



MEMO from AFL Barwon RGM Will McGregor
GFNL & BFNL 2020 Senior Premiership Football & Netball Seasons

9-6-20



To the AFL Barwon Community and all key stakeholders,

The AFL Barwon Commission have met and today announced the decision to cancel the Geelong Football Netball League (GFNL) and Bellarine Football Netball League (BFNL) senior football and netball home & away Premiership seasons for 2020.

This difficult but necessary decision includes the GFNL and BFNL senior football home & away seasons (seniors and reserves) as well as all senior netball home & away seasons (all senior grades). Clubs were fully supportive of a united approach to the outcome of the 2020 senior football and netball Premiership seasons.

AFL Barwon's intention does remain to return to play, by providing alternative competition models in a modified format for both senior football and netball in the GFNL and BFNL and conducting junior football, junior netball, and Senior Female Football competitions in 2020. It is AFL Barwon's belief that all players should be given the opportunity to play in some capacity safely if they opt to do so with the support of their club.

As outlined in AFL Barwon's strategic plan, our mission is to promote the sustainability and viability of community football and netball through our region, and this decision is the only way to ensure all 22 valued GFNL and BFNL clubs can return in 2021.

AFL Barwon has always maintained any decision would be made in accordance with feedback provided by clubs and participants. Following extensive consultation, 79% of senior clubs across all senior competitions (GFNL, BFNL, CDFNL, GDFNL) in our region told us they wouldn't support a Premiership season or were accepting of a final Commission decision.

The overwhelming majority of GFNL and BFNL clubs wanted a definitive decision on the 2020 season by June 9. AFL Barwon has listened to them and made a decision based on what is best for our clubs and community. Having determined all feedback from member clubs, the only viable decision to ensure all 22 senior clubs come back next year in the strongest position possible is to cancel the GFNL and BFNL home & away senior Premiership seasons.

Concerns raised by senior football and netball clubs included playing numbers, uncertainty around a clear path back to return to play, uncertainty around how to generate revenue without the opening of bars and canteens- including social functions, the burden placed on volunteers, the inability to effectively manage crowds to comply with the State Government restrictions, health concerns with COVID-19 and varying financial implications.

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75% of clubs were also not supportive of a competition model with just senior football/netball and Under 19s, with almost half of clubs also unable to guarantee whether they would be able to field two sides.

With 53% of GFNL A-Grade netball players and 57% of GFNL B-E Grade netball players also saying they did not want to play a season- on top of over 30% of GFNL and BFNL senior footballers, it became apparent clubs would've found it extremely difficult to field two sides. It is our duty to protect clubs, to protect the over-burden of volunteers, protect teams from high injury rates and protect clubs from potential forfeits, which would've tainted the integrity of an already compromised season.

A safe and healthy environment for all members and volunteers moving forward into 2021 is our goal, ensuring the ongoing sustainability of our clubs.

AFL Barwon will now continue to work closely and collaboratively with AFL Victoria, Netball Victoria and all clubs to manage the associated issues stemming from the cancellation of senior competitions, and will turn its attention to alternative modified models of senior competition and a return to play for junior sport in 2020, provided a return to play date is announced and endorsed by State Government.

AFL Barwon and its member clubs have a shared responsibility to keep our communities safe and this decision supports that responsibility. I would like to pass on my wholehearted thanks to all our members clubs, their tireless volunteers, the GFUA and CDFUA and our valued partners for their passion, support and efforts over this challenging COVID-19 period.

For our members to come back reinvigorated in 2021, AFL Barwon believes this is the only viable course of action. I would also like to thank AFL Victoria, Netball Victoria, the G21 LGA's and the region's Cricket Associations for their support.

AFL Barwon Chairman Craig Keating concluded,

"Through the hard work of our staff, we considered all options along with the extensive feedback received from all clubs," Keating said. "One of the sustainability pillars that formed part of the decision-making process was financial viability for participants, all clubs and AFL Barwon as an organisation.

"Whilst we are disappointed to cancel the 2020 senior premierships seasons, the continued sustainability of football and netball in our region has always been and will continue to be our priority. We need to ensure the long-term health and viability of our community and our member clubs."

Will McGregor
Region General Manager
AFL Barwon

