

GAME DEVELOPMENT

# ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ACTION PLAN

2025 - 2028



PLAY



# FOREWORD

Australian Football, as a cornerstone of Australian culture, has the power to unite people from all backgrounds and we know our rich history and community is strengthened through the diversity of people who play and love our game.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have and continue to make significant contributions to Australian Rules Football. From inspirational game play and passionate community involvement, along with sharing cultural learnings and celebrations, Australia's First Nations people are integral to the game.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan outlines an approach to build on a strong foundation of Indigenous people's participation in Australian Football and will provide space for learning from community leaders and organisations on their needs, along with their strategies to best engage their unique communities.

This action plan outlines concrete steps for creating more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from grassroots participation through to community leadership roles and it is an important strategy for the AFL to continue to find ways for everyone to feel included, safe and recognised within our game.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan has adopted learnings from football programs already delivered across the Northern Territory, Kimberly and Cape York areas and will take a place-based approach across 18 additional local government areas (LGAs) nationwide.

This strategy will focus on working directly with community leaders, Indigenous organisations, schools and local community groups to create easier access to our game and provide flexible participation opportunities.

Through the Community Connect programs, we aspire to have Australian Football embedded at the heart of communities throughout the country. Strong partnerships within these communities will guide bespoke co-design and delivery of programs across each LGA and help ensure culturally safe environments for program participants.

We are excited about the impact this plan will have and look forward to continuing to work alongside communities to grow the game in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and reflective of Australia's rich Indigenous culture.

To ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can meaningfully shape how they engage with Australian Football, it is essential to involve community leaders and organisations in the design and delivery of programs.

This Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan is grounded in two key principles: co-design and place-based approaches. Co-design means working with communities, not just for them, so that programs are shaped by their voices, lived experiences and cultural knowledge. A place-based approach ensures that our initiatives are locally led, rooted in strong relationships, and tailored to the unique needs of each community.

By collaborating with schools, families and organisations, we aim to develop community-driven solutions that make Australian Football more accessible, while building trusted partnerships to support long-term, sustainable outcomes.

Community Connect programs will provide opportunities to celebrate and share the rich diversity of Indigenous cultures across the country. By aligning participation programs with broader social impact efforts, we can help empower communities, strengthen connections and support lasting change.

We're proud to put this plan into action and remain committed to recognising and celebrating the deep cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, both within our nation and through their enduring contributions to the game of Australian Football.



**Andrew Dillon**  
Chief Executive Officer  
AFL



**Madeline Penny**  
General Manager  
Game Development, AFL



**Mark Leavy**  
National Indigenous  
Participation Lead, AFL



***The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and play our game. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football.***

# AFL VISION

**For everyone to love and connect with Australia's game.**

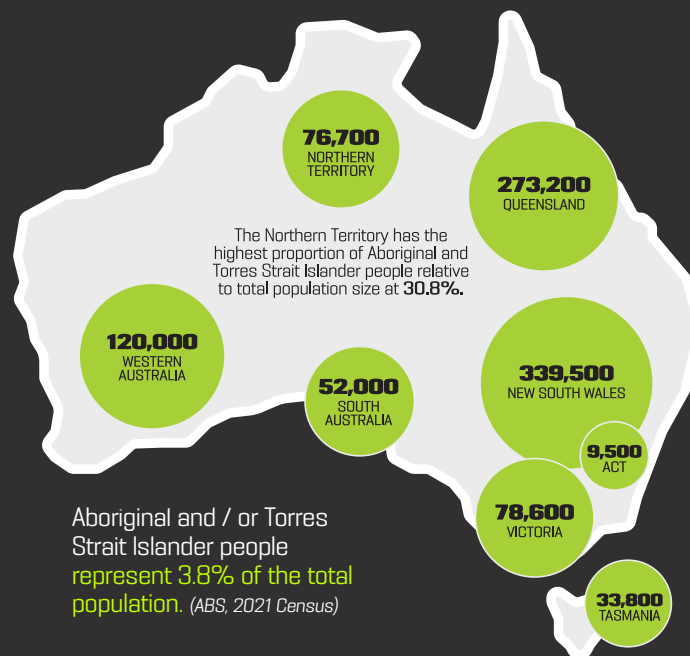
To achieve our vision, we aspire to continue to showcase the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Australian Rules Football and to connect with Indigenous communities across Australia.

The Game Development Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan (2025 - 2028) will provide a consistent, systematic framework and direction to realise our vision nationwide.

The primary emphasis of the action plan is to take a **place-based, community co-designed approach**, focusing on specific Local Government Areas (LGAs).

To achieve this, **AFL Community Connect** programs will be delivered in **18 priority LGAs** across Australia in partnership with a range of community organisations.

## STATE OF PLAY



**38%**

live in major cities

(ABS, 2021 Census)



**44%**

live in inner/outer regional areas



**17%**

live in remote and/or very remote areas



**74%**

recognise an area as a homeland or traditional country

91% in remote areas  
71% in non-remote areas

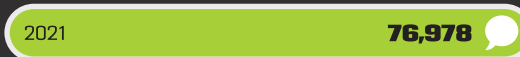


**24%**

live on their homeland

43% in remote areas  
20% in non-remote areas

(ABS, 2021 Census)



People who reported **speaking an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language** are on the rise. (ABS, 2021 Census)

\*It is important to note that First Nations people are undercounted in census data, so this number may be higher

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## CONNECTION & BELONGING

Primary focus on building a sense of belonging and connection through the creation of safe and inclusive environments.



