

OPERATING MODEL REVIEW

What we heard

*Prepared following consultation with leagues,
clubs, volunteers, community and stakeholders
(October–December 2025)*

FEBRUARY

20
26



OVERVIEW

Why this review

In October 2025, AFL Goulburn Murray (AFLGM) commenced a review of its operating model to ensure it continues to meet the needs of leagues, clubs, volunteers and communities across the region.

What changed

In November 2025, AFL Victoria announced the Regional Administration Centre (RAC) Directional Strategies Project. This materially changed the operating environment and accelerated the need for AFLGM to move from review into advocacy.

What we heard

Consultation feedback was consistent and clear:

- local football and netball are essential community infrastructure
- volunteers are under significant and increasing pressure
- administrative and compliance burden is unsustainable
- there is confusion about roles between AFLGM, RACs, leagues and AFL Victoria, and
- unmanaged transition presents a real risk to participation and club viability.



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our position

AFLGM supports improvement and evolution of operating models. However, any transition must:

- reduce the burden on volunteers
- protect participation pathways
- preserve local knowledge
- be properly funded and staged, and
- ensure appropriate governance arrangements..

The risk

Without appropriate support, transition risks include volunteer collapse, loss of participation, club closures and long-term damage to trust in football governance.

What's next

AFLGM will no longer finalise Operating Model Review recommendations, noting AFL Victoria's RAC Directional Strategies Project will determine the future model.

Instead, AFLGM will work closely with leagues and stakeholders to support the transition and advocate strongly to AFL Victoria to ensure the Goulburn Murray region is set up for success.



PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This document summarises the key themes heard through the AFLGM Operating Model Review, outlines AFLGM's response to that feedback, and sets out clear next steps. It also reflects the changed environment following AFL Victoria's RAC Directional Strategies Project, which will determine the future operating model. It should be read in the context of:

- AFLGM's Operating Model Review announced October 2025
- AFL Victoria's Regional Administration Centre (RAC) Directional Strategies Project announced November 2025

It is intended to:

close the loop with participants who contributed feedback



clearly articulate the risks to local football and netball if change is not properly supported



demonstrate how stakeholder input is shaping AFLGM's advocacy



provide transparency to AFL Victoria, leagues, clubs and the community





HOW WE ENGAGED

AFLGM ENGAGED WITH STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH:

- direct discussions between Commissioners and leagues/clubs
- an online survey (71 respondents)
- written submissions and informal feedback

RESPONDENTS INCLUDED:

- club representatives (34%)
- league representatives (9%)
- volunteers, participants and community members (49%)
- other stakeholders including Auskick coordinators and partners

FEEDBACK REFLECTED:

the perspectives of communities across the Goulburn Murray region.

WHAT WE HEARD

key themes



Strong support for local football & netball, but fear for the future



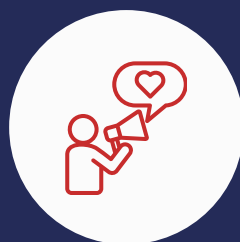
Volunteers are under significant pressure



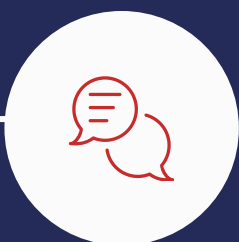
Confusion about roles, responsibilities & accountability



Mixed views on the RAC model, but strong concern about transition risk



AFLGM is expected to advocate harder for the region



Communication must improve – presence matters

THEME ONE

Strong support for local football and netball, but fear for the future

What we heard

- football and netball are described as the “heartbeat” of many towns
- clubs are deeply concerned about sustainability over the next 5–10 years
- participation pressures, declining volunteer numbers and rising compliance demands are creating fragility, and
- there is strong emotional attachment to local competitions and deep fear of losing clubs.

What this means: Stakeholders are not resistant to change, but they are fearful of change that is imposed, under-resourced, or disconnected from local reality.

THEME TWO

Volunteers are under real pressure

What we heard

- volunteer burnout was the most consistent message across all feedback
- administrative burden has increased rather than decreased over time
- compliance, reporting, points systems, salary caps and paperwork are pushing people away from volunteering, and
- volunteers feel their time, experience and judgement are not always respected.

