

XI Principles for the future of Australian football

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 2 July 2020, Football Federation Australia ('FFA'), published its discussion paper, *XI Principles for the future of Australian football* ('XI Principles'), which outlined 11 proposed principles to underpin the future development and growth of football in Australia and act as a stepping stone towards a united direction for the game. The Principles were compiled over the course of 2020 and then captured in the discussion paper which was published as a 'living document' that would continue to be refined as FFA used it as a focal point for engagement and discourse amongst the Australian football community.

Following the launch of the XI Principles, FFA undertook a rigorous process of consultation and engagement to continue to grow the document. The process provided Australian football's rich and diverse football community with an opportunity to have a say in the future of Australian football.

FFA conducted 24 consultations with various stakeholder groups with each providing a unique perspective into the current state of the game in Australia. Consultations were conducted with all full FFA Congress Members, including: Nine (9) Member Federations; The Australian Professional Football Clubs Association ('APFCA'); Professional Footballers Australia ('PFA'); and the Women's Football Council. Key stakeholders from within the Australian football ecosystem were also consulted, including:

- (a) FFA's Starting XI.
- (b) The Association of Australian Football Clubs ('AAFC').
- (c) Football Coaches Australia ('FCA').
- (d) Representing referees and match officials, the FFA Referees Committee and Professional Football Referees Association.
- (e) Women Onside.
- (f) Women in Football.
- (g) The Golden Generation.
- (h) Futsal representatives from Member Federations.
- (i) Sport Australia.

In parallel, FFA conducted a series of online surveys on each Principle so that the Australian football community could provide direct input and share their views with FFA. The surveys, which were open between 6 July and 5 August 2020, yielded over 3,100 responses. Over the coming weeks, FFA will provide more detail about the responses to the surveys.

The feedback received by FFA through the consultation process, where possible, has now been reflected in the second and final iteration of the paper. There were, however, some general themes which were raised consistently throughout the consultation process that are worth considering in further detail.

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2 STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE XI PRINCIPLES AND THE NEED FOR A CLEAR DIRECTION IN AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

Overall, the XI Principles were received extremely positively with stakeholders and the football community expressing general support and excitement for the XI Principles. FFA received a broad range of feedback from the look, feel and tone of the discussion paper, to more complex discussions around the overall governance and administration of the game. A good majority of survey respondents indicated that they 'welcomed' the launch of the XI Principles and that they were 'excited' by the vision for what Australian football might look like in 15 years' time.

There was also strong sentiment that Australian football was in great need for a clear direction which unites and inspires the entire game. The XI Principles provides an excellent platform for such a direction to be developed in consultation with the games' stakeholders and the broader Australian football community. Central to this, will be the need for clarity in roles and responsibilities of all the game's stakeholders and a united approach to ensuring the game unlocks its true potential.

3 CLOSER AND MORE DIRECT LINKS TO COMMUNITY AND A MORE CONNECTED GAME

There was a common sentiment from the consultations that FFA had, in recent times, adopted an elitist approach to the way in which the game was administered and that this was also reflected in the tone and sentiment of the document. Those which provided feedback emphasised that, although important, FFA placed a significant amount of focus on National Teams and the professional leagues and historically, had not been able to strike the appropriate balance with the rest of the football ecosystem. There was also a strong desire for FFA to engage more closely and have increased presence at the community and grassroots level of football.

'Community' was highlighted as a central theme to the identity and narrative of Australian football. There was a strong desire that the multicultural heritage and diversity of the Australian football community be reflected throughout all of the Principles to ensure that they resonate with all areas of the football ecosystem including parents, volunteers and young people who play the game. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring that more is done to engage with Indigenous, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Many felt that Australian football now has an excellent opportunity to reset and reconnect the game via aligned competition structures. A stronger connection, recognition and celebration of the Australian football community was also highlighted as being vital to uniting the game.

4 OVERWHELMING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION IN AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

An overwhelming number of respondents to the surveys told us that they believed Australian football needs transformation. This sentiment was also echoed throughout the consultations by many stakeholders and while COVID-19 was highlighted as bringing to light some of the major concerns with the current structure of Australian football, there was widespread recognition that broader transformation is timely and needed.

The transition towards a 'One Football' framework was emphasised through the consultations as a priority for Australian football. This was supported by a strong desire for FFA to lead in this space and to deliver in a timely manner.