## PERSON-FIRST

Each person brings unique strengths, experiences, considerations, and cultural contexts to the game. We adapt programs and environments to meet people where they are, recognising that factors such as language, socio-economic status, gender, and access can shape the way they engage.



## CO-DESIGN

Bespoke, community co-designed programs through multi-stakeholder partnerships to offer an alternative to the traditional AFL approach.



## SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

Ongoing, long-term commitment to LGAs and communities in scope.



## EDUCATION & TRAINING

Education and training of staff and key stakeholders in cultural awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness is a fundamental enabler to drive systemic change.



## TEST AND LEARN

Our programs are pilots—we will monitor and evaluate impact over the next 2 years to refine and strengthen our initiatives in Years 3 and 4.



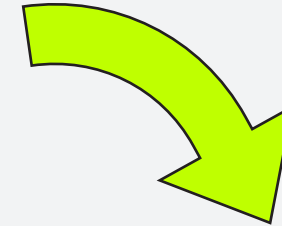
## ACCOMPANYING THE JOURNEY

Substantial participation growth will only be achieved after sustained and genuine commitment, patience, humility, and adopting a posture of learning.

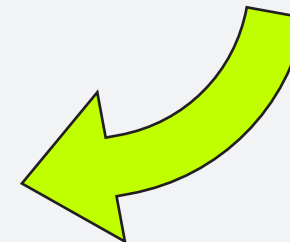


# PLACE-BASED APPROACH

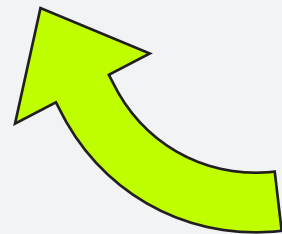
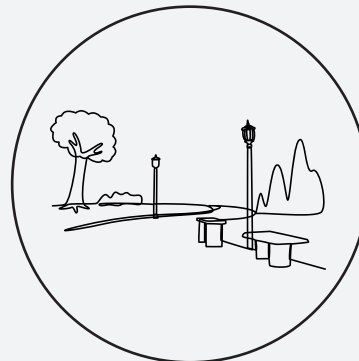
Engaging community members and local organisations



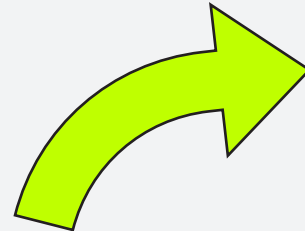
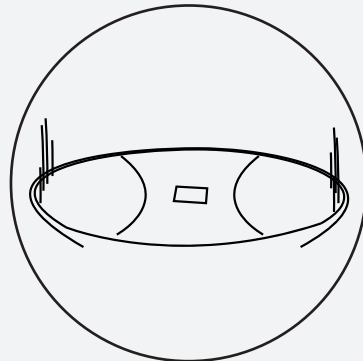
Utilising local knowledge in the process of co-design



Adopting a shared decision-making and stewardship approach



Tailoring solutions to the unique needs and context of the place



## COMMUNITY CONNECT

A place-based approach addresses issues and opportunities within a specific geographic area through a spirit of collaboration and capacity building to drive sustainable, community-led change by:

# KEY INITIATIVES

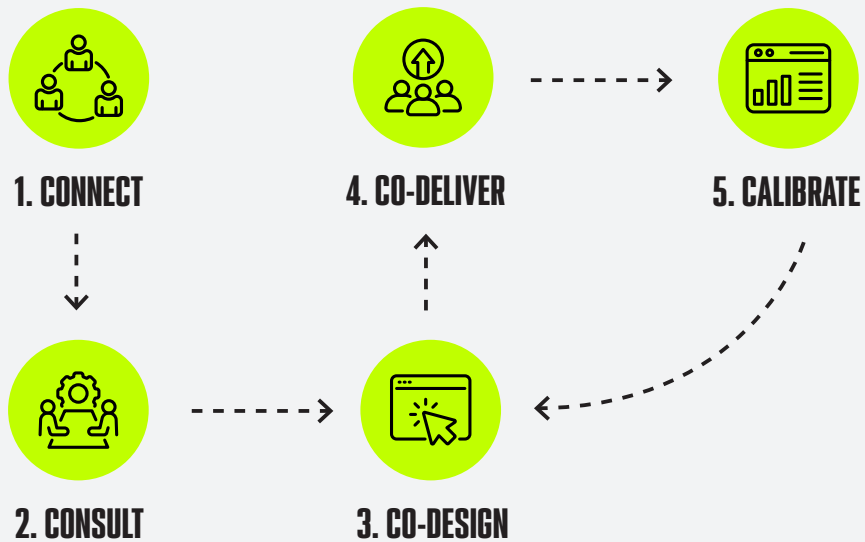
## AFL COMMUNITY CONNECT

Informed by co-design work, AFL Community Connect will be a combination of unstructured opportunities in conjunction with NAB AFL Auskick, NAB AFL Superkick and AFL Nines sessions.

This provides an initial introduction to the AFL and supports both social impact and participation outcomes.



**AFL COMMUNITY CONNECT WILL BE DELIVERED IN LINE WITH THE FOLLOWING 5 PHASES:**



# LOCATIONS





 [play.afl/indigenous](https://play.afl/indigenous)