Key message: Any future model that increases the burden on volunteers is not sustainable.



THEME THREE

Confusion about roles, responsibilities and accountability

What we heard

- confusion between AFLGM, the RAC, leagues and AFL Victoria
- unclear decision-making pathways
- perception that responsibilities overlap or shift without explanation, and
- inconsistent advice and communication.

Impact: This confusion erodes trust, slows decision-making and increases frustration at club level.

To note: AFL Victoria oversees community football across the state. AFLGM governs competitions and sets the strategic direction for the Goulburn Murray region. The Regional Administration Centre (RAC) is the operational arm that delivers the strategy set by the Commissioners and manages the day-to-day administration of competitions.



THEME FOUR

Mixed views on the RAC model, but strong concern about transition risk

What we heard

- stakeholders value RAC services (grants, administration, coordination)
- others feel the model has not reduced workload or delivered promised efficiencies
- regardless of view, there is strong concern about how any transition would occur, and
- fear of knowledge loss, service gaps and unmanaged handover to volunteers.

Critical insight: The greatest risk is not the direction of travel, it is unmanaged transition.



THEME FIVE

Communication must improve - presence matters

What we heard

- stakeholders want more face-to-face engagement
- desire for earlier, clearer communication about change
- frustration with email-heavy, directive communication, and
- stronger relationships when AFLGM staff and Commissioners are visible on the ground.



THEME SIX

AFLGM is expected to advocate harder for the region

What we heard

- clear expectation that AFLGM should be a strong advocate to AFL Victoria
- perception that regional voices are overshadowed by metro-centric models, and
- calls for AFLGM to publicly and privately push back where decisions risk local football and netball.

This was explicit: Stakeholders want AFLGM to “stand up for country football and netball”.

AFLGM'S RESPONSE

AFLGM acknowledges the strength, clarity and urgency of the feedback received. We are clear on three fundamental points:



Local football and netball must be protected

They are not just competitions, they are essential community infrastructure.

Volunteers are the system

Any model that assumes volunteers can absorb more work without support will fail.

Transition without investment is high risk

Structural change without proper resourcing places clubs, leagues and participation at serious risk.

AFLGM also acknowledges AFL Victoria's RAC Directional Strategies Project materially changes the operating environment. That announcement has accelerated the need for AFLGM to move beyond review and into advocacy.

WHAT WE'LL DO NEXT

Immediate actions (next three months)

- provide AFL Victoria with the 'what we heard' report that clearly articulates our stakeholder's consultation feedback
- work with leagues and clubs to prepare for transition to the new model
- share this "What We Heard" report publicly with leagues and clubs, and
- establish a transition risk register specific to the Goulburn Murray region

Medium-term actions (2026)

- work with leagues to support implementation of the new model and identify minimum support requirements
- advocate for funded transition packages (people, systems, training)
- clarify roles and responsibilities across AFLGM, leagues and AFL Victoria, and
- strengthen communication channels and on-ground presence.

Ongoing commitments

- maintain regular, transparent updates
- continue direct engagement with clubs and volunteers, and
- monitor participation, volunteer workload and club health indicators.

