

**Issued:** 6<sup>th</sup> June 2025

### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION (ALL PARTICIPANTS)**

#### **1. Which league do you associate with?**

- A) Football South Australia (FSA)
- B) South Australian Amateur Soccer League (SAASL)
- C) Collegians Soccer League (CSL)

#### **2. Which club/s are you associated with?**

*[insert drop-down toggle based on Q1]*

#### **3. What role do you most associate with?**

- A) Player
- B) Coach
- C) Board member
- D) Administrator
- E) Official/ Referee
- F) Other: please advise \_\_\_\_\_

*If the answer for Q3 = player, coach and official/referee, automatically go to*

question 11 (and skip Q4-10)

If the answer for Q3 = administrator, board member, or other, automatically go to question 4.

**SECTION 2(A): FEEDBACK ON CURRENT THREE-ASSOCIATION  
(FSA/SAASL/CSL) COMPETITION FRAMEWORK (ADMINISTRATORS/BOARD  
MEMBERS, AND OTHER/S)**

Respond on how strongly you AGREE or DISAGREE with the statements below:

**4. Club support staff have the tools and skills to develop high-performing teams.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. The three-league (FSA/SAASL/CSL) competition framework supports *strategic* alignment.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. The current model, where FSA, SAASL, and CSL competitions operate independently, helps maintain competitive balance.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Does the current independent three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) competition impose an additional burden on club administrators.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Would you support a model that facilitates promotion and relegation across two or all of the existing associations?**

*[insert scale]*

1 (never support) – 10 (strongly support)

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 2(B): FEEDBACK ON CURRENT FSA COMPETITION FRAMEWORK  
(PLAYERS, COACHES & OFFICIALS/REFEREES ONLY)**

**9. Please select the applicable football competition you have participated in:**

- a) FSA Competitions
  - i. National Premier League
  - ii. State League one
  - iii. State League Two South/ North
  
- b) SAASL Competitions
  - i. Premier (Saturday or Sunday)
  - ii. Division 2 (Saturday or Sunday)
  - iii. Division 3 Red/Blue (Saturday or Sunday)
  - iv. Premier C (Saturday or Sunday)
  - v. Division 6 (Saturday or Sunday)

- vi. Division 7 (Saturday or Sunday)
- vii. Division Red (Over 35's)
- viii. Division Blue (Over 35's)

c) CSL Competitions

- i. Division 1
- ii. Division 2
- iii. Division 3
- iv. Division 4
- v. Division 5
- vi. Division 6
- vii. Division 7

[Multiple Choice answers can apply here]

**10. What competition do you officiate in?**

- a) FSA
- b) SAASL
- c) CSL

[Multiple Choice selection to apply here]

**11. Please select the appropriate timeframe you have been involved:**

- a) Less than 12 months
- b) 1-3 years
- c) 4-6 years
- d) 7-9 years
- e) 10+ years

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Have you ever considered leaving your club to play in a more elite-level competition?**

A) Yes

i. What were your main reasons for considering this?

*[insert comment box]*

B) No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Have you ever considered leaving your current club to play a more social-level competition?**

A) Yes

i. What were your main reasons for considering this?

*[insert comment box]*

B) No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. If a single pathway from junior to senior football within the same club and association was established, would it promote player development?**

A) Strongly agree

B) Agree

C) Unsure

D) Disagree

E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Which association currently provides the best opportunity for aspirational players?**

*[insert drop-down – FSA/CSL/SAASL]*

**16. Which association currently provides the best environment for social competition?**

*[insert drop-down – FSA/CSL/SAASL]*

**SECTION 3: LEAGUE-SPECIFIC EXPERIENCE (ALL PARTICIPANTS)**

*If answer to Q1 = FSA go to Question 17, skip Q25-Q36*

*If answer to Q1 = SAASL go to Question 25, skip Q17-Q24*

*If answer to Q1 = CSL go to Question 31, skip Q17-30*

**FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FSA COMPETITION:**

**17. Are you supportive of an expanded association structure that includes more divisions and incorporates promotion and relegation?**

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Unsure

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Given the ongoing and predicted future growth of participation, do you support the further expansion of the FSA competition structures (i.e. State League 3 or increased teams per division)?**

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Unsure

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Respond on how you AGREE or DISAGREE with the statements below:

**19. The current promotion and relegation system works effectively in the FSA league.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**20. There are sufficient opportunities for player development and exposure**

**within your league.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**21. There is a clear pathway to progress to higher levels within your current competition structure.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**22. The current competition model allows your club to grow within the senior competition.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**23. There is enough parity between teams in the league. i.e. games are generally balanced and competitive.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**24. The current independent three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) framework supports player transition from junior to senior competitions.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**25. FSA provides timely and effective administration and communication.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**26. What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve the league?**

