



# North Coastal Female Representation Study 2026

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## Executive Summary

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Cricket across the North Coastal Zone is growing. Since 2019/20, the number of girls aged 5 to 12 playing entry-level cricket has increased by 498%. Girls aged 13 to 18 are up 167% over the same period. New families, new communities, and new generations of players are coming into the game.

But governance has not kept pace. Women currently hold 18% of club committee positions, 9% at association level, and no positions at cricket council level. The association figure has declined over the past two seasons. The people making decisions about competitions, pathways, and culture are overwhelmingly male. This gap poses a clear risk. Female participation is increasing, yet the structures shaping how cricket is run are not keeping pace with the community they serve.

The Siddle Family Foundation and Cricket NSW share aligned values around participation, equity, and sustainable growth, creating a strong foundation to investigate female engagement in cricket across the North Coast. Building on this partnership, Huddle Community Advisory was engaged to conduct an independent study of female representation, supported by Cricket NSW participation and governance data where applicable.

The North Coastal Female Representation Study focused on understanding the current state of female representation in decision-making positions across the North Coastal Cricket Zone (the zone), identifying the barriers preventing women from participating in decision-making roles, investigating whether there is a correlation between female representation in decision-making roles and growth in female participation. It also highlights successful case studies of gender-diverse committees and the positive impact of this diversity.

The research drew on six data sources: 31 stakeholder interviews, two regional workshops, a community engagement stall at the Hastings Women's Twilight Competition, a survey of 58 respondents across 22 postcodes, a cross-sport survey of 15 women at governance level in other sports, six years of participation and governance data provided by Cricket NSW, and a review of existing Australian and international research on women in sport governance.

Six findings emerged consistently across all data sources.

Female representation in governance is low and declining at the levels that matter most. During 2025/26, 85% female participants in the zone entered through programs delivered by Cricket NSW, not clubs, meaning the volunteer pipeline that typically flows from participation is not being built at club level.

Culture and meeting environment are active barriers, not background noise. Meetings without a tight structure, insider language, and venues and timing built around senior men's schedules make governance environments difficult to enter and harder to stay in.

Governance complexity concentrates workload and blocks new voices. Seven layers of governance between a new participant and Cricket NSW, combined with AGM-based structures that favour long-serving incumbents, disproportionately filter women out of decision-making roles.

Confidence and perceived knowledge gaps act as self-exclusionary barriers. Nearly half of female survey respondents reported low confidence to nominate for a committee role, not because they lack capability, but because they believe cricket knowledge is a prerequisite and because the environment does not signal that their skills are wanted.

Regional geography compounds every other barrier. Distance, inconsistent service delivery, limited female-only competitions, and inadequate facilities make participation and leadership harder to sustain across a 500-kilometre zone.

Where women are involved in leadership, decision-making better reflects participants needs, environments are more inclusive, and participation outcomes are stronger. The evidence is local and consistent. The Hastings Women's Twilight Competition, Casino Cricket Club, a committee example from the Mid North Coast, and the Kempsey women's carnival all demonstrate what becomes possible when women influence how cricket is delivered.

The survey data adds an important dimension to the findings. 62.1% of respondents said they would consider a decision-making role in the future, yet nearly half currently report low confidence in stepping forward. The pool of potential female leaders in cricket is substantially larger than the current representation suggests. The issue is not a lack of willing candidates. It is the absence of the right conditions to convert that interest into action.

The action plan that follows contains eleven recommendations across three groups. Group 1 identifies five actions that can be taken now, at low or no cost. Group 2 identifies four recommendations that can be implemented in the short term. Group 3 identifies two recommendations that require more sustained investment but are essential to embedding the changes achieved in the earlier phases.

None of these recommendations is beyond reach. The resources largely exist, along with local examples of what works. The women who would step forward, given the right conditions, already exist. Cricket NSW does not need to build something from scratch. It needs to build on what is already working, remove the barriers that hold people back, and create the conditions for the next generation of female leaders in cricket to emerge.

Female participation will continue to grow. The question is whether the governance structures surrounding it are ready to create sustainable change.



## Background & Purpose

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Commissioned in late 2025, the project is aligned with Cricket NSW's *Breaking New Ground* strategy and Cricket Australia's *Women and Girls Action Plan 2024 - 2034*. It focuses on locally grounded evidence rather than solutions designed for metropolitan contexts and scaled down for regional communities.

Cricket across the North Coastal Zone is growing. Since 2019/20, the number of girls aged 5 to 12 playing entry-level cricket has increased by 498%, and those aged 13 to 18 have increased by 167% over the same period. New families, new communities, and new generations of players are entering the game.

This growth has not happened by accident. It has been driven by targeted programs and the efforts of local people, many of them women, who have built opportunities from the ground up. The Hastings Women's Twilight Competition, Casino's carnival model, and the Kempsey women's carnival are examples of what is possible when women are given the space and support to lead.

