



**FOOTBALL IN COUNTRY VICTORIA**  
**REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURES**  
**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**INTRODUCTION**

The AFL Chief Executive Andrew Demetriou has announced a review of the governance and structures of football across country Victoria. Andrew has asked me, in my capacity as Chairman of AFL Victoria Limited, to lead the review.

The AFL's commitment to football in country Victoria is significant. The VCFL is the governing body for leagues that play football in country Victoria, and together with their affiliated leagues, meet the cost of participation and development of those leagues.

The AFL however also makes a very significant additional financial contribution to the well-being of country football, being direct grants to VCFL of almost \$600,000 and indirect investment in excess of \$2.8 million for TAC regions, annual U/16 and U/18 country championships, and wages for development managers and officers employed in country regions by AFL Victoria. On top of this is the investment made in the State Government's Country Football and Netball Program, the annual AFL Community Camps for AFL Clubs that visit country Victoria and the pre-season NAB Challenge games played in country Victoria.

The AFL has seven key development objectives for the game. AFL Victoria is charged with the responsibility of achieving these objectives in Victoria, by working together in a collaborative fashion with its major affiliates, one of which is the VCFL.

The seven key development objectives are:

1. **Participation** – to develop and support pathways from AFL Auskick to open age football that maximise participation.
2. **Community** – to support leagues, clubs and schools to provide quality environments and management to motivate volunteers, umpires, coaches, teachers and sports trainers for all levels of Australian football.
3. **Engagement** – to develop community engagement initiatives that add social value and support access to broader pathways for inclusive environments, particularly in the indigenous and multi-cultural communities.
4. **Talent & Second Tier** – to establish best practice talent pathway and enhance Second Tier competitions to identify, attract and develop first choice athletes as well as provide a career path for talented umpires and coaches.
5. **Facilities** – to collaborate on facility development for the community football network of leagues, clubs and schools.
6. **Fan Development** – to build relationships with the community to develop fans of the game.
7. **People & Culture** – to attract, develop & retain quality people and develop a high performance culture in line with our values.



## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Review is;

- (i) To examine current governance and structures of football in country Victoria, including but not limited to AFL Victoria Development and Auskick, TAC talent programs and pathways, the VCFL and its affiliated bodies, and the AFL Engagement programs, to determine;

- the effectiveness of these structures;
- the level of duplication of resources and administration effort; and
- the levels of collaboration between various stakeholders;

and assess their impact on firstly achieving the seven key development objectives, and secondly, ensuring the AFL grants and investment provided to country Victoria is being used most effectively;

- (ii) To make recommendations to the AFL, AFL Victoria and the VCFL and its members as to how the governance and structures between these bodies may be improved in order to maximise collaboration between all parties, and thereby ensure

- the seven key development objectives in country Victoria can be achieved; and
- the governance and structures are most cost effective.

The AFL and AFL Victoria recognise that member leagues of the VCFL, and the VCFL itself, are autonomous bodies responsible for the management and conduct of football competitions under their jurisdiction.

## BACKGROUND

In his report in October 2001 titled “**Investing in the Future of Australian Football**”, then AFL Commissioner Colin Carter recommended as one of his ten initiatives the following;

***Exploring more efficient ways of working together:** The structures that govern football were put into place many decades ago. We want to initiate a discussion with our state and local league partners to assess what organisational relationships will best serve football in coming years. The football system now employs substantial staff and resources. Our focus should be on improving the system’s effectiveness, putting into place more rigorous performance measurement systems and reducing duplication of effort.*

This recommendation was based on his findings under the heading of “**Football’s governance structures are costly and out of date**”. Some extracts under that heading are as follows;

*Football, especially in the traditional states, is built around structures – leagues, regional and state bodies – that reflect our long history and have grown ‘from the bottom up’.... So much of what happens in football’s ‘development industry’ reflects these inherited organisational structures and administrative arrangements.*

*It is clear that the many levels of Australian football have not worked well together. The code has long operated as a series of ‘silos’, between states, leagues and clubs, and even inside the AFL*



competition. Turf has been protected, and potential partners 'in the greater cause' have been treated as enemies. There has not been a concerted ....approach to developing the game.

Political differences between national, state and regional bodies consume energy and block change.

*"For an AFL development initiative to have any influence on a participant in country Victorian football, it has to get past 6 levels of governance. First the board of Football Victoria, then the Development body, then the VCFL Board, Regional Board, League Board and finally the Club Board" – interview with Administrator*

*As a result, various states and leagues duplicate their efforts and typically fail to share ideas, resources and strategies, despite commonality in issues and interests.... **This lack of co-ordination is costly.....The result of the lack of co-ordination is more costly and poorer delivery of services to local football clubs and leagues....The vision should be for more collaboration....***

*The dominant themes underlying a structure would be collaboration and sharing, to 'think national and act locally'.*

*Our overall conclusion is that Australian football should not waste its limited resources by constantly re-inventing the wheel. The challenge is to adopt a co-ordinated, unified approach to tackling the issues. 'Silos' are no longer affordable. Performance and outcomes must be measured and communicated.*

That report was adopted by the AFL. Then Chairman Ron Evans at a pivotal meeting of the AFL and AFL Clubs made the now well known statement '**Ultimate competition on the field. Ultimate collaboration off it**'. This has led to a greater level of collaboration at the highest level.

AFL Game Development has adopted the theme on a national level, with the concept of '**think national, act locally**'.