*[Insert comment box/or provide MC options]*

**FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SAASL COMPETITION:**

Respond on how you AGREE or DISAGREE with the statements below:

**27. The current three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) competition model limits your clubs' ability to reach their full potential.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**28. The promotion and relegation system works effectively in the SAASL competition.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**29. There are sufficient opportunities for player development and exposure within your league.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**30. The current three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) competition model allows your club to grow within the senior competition.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**31. The current three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) framework supports player transition from junior to senior competitions.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**32. There is enough parity between teams in the league. i.e. games are**

**generally balanced and competitive.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**33. SAASL provides timely and effective administration and communication.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**34. What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve the league?**

*[Insert comment box/or provide MC options]*

**FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN THE CSL COMPETITION:**

**35. How would you rate the level of competition in your league?**

- A) Very high
- B) High
- C) Moderate
- D) Low
- E) Very low

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Respond on how you AGREE or DISAGREE with the statements below:

**36. There is a clear pathway to progress to higher levels within your current league, e.g. from amateur or semi-professional.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree

- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**37. There is enough parity between teams in the league. i.e. games are generally balanced and competitive.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**38. The promotion and relegation system works effectively in the CSL competition.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**39. CSL provides timely and effective administration and communication.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**40. What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve the league?**

*[Insert comment box/or provide MC options]*

**SECTION 4: GENERAL QUESTIONS (ALL PARTICIPANTS)**

**41. Are you familiar with the FSA, SAASL, and CSL competition league structures?**

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) Unsure

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Respond on how you AGREE or DISAGREE with the statements below:

**42. There should be a closer relationship between SAASL and CSL Clubs with the FSA competition structure.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**43. The current three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) competition for Football in Metropolitan Adelaide maximises player transition from youth to senior teams.**

- A) Strongly agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**44. There would be benefits for clubs and stakeholders if one or more of the existing three association competitions (FSA/SAASL/CSL) were unified.**

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**45. The three-association (FSA/SAASL/CSL) competition offers advantages for clubs and their stakeholders**

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**46. It is important to maintain the independence of the three-association competitions.**

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**47. It is important to acknowledge and safeguard the history of the different leagues (FSA, SAASL and CSL).**

- A) Strongly Agree
- B) Agree
- C) Neutral
- D) Disagree
- E) Strongly Disagree

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Questionnaire**

## Appendix M: Stakeholder Survey Insights and Trends

### 1. The current three-association model limits club growth and strategic alignment.

- Fragmentation makes it difficult for clubs to plan long-term and move between leagues.
- Structural misalignment creates confusion around progression pathways.
- Clubs in different associations operate under different standards and expectations.
- The current model limits collaboration between clubs and associations.

*"Needs to be much better aligned for success."*

*"All have different and competing goals and outcomes."*

*"The 3 leagues couldn't be further apart in terms of strategic direction and operation."*

**27%** Only 27% of administrators and board members believe the current FSA/SAASL/CSL model supports strategic alignment.

**45%** 45% of respondents associated with the SAASL competition believe the three-league competition model limits their club's ability to reach their full potential.

**57%** 57% of respondents agree that there would be benefits for clubs and stakeholders if one or more of the existing three association competitions were unified, whereas 61% agree there should be a closer relationship between SAASL and the CSL clubs with the FSA competition structure.

### 2. Promotion and relegation across an expanded competition structure is widely supported.

- Clubs support promotion and relegation, provided it doesn't diminish the standard of football.
- Respondents agree that the promotion and relegation system works effectively in the FSA, SAASL and CSL competitions.
- However, some comments suggest that promotion and relegation systems are inconsistently applied and lack transparency.
- A lot of comments were critical of the SL2 promotion framework.

*"As long as it doesn't dilute the level of competition at the top level."*

*"I support there being leagues for the structure of promotion/relegation but the teams that are in the leagues have to be competitive."*

*"The SL2 Promotion structure is complicated and does not reward consistent success within the league."*

**77%** 77% of FSA Respondents (all but officials/referees) are supportive of an expanded association structure that includes more divisions and incorporates promotion and relegation.

**60<sup>avg.</sup>** 60 was the average score (out of 100) of the extent to which all Board Members and Administrators would support a model that facilitates promotion and relegation across two or all of the existing associations.

### 3. There is a lack of clear player development and exposure opportunities.

- Amateur competitions are not seen as genuine pathways to elite football.
- There is no consistent visibility for scouts or high-performance programs.
- Players wanting to progress are forced to switch clubs or associations.
- The pathway for late-developing players is unclear or non-existent.
- However, CSL responders don't feel player development / exposure opportunities should necessarily be a priority of the league.