But governance has not kept pace. Women currently hold 18% of club committee roles, 9% of association-level roles, and no positions at the Cricket Council level. Decision-makers on competitions, pathways, and culture are overwhelmingly male.

This matters for two reasons.

The first priority is equity. Women and girls now make up a significant and growing share of cricket participants in the North Coastal Zone. They deserve governance structures that reflect their presence and respond to their needs.

The second is sustainability. Research indicates that 30% female representation is the threshold at which women in decision-making roles begin to have meaningful influence (Australian Sports Commission, 2024; Women in Sport, 2017). Below that threshold, women are more likely to feel isolated, less likely to be heard, and more likely to leave. Cricket cannot afford to lose the volunteers, advocates, and leaders it needs to sustain the growth it has worked hard to achieve.

This report does not recommend mandatory diversity quotas on committees. Instead, it identifies a skills-based approach to recruitment and governance reform that creates more opportunities for females to be actively involved in the leadership and growth of cricket across the North Coastal Zone.

Participation is growing fast. Governance is not. This report does not set out to criticise what has been built. It makes the case for what comes next.

## Methodology

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This project used a mixed-methods approach to understand female representation in decision-making roles within cricket governance across the North Coastal Zone and to explore the relationship between governance representation and growth in female participation. Six data sources were used to build a consistent, locally grounded evidence base.

### Stakeholder interviews

Thirty-one interviews were conducted with club and association representatives, Cricket NSW staff, and volunteers. Participants were identified through Cricket NSW networks, referrals, and survey opt-ins. Interviews were semi-structured to allow consistent themes to emerge while capturing local experience across a range of roles and geographic areas.

### Community engagement

Three forms of community engagement were used to test and validate insights across the zone:



- A workshop in Goonellabah with participants from the Far North Coast
- A workshop in Coffs Harbour with participants from the Clarence Valley and North Coast areas
- An engagement stall at the Hastings Women's Twilight Competition at Lake Cathie

The workshops brought together players, parents, volunteers, and club representatives. Discussion focused on barriers to participation, governance roles, and practical solutions. Priority voting was used to identify the ideas participants considered most important. The engagement stall at Lake Cathie offered an opportunity to gather informal feedback directly from female participants and supporters at a community cricket event.

### Community Survey

A community survey was distributed across the North Coastal Zone from January to April 2026, generating 58 responses from players, parents, coaches, committee members, officials, and supporters. The survey was promoted via direct email to registered participants in the region, social media, and postcards with QR codes distributed at community cricket events.

Responses were received from 22 postcodes spanning the full length of the zone, from Gloucester in the south to Tweed Heads in the north, with representation across all three Cricket Council areas. The survey captured both quantitative ratings and qualitative responses on participation, governance confidence, and barriers to involvement.

## Cross-sport survey

A supplementary survey was conducted to determine whether the barriers identified in the cricket research were specific to cricket or reflected a broader pattern across community sport. Fifteen women with volunteer or governance experience across a range of community sports responded. All respondents were located within or adjacent to the North Coastal Zone. Results are presented as indicative and corroborating evidence rather than as standalone findings, and are discussed in the cross-sport perspective section of this report.

## Participation and governance data

Cricket NSW provided participation and committee composition data from 2019/20 to 2025/26. This data captures female registration numbers across entry-level, junior, and senior cricket, as well as the gender composition of committees across clubs, associations, councils, and the Zone. This data provides an objective baseline for assessing both the current state of female representation and trends over time.

## Research review

A review of existing Australian and international research on women in sport governance was conducted alongside the primary data collection. This review provided context for the local findings and helped identify what is already known about barriers, enablers, and effective practice. Key sources are summarised in the Literature Review section of this report.

## How the findings were developed

Findings were identified, with consistent themes emerging across multiple data sources. Survey data, interviews, and engagement sessions were cross-checked to ensure that patterns were not isolated to a single group or area.

## Limitations

Survey responses were self-selected and may have been skewed towards more engaged participants. Workshop participation was strongest on the Far North Coast, with smaller contributions from other areas. Interview participants were largely drawn from existing cricket networks.

These limitations are balanced by three factors. Responses were received from 22 postcodes across all three Cricket Council areas. Consistent themes emerged across all data sources. The participation and governance data provided by Cricket NSW covers the entire zone across multiple seasons, providing an objective baseline that does not rely on self-selection.



## Summary

The strength of this dataset lies in its consistency. The same issues were raised across interviews, survey responses, community engagement sessions, and the cross-sport survey, and were supported by participation and governance data. Where findings appear in this report, they reflect patterns observed across multiple sources, not the views of a single group.

## Literature Review

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Women's underrepresentation in sport governance is well documented across international and Australian contexts. Globally, women hold a minority of positions on sport organisation boards, and progress has been slow without deliberate intervention (Adriaanse, 2016). Locally, the Australian Sports Commission identifies gender-balanced leadership as a governance standard rather than an aspiration, explicitly linking leadership diversity to funding accountability and organisational performance (Australian Sports Commission, n.d.).