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Outlined below is a summary of how the Principles have been updated in line with the feedback received by FFA in the second and final iteration of the document:

4.1 **A national football identity**

Extra emphasis has been placed on the need for 'community' to be reflected in the Australian football identity, with stronger references to the inherent diversity of the Australian football community including volunteers, Indigenous heritage, CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities.

4.2 **Reset the Australian football narrative**

It has been recognised that 'community' should be at the centre of the Australian football narrative and all parts, not just elite football, should be shared and celebrated. Furthermore, the Australian narrative should resonate with all parts of the community, particularly our youth.

4.3 **Stimulate the growth of the Australian football economy**

Two (2) elements have been emphasised. Firstly, the need to raise understanding and awareness of the international transfer system so that Australian clubs and players are better informed when dealing with international clubs. Secondly, the need for Australian football to implement a fully-functioning, modern, domestic transfer system has been highlighted.

4.4 **Resetting and rebuilding Australian football products**

Greater emphasis has been placed on reconnecting the football pyramid via the creation of a national football calendar and the realignment of Australian football competitions. Additional impetus has also been provided for the continued development of a national second tier framework, as well as the development of improved digital products to service and engage the football community. Finally, it is also recognised that futsal, beach soccer and schools' programs remain largely untapped opportunities for Australian football.

4.5 **More football, more often: increasing match minutes for youth players**

The findings from a recently completed preliminary review of the women's player pathways have now been included along with complementary measures.

4.6 **Creating world class environments for coach and referee development**

Importantly, this area of the paper has been updated to reflect the recent appointment of Tony Gustavsson as the new Matildas Head Coach. It now also recognises the contribution of referees and match officials as vital contributors to the quality of the on-field football product and emphasises the need to build a culture of respect.

4.7 **A whole of football approach to protecting and enhancing the game through modern, efficient, and effective governance**

The need to strengthen football, particularly considering the COVID-19 pandemic has been reemphasised. There was strong support from stakeholders and the broader Australian football community, and this has also been highlighted.

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4.8 **A new model for FFA and the professional leagues**

There is greater acknowledgement that professional clubs have assumed more responsibility over operational matters of the professional leagues including, for example, the negotiation of the collective bargaining agreement between the clubs, as the employers of the players, and PFA. It is also highlighted that discussions between FFA and the professional clubs in relation to the unbundling of the professional leagues are ongoing.

4.9 **Reduce the cost of football and secure the future of the game**

It has been acknowledged that in the case of grassroots and community football, the cost to play football, comparatively, is quite competitive and in many cases, provides greater value than other sports. The impact of private academies is also contributing to a higher average cost of participation, but which clearly services a greater demand for football for the community than is typically able to be met by affiliated football clubs – this requires further consideration. The need to develop a more accurate narrative about this area, through the dissemination of accurate information, has also been highlighted.

4.10 **Australia becoming the centre of women's football in the Asia-Pacific Region**

Greater emphasis has been placed on creating and shaping an environment which promotes participation of women in football, and particularly at senior leadership and decision-making levels. It was felt that by creating positive environments for women and girls to participate in football, that this would naturally increase the talent pool of women involved in the game and we would soon see more women entering senior decision-making roles in football. The discussion also anchors women's football in the growth and development of Australian football.

4.11 **Transform our national teams into uniquely iconic brands**

Due recognition has been given to the place which the national teams already occupy within, not just the Australian football community but also Australia society more broadly. This Principle has therefore been amended to ensure that the Matildas and Socceroos are "elevated" even further.

5 THE TRANSFORMATION OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL HAS ALREADY BEGUN

Since the publication of the XI Principles, FFA have continued the process of transformation and have taken several positive steps directly in pursuit of the XI Principles.

Some highlights include:

- Reaching agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding with Football Coaches Australia (FCA);
- Advancing plans for a National 'Home of Football' in Sydney and supporting Football Victoria to secure funding towards the 'Home of the Matildas' project at Latrobe University in Victoria
- Securing hosting rights for two (2) AFC youth women's qualification tournaments in regional Australia (Cessnock and Shepparton);
- Advancing internal and external discussions regarding aligning the national football calendar and the evolution of the National Premier Leagues (NPL);