*"Fewer clubs are promoting their own juniors into senior football, which is damaging long-term pathways and the overall strength of the football ecosystem in SA."*

*"Clubs are more attracted by the revenue a junior program can generate rather than player development."*

**57%** 57% of FSA responders don't agree there are sufficient opportunities for player development and exposure within their league.

**60%** 60% of SAASL responders don't agree there are sufficient opportunities for player development and exposure within their league.

**73%** 73% of CSL responders don't agree there is a clear pathway to progress to higher levels within their current league (e.g. from amateur or semi-professional).

### 4. Junior-to-senior player transition is hindered by the current fragmented structure.

- A single pathway from junior to senior football within the same club would promote player development, but it depends on the quality of the coaches.
- Integrated clubs are best positioned to retain and develop youth talent.
- Players often change clubs to progress from juniors to seniors.
- The disjointed model creates drop-off points in participation.



*"Players staying in the same club is vital for chemistry and will result in much stronger teams."*

*"Only if it was appropriately managed and standards were kept to."*

*"Having a clear pathway to senior football from grassroots level, as well as having the backing from the club would in my opinion greatly improve player development."*

**75%** 75% of all players and coaches agree that a single pathway from junior to senior football within the same club would promote player development.

**26%** Only 26% of respondents agreed that the current three-association model for football in Metropolitan Adelaide maximises player transition from youth to senior teams.

## 5. Competitive balance is rated strong across all three competitions.

- Leagues appear to have graded divisions effectively, resulting in few blow-outs and tighter score-lines.
- Strong parity contributes to higher player satisfaction and sustained engagement across the season.
- Promotion/relegation is viewed as a key mechanisms that keep teams in the appropriate competitive tier.
- Administrators report that balanced competitions help retain volunteers and sponsors, as closely fought matches draw larger crowds.



*"Most divisions are generally balanced."*

*"The leagues are structured very well to put teams together that are at a similar level."*

*"The lower divisions have some disparity; however, it's not the same 'weak' teams each season, hence it's impossible to balance perfectly."*

**60%** 60% of FSA respondents agree there is enough parity between teams in the league, whilst 50% of SAASL and 65% of CSL agree the same for their competitions.

**40%** 40% of administrators and board members agree that the current model helps maintain competitive balance.

## 6. Clubs overwhelmingly support further expansion of FSA competition.

- Growth in participation is outpacing current league capacity.
- Clubs want access to formal pathways, even from lower tiers.
- A third State League or more promotion slots would boost opportunity.
- FSA is seen as the most structured and scalable option for expansion.



*"Creating a State League 3 is a far better approach to the current State league North / South."*

*"Football needs to sit under one umbrella and 1 league structure. Multiple divisions would allow for strong, well run amateur clubs to compete effectively."*

*"Increasing the size of the League or adding a further division will allow more pathway options for aspiring players."*

**77%** 77% of FSA respondents support expanding FSA competition structures.

**45%** 45% of SAASL respondents agree that the three-association competition model limits the club's ability to reach its full potential.

## 7. There should be a closer relationship between SAASL and CSL clubs within the Metro Adelaide competition structures.

- Respondents expressed there could be benefits for both SAASL and CSL clubs if they were more aligned.
- Main considerations included that the present model doesn't make sense to continue as the depth and quality of players to maintain the structures as they are is not sustainable.
- A close relationship between SAASL and CSL could provide a lower-cost model which, could attract more players to clubs and increase participation rates

*"It would create a more balanced and effective structure and will allow for elite leagues..."*

*"...resources are better utilised with a close relationship between all competitions."*

*"I cannot emphasise enough the importance of maintaining purely amateur competitions. Additionally, having both Saturday and Sunday competitions maximises the ability to participate due to availability."*

**61%** More than 61% of respondents support a closer relationship between SAASL and CSL Clubs.

**60%** 60% of respondents do not agree that the three-association competition offers advantages for their clubs and stakeholders.

## 8. Historical identity matters, but not at the expense of progress.

- Stakeholders within leagues are proud of their roots and community identities.
- Most want to preserve history while moving towards a better system.
- Unification is not seen as disrespect - it's seen as evolution.
- Stakeholders would understand the requirements for unification of two or more of the current association structures.

*"Maintain independence, but with oversight from the FSA."*

*"FSA & SAASL will benefit more from unifying rather than staying independent. The only competition that will truly benefit from independence is CSL due to the fact that the history is based around institutions not area/Location."*

*"SAASL and CSL have their own histories and ways of working. Perhaps being more closer to FSA for support and guidance."*

**35%** Only 35% of respondents agree that it is important to maintain the independence of the three-association competitions.