Cricket Australia's *Women and Girls Action Plan* (2023) acknowledges this at the national level, identifying female leadership representation as a system-wide lever for the sport's long-term sustainability. Cricket NSW's strategic plan identifies women and girls as a key growth segment, though research suggests governance metrics and leadership pathways for women remain underdeveloped at the state and community level (Cricket NSW, 2023).

Despite this policy commitment, research consistently shows that voluntary change is slow and passive approaches are ineffective. Waiting for women to self-nominate or relying on existing networks to diversify has not produced sustained results in Australian sport (Blacklock et al., 2025). Informal recruitment practices, lack of role clarity, and the dominance of long-serving members have been identified in multiple studies as the primary structural mechanisms that maintain male-dominated committees (Victorian Government, 2020; Raw et al., 2025). At the community sport level, women are concentrated in informal or support roles such as canteen, uniforms, and administration rather than in decision-making positions. Governance capacity at club level directly influences inclusion outcomes (Hanlon et al., 2019; Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2024). Multi-layered governance structures increase the burden on volunteers and concentrate the workload on a small group of people, making it harder for new volunteers to enter and contributing to broader volunteer fatigue (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2024).

Cultural barriers compound structural ones. Research from both Australian and New Zealand cricket contexts finds that women experience governance spaces as unwelcoming. This is not always through overt hostility, but through assumed knowledge, insider language, informal power dynamics, and meeting cultures that favour long-serving members (Palmer, 2022). A qualitative study of Australian community sport found that male-oriented club cultures and unequal resourcing persist across sports, and that organisational culture is the critical factor in whether inclusion initiatives succeed or fail (Timperley & Phillips, 2025).

Women who enter governance roles frequently report needing to prove their credibility in ways their male counterparts do not, and describe the experience as exhausting. This pattern is directly linked to attrition (Hoye et al., 2025). Research on critical mass in board governance suggests that meaningful influence requires representation beyond token levels, with boards exceeding 30% female representation shown to function differently and produce more genuinely inclusive decisions (Women in Sport, 2017).

The relationship between female governance representation and female participation outcomes is an emerging and important area of evidence. Organisations with formal gender equity strategies demonstrate stronger participation outcomes, and leadership diversity signals organisational commitment in ways that influence who feels welcome to participate (Eime et al., 2021). New Zealand Cricket's structured governance intervention found that increasing female representation on boards and committees produced flow-on effects for participation planning and investment priorities, with capability building identified as essential to sustaining gains over time (Snedden, 2022; New Zealand Cricket, n.d.). A foundational report by New Zealand Cricket found that governance decisions directly shape participation outcomes and that limited female voices in decision-making lead to traditional prioritisation frameworks that favour established male programs over emerging female programs (New Zealand Cricket, 2016).

Evidence on what works consistently points to structured rather than passive approaches. Female-only development pathways reduce barriers to entry into male-dominated environments (Cricket NSW, 2024; Snedden, 2022). Gender quotas have been shown to increase representation, though structural interventions must be accompanied by capability building and leadership endorsement to produce lasting outcomes (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; New Zealand Cricket, n.d.).

**Effective mechanisms for increasing female representation on Committees identified across multiple studies include:**

- Clear role descriptions,
- Proactive recruitment,
- Micro-volunteering entry points,
- Skills-based selection processes,
- Mentoring or shadowing programs

(Change Our Game, 2019; Raw et al., 2025)

Unconscious bias training and education on inclusive language are identified as complementary cultural interventions that support structural change alongside recruitment reform (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2023). Male allyship is also identified as a meaningful enabler, with visible leadership support from men in existing roles shown to influence cultural change at club level (Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2023).

## Relevance to the North Coastal Zone

Most existing research focuses on metropolitan or elite sport settings. Less is known about regional community cricket, where governance complexity, volunteer capacity, and geographic challenges intersect.

This project applies these established findings to a regional context and tests them against local data. The patterns identified in the North Coastal Zone are consistent with broader research, but are made more acute by geography and system complexity.



## A cross-sport perspective

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Cricket is not alone. A brief supplementary survey asked women with volunteer and governance experience in other sports across NSW to share their experiences.

The responses, covering 11 sports, were consistent and closely aligned with patterns observed in cricket committees across the North Coastal Zone, suggesting these barriers reflect broader trends in community sport. While the sample is self-selected and around a third of the cricket survey, it provides useful context for the North Coastal zone cricket research.

Respondents confirmed that women rarely seek governance roles. Most enter through informal pathways, with 94% entering via help with a child's team. Other pathways include stepping in when no one else would, or when someone already involved asked. Few described actively pursuing committee positions. This reinforces reliance on personal invitations rather than on open, accessible entry points.

Male-dominated culture and resistance to change were the most commonly reported barriers for women. Respondents reported their views being given less weight, assumptions that they held administrative rather than decision-making roles, and long-serving members maintaining the status quo in ways that excluded newer voices.