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- Appointing Trevor Morgan (National Technical Director), Ron Smith (Technical Advisor), and Rae Dower (Women's Technical Advisor) to key technical positions;
- Appointing Jane Fernandez as FFA's Head of FIFA Women's World Cup Office and Peter Filopoulos as FFA's Head of Marketing, Corporate Affairs and Communications;
- Advancing the unbundling of the professional leagues as APFCA¹ assume more control over professional league operational matters such as the negotiation of the Leagues CBA² and its commercial rights sales;
- Finalising a new National Teams CBA² which maintains gender equality principles;
- On 29 September 2020, FFA announced that it had appointed highly experienced coach, Tony Gustavsson, as the new Head Coach of the Westfield Matildas for a four-year term which will include four major tournaments - the Tokyo (2021) and Paris (2024) Olympic Games, as well as the Women's Asian Cup in 2022 and the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup™. A two-time FIFA Women's World Cup™ winner and Olympic Gold Medallist with the US women's national team, Gustavsson brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the role;
- Entering into new commercial agreements for the Westfield Matildas; and
- Making progress internally on the development of a White Paper into the domestic transfer system to implement the recommendation of the Starting XI made in June 2020.

6 THE SECOND ITERATION OF THE XI PRINCIPLES

This second and final iteration of the XI Principles builds on the 'living document' published in early July 2020, and represents the culmination of a thorough consultation process over four weeks, followed by a period of consolidating, testing and implementing various aspects of the XI Principles. The paper has been updated, where possible and appropriate, to reflect to feedback received and the numerous steps which have been taken in the interim to bring the XI Principles to life.

The XI Principles take a holistic view of Australian football and the challenges facing it. It represents the strategic agenda for Australian football and will replace the *Whole of Football Plan* published in May 2015. Importantly, it establishes an excellent platform for Australian football to develop an exciting and new strategic direction for Australian football.

It should also be noted that the language in those Principles marked with an asterisk below have been updated following the consultation process. These Principles still maintain the essence of their original intent however, some wording has been changed to reflect the feedback received by FFA.

The XI Principles are now as follows:

- I. Build a consistent and strong identity for Australian football which inspires all Australians.
- II. Develop a new narrative for football which signifies a fresh start for the game in Australia, successfully ties together all new initiatives and distinguishes it from other sporting codes in the country.

¹ Australian Professional Football Clubs Association

² Collective Bargaining Agreement

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- III. Evolve and grow an integrated and thriving football ecosystem driven by a modern domestic transfer system. *
- IV. Ensure the Australian Football pyramid is aligned and connected through optimised competition structures. *
- V. Create a world class environment for youth development / production by increasing match minutes for youth players and streamlining the player pathway.
- VI. Create a strong culture around coach and referee development by emphasising the importance of the role as a skilled position and a vital link in player development. *
- VII. Transition towards a modern, fit-for-purpose governance and administration framework for football in Australia in line with global standards and best-practice in Australia.
- VIII. Create an operating and governance model for the A-League, W-League and Y-League which is fit for the current circumstances.
- IX. Ensure that football becomes more open and accessible to the Australian community and that cost does not remain a barrier to participation.
- X. Accelerate and enhance the growth of the game by driving participation of women and girls and enhancing existing competition structures to promote player development. *
- XI. Elevate even further the Westfield Matildas and the Socceroos as the unifying symbols of the game and heroes who epitomise the Australian football identity to inspire every young Australian regardless of their ability or background. *

7 WHERE TO NEXT?

The XI Principles take a holistic view of Australian football and the challenges currently facing the game and deliberately only speak to the 'What' and the 'Why' of football in Australia. Its intention was to act as a focal point of discussion for the Australian football community by establishing a case for change and then a guiding principle, underpinned by various measures, to guide the future growth and development of Australian football.

The XI Principles has now replaced the Whole of Football Plan published in May 2015, and importantly, establishes an excellent platform for Australian football to develop an exciting and new strategic direction for Australian football as well as provide the impetus to crystallise ongoing matters and drive a fresh and exciting agenda.

There are some foundational matters in relation to building Australian football's identity and developing a complementary narrative (Principles 1 and 2) which must be addressed as a matter of priority. FFA will also however, commence some of the more strategic initiatives outlined in the XI Principles including the preliminary work required to kick start Australian football's transition towards a 'One Football' model.

FFA will now, in consultation and collaboration, with the game's stakeholders, begin the process of operationalising the XI Principles. Since its publication in October 2020, FFA has commenced the implementation of several key strategic initiatives across all XI Principles. FFA has moved into the 'Who', 'When', and the 'How', and will put significant work into bringing the XI Principles to life, in collaboration with the games' stakeholders, across the Australian football ecosystem.