

Sydney Football League: Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the SFL and why is it returning?

The Sydney Football League (SFL) will be New South Wales' premier competition from 2027.

A recent competition review discovered a need to elevate the standard of football in Greater Sydney and define a clear and accessible premier pathway for players, coaches and officials.

The SFL will be established as a premier competition that develops, retains and attracts talented players, coaches and officials in Sydney and New South Wales.

Did the SFL exist once before?

For many years, Australian Rules Football in Sydney operated under two competitions – the Sydney Football League (SFL) and the Sydney Football Association (SFA).

In 2009, these competitions merged to form the Sydney AFL, which evolved into the AFL Sydney competition known today.

The original SFL was a community football competition. While the recently announced SFL shares the historical name, it represents a significantly elevated, premier competition with new purpose, standards, and objectives.

The AFL and AFL NSW/ACT acknowledges the importance of Sydney's football history and has chosen to reinstate the SFL name to recognise and honour that heritage.

When will the SFL start?

The inaugural SFL season will commence in April 2027.

How many rounds will the SFL play?

In 2027, all four grades of the SFL (Senior Mens, Senior Womens, Under 19.5 Mens and Under 20 Womens) will play for 18 rounds, before progressing to Finals.

Finals will be played by the Top 5 teams across four weekends of fixtures.

What does the establishment of the SFL mean for the AFL Sydney competition? Will AFL Sydney be replaced?

No. The competitions will co-exist, each fulfilling a distinct purpose.

AFL Sydney will remain a vibrant, inclusive, community-based competition with divisional football for Men and Women, underage competitions, and Masters football (35+).

The SFL will sit above AFL Sydney as a premier competition designed to elevate the standard of football in Greater Sydney and provide a clear, aspirational pathway for players, coaches, and officials.

AFL Sydney will not dissolve or merge into the SFL.

How will the SFL differ from AFL Sydney?

AFL Sydney will continue to offer tiered, divisional community football. In contrast, the SFL will provide a higher-standard, premier competition comprising four mandated grades:

- Senior Mens
- Senior Womens
- Under 19.5 Mens
- Under 20 Womens

Any additional teams fielded by SFL clubs will participate within AFL Sydney in the appropriate divisions.

There is no promotion or relegation between AFL Sydney and the SFL, as they are separate competitions with different purposes.

What will the competition hierarchy in NSW look like with the reinstatement of the SFL?

The SFL will operate as the premier competition in New South Wales, sitting above AFL Sydney's community competitions.

The SFL will not change any competitions that operate outside of Sydney, and its establishment does not impact regional league structures.

What is the ambition of the SFL from a talent-pathway perspective? Will it be a breeding ground for future AFL players?

Yes. The vision for the SFL is to create a nationally recognised and premier competition that attracts, develops, and retains talented players, coaches, and officials in Sydney.

The inaugural SFL season will commence in April 2027, with the competition sitting alongside other senior premier competitions like the QAFL in Queensland and complement existing pathways such as the Talent League.

It will provide a strong competition for players 18+ and serve as a genuine platform for talent to progress to elite programs, including AFL clubs.

How were the nine SFL clubs decided?

All AFL Sydney Premier Division clubs were formally invited to tender for an SFL license.

To ensure competitive balance, sustainability, and an elevated standard of play, no more than nine licenses have been issued as the SFL is established. This range reflects current and projected participation levels, pathway needs, and competition integrity.

As part of the tender process, clubs were required to satisfy a series of prescribed minimum and optimal standards that underpin the long-term integrity and professionalism of the competition. These include:

- Governance
- Talent and high-performance programs
- Football operations
- Coaching and officiating
- Administration and staffing
- Facilities
- Financial sustainability
- Club environment and culture

The dedicated panel that assessed the tenders and determined the club licenses also considered the geographic spread of clubs to ensure a truly Sydney-wide competition footprint that represents the key regions across Greater Sydney, including:

- South West
- South
- City and Inner West
- East-Bayside
- East Parkside
- North Shore
- Northern Beaches
- North West
- West

Will the competition expand in the future?

Future expansion beyond the initial clubs that the SFL commences with will be considered over time and where competition standards, pathway objectives and sustainability requirements are met.

How will the SFL operate amid limited facilities in Greater Sydney?

The existing facility landscape in Greater Sydney presents challenges for a premier competition.

To address this, the AFL and AFL NSW/ACT will work with clubs, councils, and government partners to enhance our venue network and ensure our players, officials and staff have access to the best possible playing environments.

The AFL has invested over \$8.5M over the last three years into facilities that will support the SFL, with an additional \$32M committed from our council and government partners.

The AFL and AFL NSW/ACT will work with each SFL club on bespoke venue upgrade plans to fast track the required improvements at each SFL venue.

What new or amended policies will the SFL introduce?

The SFL will operate under a modernised policy suite designed to support a consistent, professional, and well-governed competition.

Some existing AFL Sydney policies will be retained, while others will be adapted to reflect the elevated nature of the SFL.

All clubs will be supported by AFL NSW/ACT with education and guidance to ensure clear and consistent implementation of these policies ahead of the 2027 season.