*"I'm amazed every time a man on the committee 'mansplains' how I should tackle my presidency role."*

This respondent went on to describe being advised by a male colleague on a recruitment issue, despite having 25 years' professional experience in that field. Another participant noted increased scrutiny as club president, compared with when she held a less visible role. As one participant summarised:

*“The old boys’ club and the way it’s always been are the biggest barriers... it scares off fresh members.”*

When asked to rank the ways to support women in getting involved in decision-making roles, the results indicate a strong correlation with the cricket specific data.

**Support mechanisms most strongly identified were:**

- Encouragement and active invitation from other leaders
- Mentoring and peer support from other women in governance roles
- Better understanding of the time commitment
- Clear role descriptions and defined responsibilities
- Splitting roles into smaller, more manageable tasks
- Skills-based recruitment rather than recruitment based on club history or seniority

When asked about their preferences for decision-making environments, cross-sport respondents rated the following factors as most important: meetings not running over two hours, agendas and papers distributed beforehand, structured discussion and decision processes, clarity over responsibilities, and trust in the chair to manage the meeting effectively.

## **What this tells us**

Across community sport, the same patterns of informal entry pathways, entrenched culture, uneven workloads, and reliance on invitations are present. The factors that support change are also consistent and practical. This reinforces the point that the challenges identified in this report sit within a broader community sport context and that proven approaches already exist.

## The North Coastal Zone: a regional picture

The North Coastal Zone spans approximately 500 kilometres of coastline and hinterland, from Tweed Heads in the north to Gloucester in the south. It is one of the largest geographic zones in the Cricket NSW network, encompassing three Cricket Councils, fifteen associations, and approximately 70 clubs that field around 500 teams.

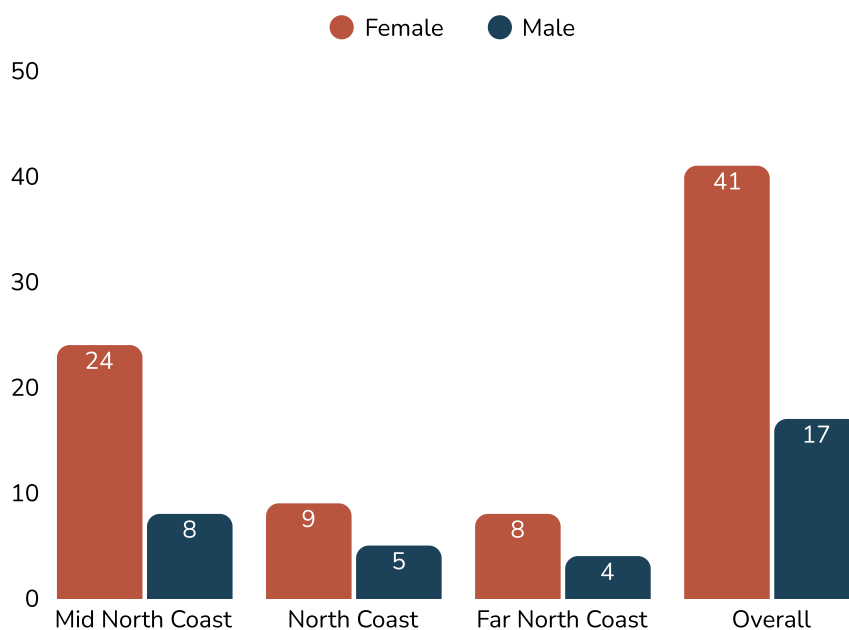
Treating the zone as a single entity risks obscuring significant differences in population density, infrastructure access, governance stability, and female representation.

Zone-wide solutions will not produce zone-wide results unless they are calibrated to these different starting points. The Far North Coast, in particular, requires targeted investment and a sustained presence rather than generalised resources delivered infrequently.

### Survey Overview

The community survey received 58 responses from across the North Coastal Zone between January and April 2026. Respondents included players, parents, coaches, committee members, officials, and supporters.

Figure 1: Breakdown of responses by region and gender



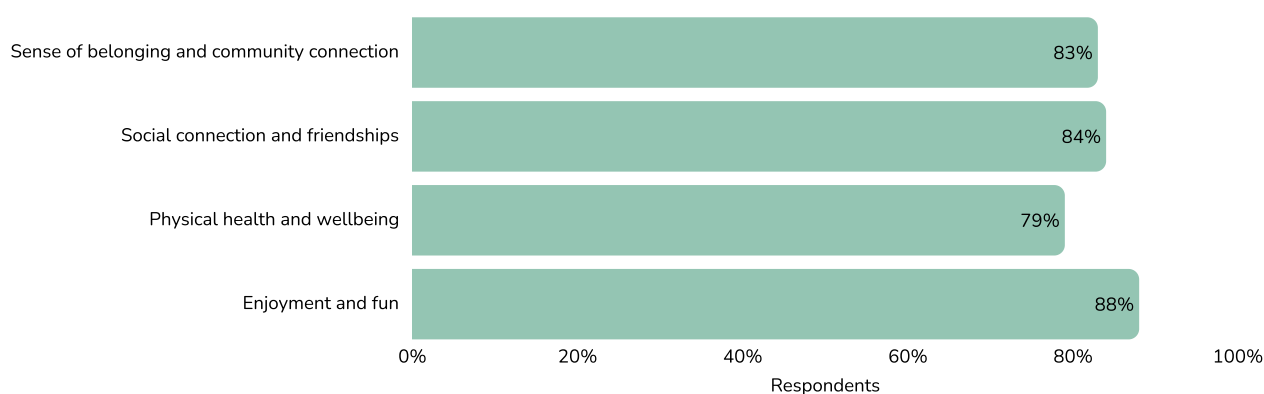
Survey participation was unevenly distributed across the zone, reflecting current participation levels, existing relationships, and the strength of pathways in each area.

