FLEXIBLE, EQUITABLE AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO FACILITY USE

REVIVAL OF SENIOR FOOTY IN THE NORTHERN RIVERS

Location: Northern Rivers, North NSW (near QLD Border)

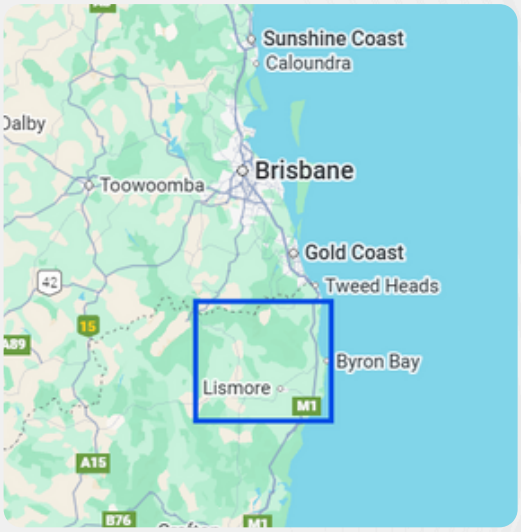
Partners: AFL Queensland, AFL NSW/ACT, Northern Rivers clubs and teams

The Northern Rivers senior men's footy competition is a standout example of how an innovative approach and community involvement can overcome participation challenges.

OVERVIEW

Senior men's footy in the Northern Rivers had faced a steady decline over the years, with falling numbers and limited competition opportunities. Although the region is in New South Wales, the game in Northern Rivers is managed by Queensland AFL after four local clubs joined the AFL South East Queensland (Gold Coast) competition back in 2012.

By the start of the 2025 season, only one men's team from the region remained registered to play in the Gold Coast competition. Clubs pointed to travel demands and the requirement to field two senior teams in the competition as major barriers to continued participation. In response, the league set out to reimagine the Northern Rivers competition - aiming to create a more accessible, engaging, and fun environment that would re-energise the football community.



Following consultation with regional stakeholders in April, an innovative, low-cost, and localised competition was piloted from July 2025 named The Northern Rivers Cup. The initiative exceeded expectations, sparking renewed interest in the game, showcasing the power of flexible, community-focused solutions.

THE APPROACH PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS:

- **Reducing Planning Complexities:** A centralised venue each week that created efficiencies in resourcing
- **Community Collaboration:** The entire footy community from across the region came together to make this a success
- **Bringing the Community Together:** a mix of past senior players, former local juniors, AFL Masters players and several cross-code players joined the competition
- **Participation Increase:** Large numbers of participants have re-engaged in a short period of time
- **Opportunity for Further Growth:** The opportunity to continue to work with stakeholders in the region to grow the participation and sustainability of football over coming years

THE NORTHERN RIVERS CUP
SIX WEEK MEN'S SOCIAL COMPETITION OUTLINE

FLEXIBLE TEAM STRUCTURE
Seven teams formed, some linked to existing clubs, others representing local towns, with teams from Lismore, Byron Bay, Casino, Ballina, Lennox Head, Nimbin, and Brunswick Heads.

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE
Registration set at just $50 per player, reducing financial barriers and creating a low cost introduction for those new to the game.

SHORT, SHARP SEASON
Six-week competition, with each team playing five games plus a finals week.

CENTRALISED GAME DAYS
All matches each weekend held at a single venue, allowing efficient use of first aid, umpires, and creating a vibrant, communal atmosphere.

ADAPTABLE FORMAT
The competition was initially planned as 14-a-side with modified rules to maximise participation. As interest grew, teams swelled to 25–30 players and the competition shifted to traditional full-sided games.

COLLABORATION
The initiative was a cross board collaboration including QLD and NSW AFL state bodies, clubs and the local communities to find a solution for the region.



Photo credit: **DC Sports Photography**

OUTCOMES SO FAR

Participation Boom
Initial goal: 100 players and 4 teams
Actual result: 260+ registrations and 7 teams

Community Spirit
Centralised venues creating connection and a festival-like atmosphere each weekend

Localised Model
The flexible, low-cost, and localised approach proved highly effective

To find out more details on the Northern Rivers competition revival, contact the AFLQ Facilities team via **reception@aflq.com.au**