**53%** 53% of respondents agreed it is important to acknowledge and safeguard the history of the different leagues.

## 9. Club support staff lack the tools and expertise to support high performance, leading to volunteer fatigue.

- Financial and staffing constraints are holding back club professionalism.
- Clubs are supported by well intentioned volunteers, however, don't have the means or resources to develop high performing teams.
- Volunteers are overworked and under-supported, often juggling club duties with full-time jobs.
- Smaller clubs promoted to higher divisions often struggle to meet increased expectations.
- Over 30% of clubs have teams competing across two or more competition frameworks.

*"More needs to be done to assist those smaller clubs when being promoted to a higher league."*

*"Clubs are supported by well intentioned individuals who volunteer their services outside their day-day jobs and commitments. Consequently, they don't have the means or resources to develop high performing teams."*

*"There is far too much administrative burden on volunteers who generally have jobs and numerous roles in their club."*

**35%** Only 35% agreed club support staff had the tools and skills to support high-performing teams.

## 10. Club administrators are burdened by the three-association structure.

- Administrative duplication across leagues increases workload for volunteers.
- Different competition systems and requirements mean more time spent on compliance.
- Volunteers report burnout and frustration with inconsistent processes.
- Clubs lack centralised systems or shared resources for admin support.

*"yes, duplication across roles."*

*"Yes as they need to fill teams in each year level."*

*"At times, some administrative tasks could be better aligned."*

**39%** Only 39% of board members and administrators believe that the current independent three-association competition imposes an additional burden on club administrators.

## 11. Administrative performance and communication varies significantly between associations.

- Clubs praise CSL's clear fixtures, prompt updates, and quick issue-resolution.
- Under-half of respondents in FSA and SAASL feel communication is adequate, highlighting inconsistent turnaround times on enquiries, rule clarifications, and schedule changes.
- There is a perception of less effective admin in FSA/SAASL which pushes extra burden onto club volunteers.



*"Very happy with the CSL Administration, their processes and transparency."*

*"Natasha does a great job, but from an outside perspective, from someone that works in sport, it seems she's doing multiple people's jobs on her own (SAASL)."*

*"A lot better this year. Poor staff are hammered with queries. I think we need efficiencies from trials through to sign up (FSA)."*

**60%** 60% of CSL responders agreed that CSL provides timely and effective administration and communication, whereas this number falls to 43% for FSA and 40% for SAASL.

## 12. There is a need to improve geographic balance to minimise travel requirements across the entire competition

- Many respondents raised travel as a friction point week in week out i.e. North v South.
- This is apparent in SAASL Sunday and CSL competitions.
- This appears to be a lesser issue in FSA based on respondent comments.
- Players/coaches have also considered or have left their club due to travel commitments.



*"Travel from Port Pirie to Pt Elliot is no chance of progression unless your parents are on committee or have started at club when 6."*

*"I got offered higher spot in NPL but declined because of travel."*

*"...Look to have zones in the lower divisions so that travel is not a large factor."*

NB: Please note, these insights have been derived from the optional comments section throughout the survey

## Appendix N: FSA's NTC Program Information

### Football SA National Training Centre

Football SA's National Training Centre (**NTC**) program is a full-time youth pathway development program for players between the ages of 12 and 18. When players in the NTC program reach the age of 18, they may progress through the player pathway to Adelaide United, another A-League club or an overseas professional football club.

### Annual Football SA Investment in NTC

Football SA currently invests more than \$1 million on an annual basis in its NTC program and has done so for several years to ensure talented young South Australian players are provided a high-performance environment. This annual investment excludes any funding received from Football Australia.

Since 2011, a considerable number of players have developed their football in the NTC and progressed to the A-League and overseas competitions as professionals including:

- 32 male players in the Joeys and Young Socceroos;
- 35 players in the A-League Men;
- 17 male players registered with overseas football clubs, including the below transfers in the 2024 international transfer windows:
  - Joe Gauci (Aston Villa FC);
  - Steven Hall (Brighton & Hove Albion FC);
  - Giuseppe Bovalina (Vancouver Whitecaps FC);
  - Musa Toure (Clermont); and
  - Alexander Popovic (Gangwon FC).
- 43 players in A-League Women; and
- 21 female players in the Young Matildas.

Football SA's investment has therefore provided significant and valuable support to the training and development opportunities for young players who may become professional footballers, and Socceroos and Matildas. It is not only clubs who facilitate the development of young players in South Australia, Football SA's NTC program plays a fundamental role.

Despite this, Football SA currently receives no Domestic Training Compensation (or additional funding from Football Australia) for players once in the Football SA NTC program who subsequently sign a professional football contract with Adelaide United, another A-League or an international club, despite Football SA providing such training and development opportunities for those players.

The Regulation Change has prevented a further investment into the development of youth within South Australia. Football SA's goal is to invest funds into the continued roll out of Development Centres, WNPL and NPL Clubs to further enhance our reputation as a leading development hub for players in the country.