|                                            | Mid North Coast                          | North Coast               | Far North Coast           |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Survey respondents</b>                  | 32                                       | 14                        | 12                        |
| <b>Gender split</b>                        | 75% female<br>25% male                   | 64% female<br>36% male    | 67% female<br>33% male    |
| <b>Primary motivation for involvement</b>  | Community connection and physical health | Community connection      | Sense of belonging        |
| <b>Low confidence to nominate</b>          | 50% of region respondents                | 43% of region respondents | 41% of region respondents |
| <b>Would consider a role in the future</b> | 87% yes or maybe                         | 64% yes or maybe          | 58% yes or maybe          |

There are more female respondents in the Mid North Coast, the most populous of the three regions. This, along with the highest future intent numbers, suggests that when women are more involved in cricket, they are also more interested in decision-making roles.

## Why people get involved

Figure 2: Benefits of being involved in community cricket

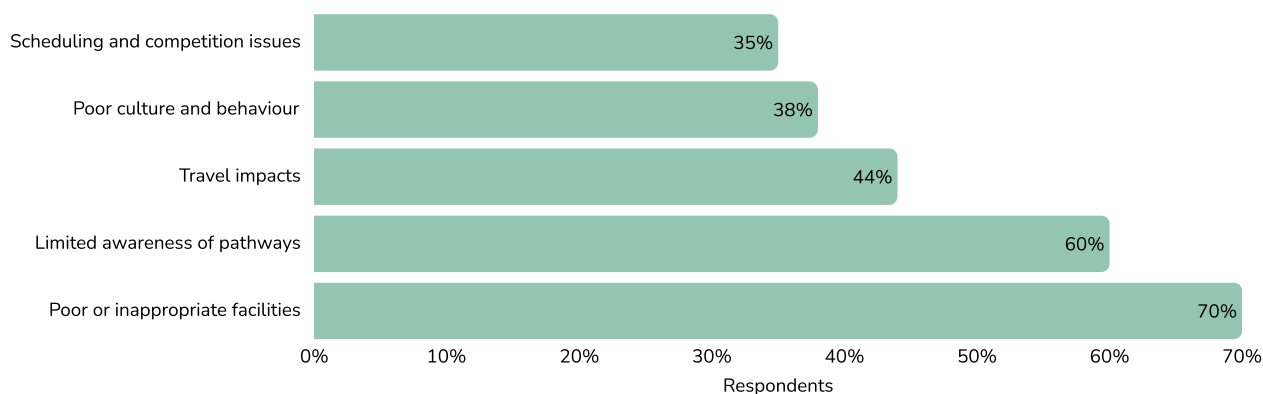


People across the zone are drawn to cricket for the same reasons: connection, enjoyment, and community. This finding was consistent across all three Cricket Council areas. The differences between areas are not in why people participate, but in how effectively each area supports them in continuing and progressing.

This matters for the action plan. The zone does not need fundamentally different strategies for each area. It needs targeted effort to strengthen the conditions for participation where they are weakest.

## Barriers to long-term commitment

Figure 3: Most commonly experienced barriers



Poor or inappropriate facilities are the most significant barrier identified, selected by 70% of respondents. It is a tangible, practical issue that affects the experience of female players at every level and requires advocacy to local government to address.

The second-ranked barrier, limited awareness of pathways, points to a communication and information gap rather than a lack of opportunity. Women and girls are not necessarily aware of what is available to them, particularly development and leadership pathways beyond their immediate club environment.

Both barriers are directly addressed in the recommendations.

## Barriers to joining decision-making roles

Survey respondents identified five consistent barriers to joining decision-making committees. These are specific to governance involvement, not to playing or supporting cricket.

- Lack of time or perceived time commitment
- Unclear roles and expectations
- Low confidence or not feeling qualified
- Not being asked or encouraged
- Existing committee culture, described as closed or intimidating

These five barriers point to three overlapping gaps: a knowledge gap, a confidence gap, and an invitation gap. People lack sufficient information about what the roles involve. They do not feel qualified, even with relevant skills. And they wait to be asked rather than stepping into environments that feel unwelcoming.