What good engagement looks like from here

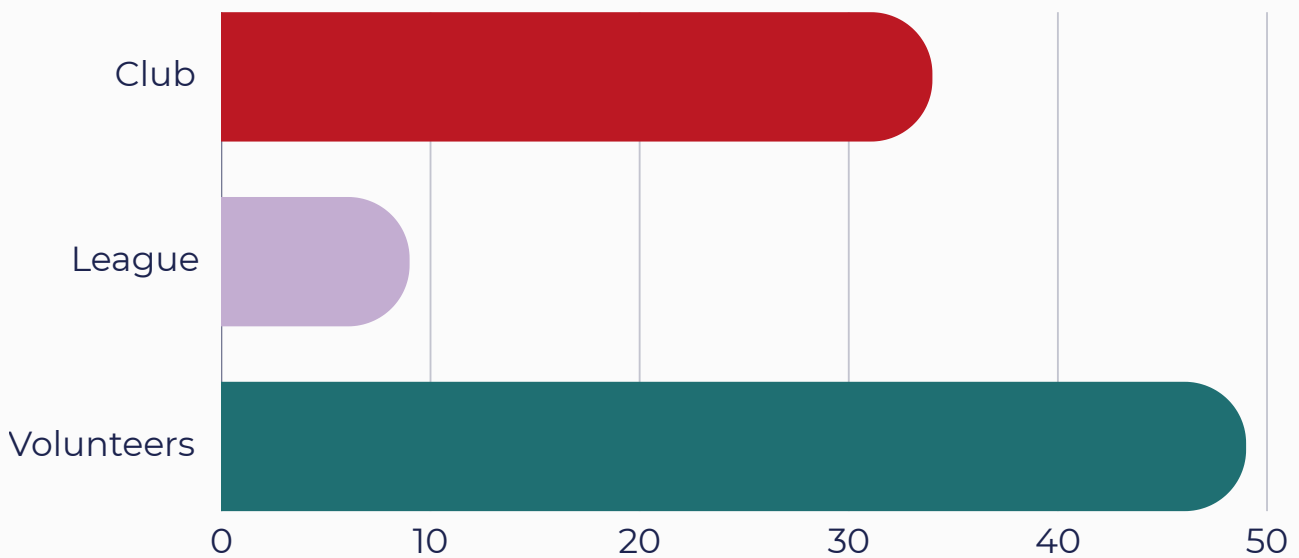
Based on best-practice consultation, AFLGM commits to:

- publishing updates even when decisions are not final
- being honest about constraints and trade-offs
- showing clearly how feedback influences outcomes, and
- advocating publicly and constructively when regional football and netball are at risk.

WHAT WE HEARD

in numbers

The survey received 71 responses. The table below shows a breakdown of respondent representation.



To complement the qualitative feedback, survey results highlight several clear trends:

<p>Value</p> <hr style="width: 20px; margin-left: 0;"/>	<p>of AFLGM activities</p>	
<p>Value</p> <hr style="width: 20px; margin-left: 0;"/>	<p>of RAC activities</p>	
<p>Perception</p> <hr style="width: 20px; margin-left: 0;"/>	<p>reflects stakeholder needs</p>	
<p>Communications</p> <hr style="width: 20px; margin-left: 0;"/>	<p>from commissions & RAC</p>	
<p>Communications</p> <hr style="width: 20px; margin-left: 0;"/>	<p>feeling heard</p>	<p>36%</p>



WHAT WE HEARD

in your words

STOP:
ADMINISTRATIVE
BURDEN ON
VOLUNTEERS

“The administrative burden on clubs and individuals at clubs is huge. Clubs are finding it more difficult to attract volunteers... with added administration and requirements put on clubs from the AFLGM, it scares people away from volunteering or burns them out.”

STOP:
ONE-SIZE-FITS-
ALL APPROACHES

“Working in regional Victoria under metro-centric operational rules often presents significant challenges. These one-size-fits-all approaches can overlook the unique needs, resources, and community dynamics of regional clubs.”

START:
GENUINE, ON-
THE-GROUND
ENGAGEMENT

“Open up communication with clubs – get out on the ground and see what good happens in clubs. The greatest asset to our executive is the open lines of communication and relationships.”

START:
PRIORITISING
PARTICIPATION
AND RETENTION

“Participation and retention must be the number one priority. If clubs do not have enough players, every area of club operations begins to struggle - on-field performance, finances, volunteer workload, and overall club health.”

KEEP:
WHAT AFLGM
DOES WELL

“Auskick and Superkick are two of the most valuable programs AFLGM currently delivers. These programs are the foundation of junior participation and are essential for the future sustainability of all clubs.”



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CLOSING MESSAGE

The message from this consultation is clear: Local football and netball matter deeply. Volunteers are stretched. Communities are anxious. And change, if mishandled, carries real risk.

AFLGM will continue to put community first, stand up for the Goulburn Murray region, and work relentlessly to ensure the future operating model strengthens, not weakens, the clubs, people and towns that make our game possible. Our role now is to support our leagues through this transition and advocate to ensure it is delivered successfully.

Website: www.aflgm.com.au