In 2003-2004 the Victorian Government conducted an inquiry into country football through the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee. An extract of the Chair, Mr Ben Hardman MP, forward contained in the final report December 2004, included:

*Although country football clubs and leagues have amply demonstrated their ability to 'help themselves', there remains areas where additional support would be welcomed. The Committee has made a range of recommendations directed at football's peak bodies and local and state government, which are designed to provide this support. It is apparent that volunteers in sporting clubs would benefit from additional assistance to meet their many financial and legal obligations. It is also clear that the huge potential of country football is being constrained by the often poor and inadequate state of some grounds and facilities. The Committee has made funding recommendations to address both of these issues. However, the injection of additional funds into country football will not be sufficient to ensure its continued success. The Committee also believes the Australian Football League, Football Victoria and the Victorian Country Football League should continually review and improve aspects of their operations to ensure that they are adequately responding to the needs of people in rural and regional Victoria who play and support grassroots football'.*

Some initiatives have been taken in country Victoria. In 2005 the VCFL structure was changed from 10 regions to 4 Areas, each with an Area Manager. Central administration hubs have also been created to reduce administration effort and costs. However, in terms of governance, Football Geelong is the only 'hub' that runs with an independent commission that oversees more



than one league. All other hubs still have independent governance structures for participating leagues.

However, it is not apparent that the level of collaboration and sharing has improved and the removal of costly 'silos' has occurred in Victoria generally. This was apparent in discussions with stakeholders in metropolitan areas during the transition from Football Victoria Limited to Australian Football League (Victoria) Limited.

It is also most apparent that Melbourne is undergoing one of the most significant demographic changes in its history. This is being reflected not only by the fact that Western Melbourne is now officially the fastest growing region in Australia, but also by other growth corridors extending into what were once regarded as country regions. As a result, the boundaries between metropolitan and country in some areas of Victoria have become blurred; as has the concept of whether leagues in these regions are now metropolitan or country leagues, or a mix of both.

The intent of this review is to ensure that football's peak bodies adequately respond to the future needs of football in country Victoria.

#### **THE VICTORIAN COUNTRY FOOTBALL LEAGUE (VCFL)**

Under its Statement of Purpose, the VCFL has the responsibility to *"promote, control, manage, encourage, develop and foster the Australian game of football"*.

The VCFL Constitution states this purpose is to be conducted in *"The State of Victoria with parts of New South Wales and South Australia (which) shall be divided into amalgamated areas to be known respectively as East, North East, North West/Central and South West or such other areas as may be determined by the Directors from time to time."*

Eligible bodies that may be affiliated with the VCFL include

*"All:*

*(i) Country Football leagues and associations which conduct a competition of the Australian game of Football within Victoria and in parts of New South Wales and South Australia; and*

*(ii) other country football associated bodies (including umpire associations),*

*in all such cases as determined by the Directors from time to time....."*

The VCFL 2011 Handbook lists the contact details for 79 VCFL Leagues, of which 25 fall under the administration of other leagues, presumably as part of 'hubs'. It lists 30 Umpiring Associations.

The handbook also lists 19 staff of VCFL, 13 of whom are listed as being employed in Melbourne.

There is one Area Manager for each of the regions specified above; a total of 4 Area Managers for country Victoria. The role of these Area Managers is;

- Clubs & leagues first port of call for all day to day matters
- The communication channel to the VCFL and from the VCFL to its affiliates



This Review will seek submissions and feedback from the VCFL, affiliated Leagues and Umpiring Associations. In many cases this will include face to face interviews, however, where that is not practical for timing reasons, the Review will seek written feedback based on a 'to be determined' format.

### **TAC TALENT PROGRAMS**

There are 6 AFL Victoria TAC Regions in Victoria that are responsible for talent programs and pathways in country Victoria, being Bendigo Pioneers, Geelong Falcons, Gippsland Power, Murray Bushrangers, North Ballarat Rebels and the Dandenong Stingrays. Each TAC Region is managed by a Region Manager and has 2 or 3 Development Officers. The Region Managers report to AFL Victoria Head Office.

The Review will seek feedback from the Regions and the Leagues in each region, as to the effectiveness of the programs and pathways, including the adequacy of programs post the TAC for players not drafted to the AFL.

### **AFL VICTORIA DEVELOPMENT**

There are 13 AFL Victoria Development Regions within the larger 6 TAC Regions, managed by Development Managers who report to the Head Office of AFL Victoria.

Core development activities include NAB AFL Auskick, coaching programs, school football, AFL player appearances and assisting with TAC development squads.

The review will seek feedback from the Regions and the Leagues in each region, as to the effectiveness of development programs and impact on the quantity and quality of participation across the age levels.

### **COMPETITORS & OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

The Review will seek feedback from other key external stakeholders to football including State Government and various local councils/municipalities.

The Review will also look at the structures and programs of major competitor sports, notably FFV, to assess the effectiveness of these against those of Australian football.

### **OUTCOMES**

The Review will assess and provide recommendations specifically against the following key issues;

- The level of common understanding in all stakeholders on the key issues and development objectives;



- The level and effectiveness of communication and collaboration between all stakeholders in football in country Victoria, including AFL Victoria head office, its regional development and talent network, the VCFL and its affiliates;
- The cost of providing services to all these stakeholders, including the level of duplication, and whether an alternative governance structure can provide more cost effective services and/or those additional services and programs required to achieve the seven development objectives;
- The effectiveness of relationships with key external stakeholders in terms of gaining support for game and facilities development;
- The adequacy of human resources, including the makeup and location of those human resources, to;
  - effectively service VCFL Leagues and Clubs; and
  - implement the programs to achieve the seven AFL development objectives
- How the demographic changes of Melbourne are impacting on the delivery of services to particular leagues and stakeholders, and whether more effective structures will deliver better results in these particular regions;
- How the programs and structures in Australian football compare with those of our major competitors and what threats, if any, exist;

#### **TIMING**

A report with recommendations will be provided to the AFL by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011. The final recommendations will be communicated to all stakeholders by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Jackson'.

**Peter Jackson**

**Chairman  
AFL Victoria**