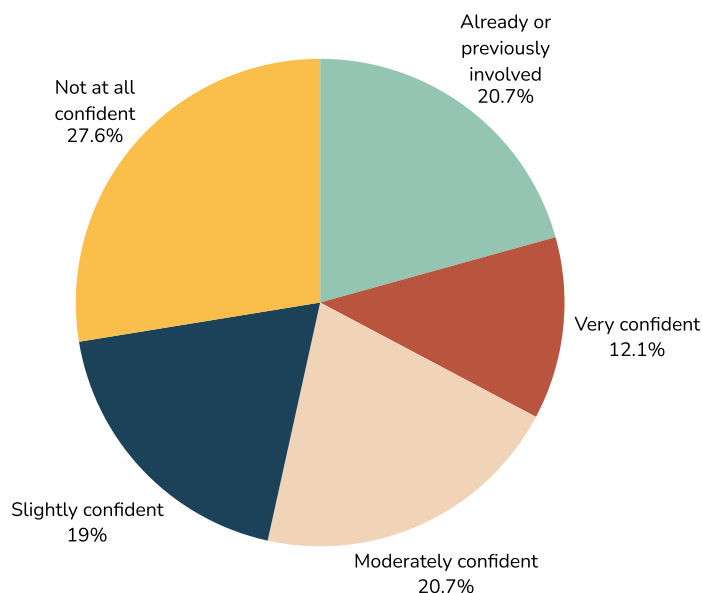
This is not a capability problem. It is a problem of clarity, visibility, and invitation.

One finding deserves particular attention. When asked about meeting spaces, 70.7% of respondents described them as very or moderately welcoming. This acceptance of the physical meeting place sits in tension with qualitative evidence from interviews and workshops, where meeting culture was consistently described as a significant barrier. The likely explanation is that many survey respondents have limited direct experience of governance meetings. Those who find those spaces unwelcoming are often those who have already left or never entered. This is addressed in detail in Finding 2.

## Confidence to nominate for a decision-making role

Nearly half of respondents (46.6%) reported low confidence in stepping into a governance role, while only 12.1% said they were very confident.

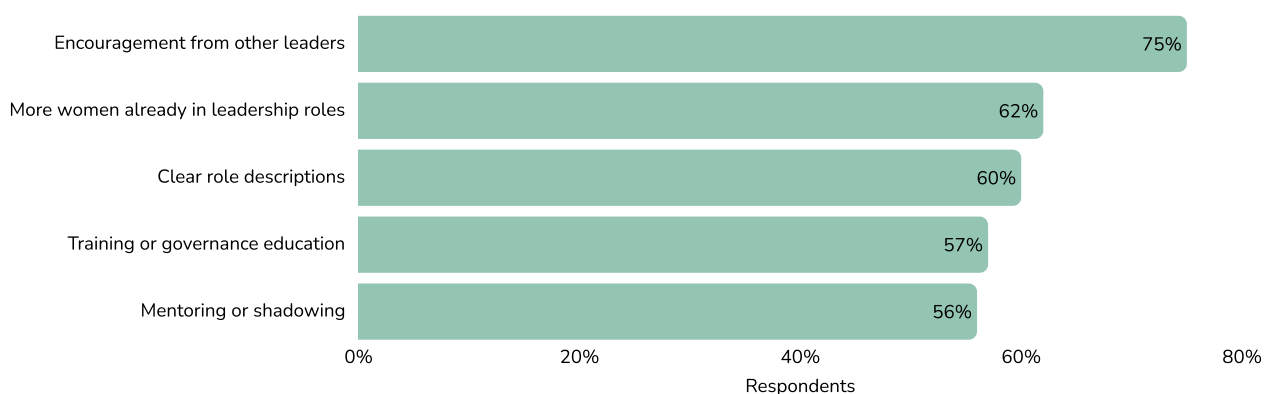
Figure 4: Confidence to nominate for a committee role



This is not a reflection of capability. Respondents possess directly relevant skills in areas such as finance, communications, event management, and governance. The barrier is not what women can do. It is whether they believe those skills are wanted and whether the environment is one in which they can succeed.

## What would make a difference?

Figure 5: Effective supports for increasing female committee involvement



The top five supports identified are all relational or structural. None of them requires prior cricket knowledge. This reinforces the finding that the barrier to women's participation in governance is not a lack of capability. It is the absence of clear signals, visible role models, and active invitation.

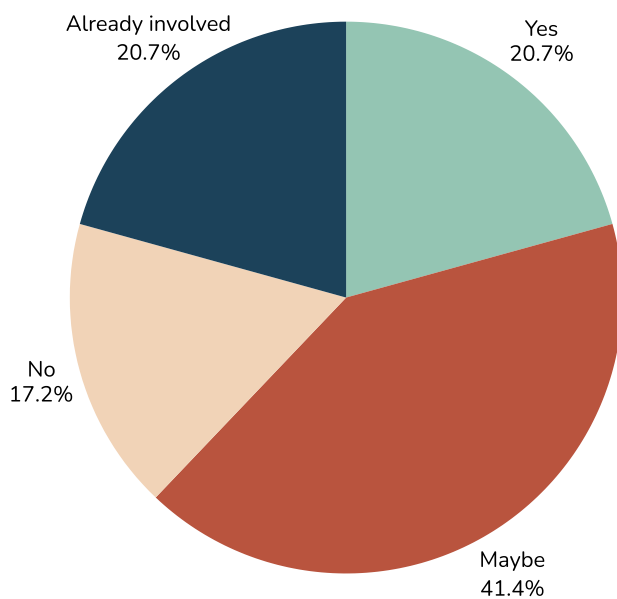
A better understanding of the time commitment was selected by approximately 46% of respondents. Addressing this requires not only clearer communication about what the roles involve, but also a genuine effort to make governance roles more accessible and less burdensome.

Effective mechanisms for increasing female representation on committees, identified across multiple studies, include clear role descriptions, proactive recruitment, micro-volunteering entry points, skills-based selection, and mentoring or shadowing programs (Change Our Game, 2019; Swinburne University, 2020).

## Interest in future involvement

Combined, 62.1% of respondents said they would consider a decision-making role in the future.

Figure 6: Would you consider a decision-making or committee role in the future?



This is one of the survey's most significant findings. The pool of potential female committee members is substantially larger than current representation suggests. The issue is not a lack of willing candidates. It is the absence of the right conditions to turn that interest into action.

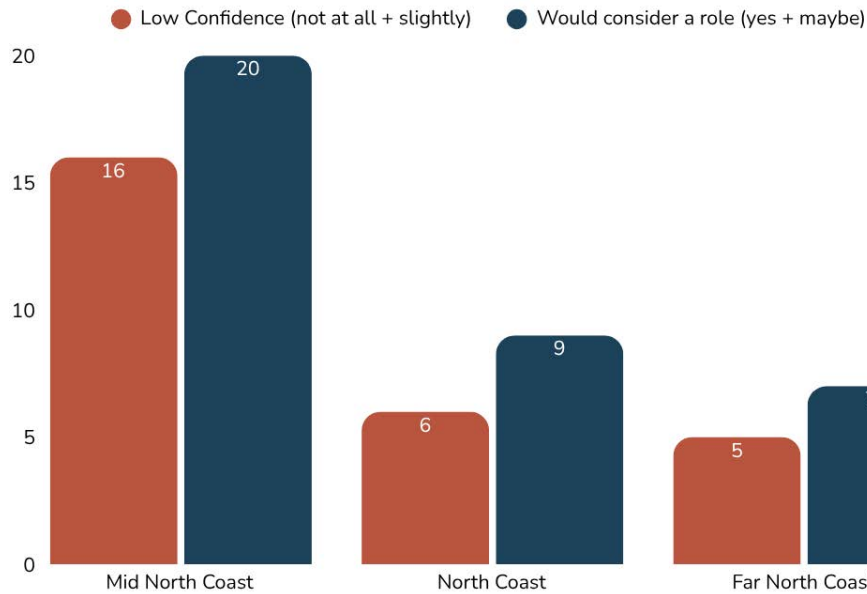
The 41.4% who said maybe represent a specific opportunity. These are people who are open to involvement but have not yet received sufficient reason, support, or encouragement to commit. With the right conditions in place, many of them could step forward.

## The confidence gap

Across all three Cricket Council areas, the number of people who would consider a decision-making role in the future exceeds the number currently reporting low confidence.

There are women who are interested but not yet ready to step forward. The gap between interest and confidence is not fixed. It can be closed with the right support, visibility, and invitation. The data does not suggest that women need to be convinced to participate in governance; it suggests they need better support to do so.

Figure 7: Interest in committee roles exceeds current confidence



## What the data tells us

1. The survey findings point to four consistent conclusions:
2. People value cricket for the same reasons across the three Cricket Councils of the North Coastal zone. Connection, enjoyment, and community form a strong foundation to build on.
3. Facilities and limited awareness of pathways are the most significant practical barriers to long-term female participation. Both are addressable.
4. Nearly half of respondents have low confidence in taking on a governance role, but nearly two-thirds would consider one in the future. The gap between confidence and interest is the opportunity this action plan is designed to close.
5. The supports that would make the most difference, including encouragement, visible role models, clear role descriptions, training, and mentoring, are practical, low-cost, and within reach. The barriers are real, but they are not insurmountable.

## Findings

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Findings are drawn from 58 survey responses, 31 stakeholder interviews, two regional workshops, engagement stall voting data, and participation data from across the North Coastal Zone. Consistent themes emerged across all inputs.

### Findings at a glance

1. Female representation in governance doesn't reflect the latest participation
2. Culture and meeting environments are active barriers
3. Governance complexity limits participation and concentrates control
4. Confidence and perceived knowledge gaps are blocking participation
5. Regional conditions amplify barriers to participation and leadership
6. Where women lead, participation and culture improve

### Finding 1: Female representation in governance doesn't reflect the latest participation

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In the North Coastal zone, women currently hold:

- 18% of club committee positions
- 9% of association positions, down from 10% the previous season
- 0% at Cricket Council level

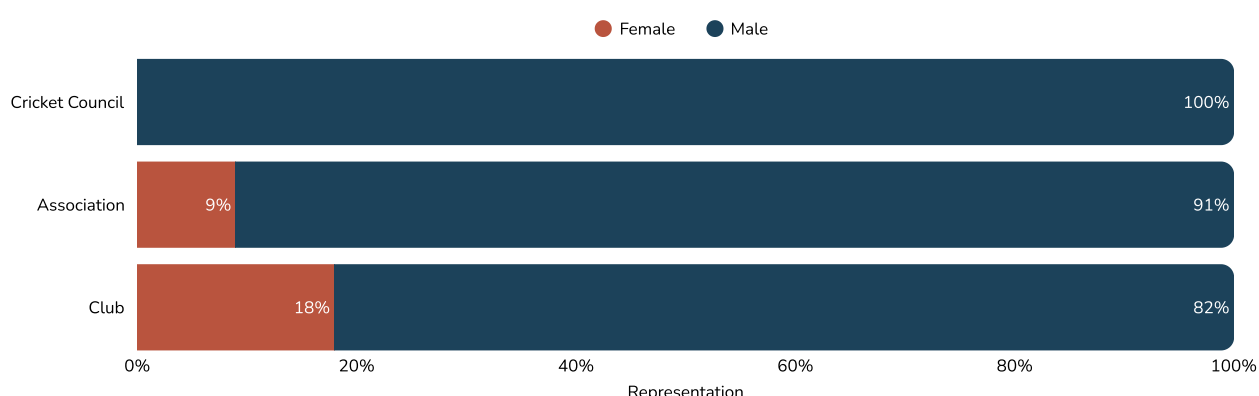
At the same time, female participation is growing rapidly:

- Participation for girls aged 5 to 12 is up 498% since 2019/20
- Girls aged 13 to 18 are up 167% over the same period

This is not a pipeline issue. Participation is increasing, but it is not yet translating into leadership. The largest increases in participation are in entry-level programs, where families are new to cricket and have not yet become familiar with club structures or the volunteer roles that sustain them.

85% of entry-level female participants in the North Coastal Zone come through programs delivered by Cricket NSW rather than by clubs. Clubs are not driving participation growth, and as a result, the volunteer pipeline that typically flows from participation is not being built at club level. Those new, enthusiastic players and their families represent the next generation of potential female committee members, but without a deliberate connection between participation and governance, that potential will not be realised.

Figure 8: Female committee representation across governance levels 2025/26



This points to a clear resourcing gap. The Cricket NSW Club Resourcing Strategy ranks clubs as Priority 1, 2 or 3 based on growth opportunities and committee capability. Priority 1 and 2 clubs, which receive the most resources, already have approximately 20% female representation. Priority 3 clubs drop to approximately 13%. Clubs with the least support are least likely to have women in decision-making roles.

## What participants said

*“The only woman representative on the rep committee... her skills are being underutilised. She is still largely a team manager for the zone women's program, not perceived as a leader in women's cricket and not given any licence to set an agenda.”*

(Interview, Port Macquarie)

*“It's rare that the opinions are accepted.”*

(Survey respondent, Taree/Wingham)

*“Too many levels of governance and volunteer fatigue is a huge factor.”*

(Survey respondent, Port Macquarie)

## What this means

The gap in female governance representation is most pronounced at the association and council levels, where established practices, relationships, and culture are hardest to shift. The pathway from the newest participants to the operational needs of representative cricket can be made more inclusive if change begins at the club level. If this gap is not addressed, the current growth in women's and girls' cricket will be difficult to sustain.

## Finding 2: Culture and meeting environments are active barriers

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Across all data sources, the culture of decision-making environments was identified as a direct barrier to women's participation in governance. This goes beyond general male dominance to specific behaviours and structures that make committees difficult to enter and harder to remain in.

### Common patterns identified

- Meetings run long, lack structure, and are dominated by a small number of long-serving voices
- Heavy use of cricket language and assumed knowledge excludes new participants
- Meeting times and venues do not suit people with work and family commitments
- Meeting times prioritise avoiding men's training sessions
- Women's perspectives, particularly on girls' cricket, are dismissed or not prioritised
- Resistance to change is often framed as protecting tradition

### What participants said

*"Our older generation are struggling big time with it. There's a lot of pushback."*

(Experienced committee volunteer from Mid North Coast)

*"In a male-dominated committee, it can be daunting to put your view across."*

(Survey respondent, Forster/Tuncurry)

*"There is a small but visible culture in some teams and clubs of toxic masculinity. It's all about the boys."*

(Survey respondent, Port Macquarie)

Workshop participants described governance environments as an 'old boys' club', and, unprompted, identified misogynistic reasons as barriers to volunteering. In one case, a female committee member stepped away because she was unable to influence decisions and leadership was unwilling to support change. Survey responses align with this pattern, with many women describing the meeting culture as unwelcoming.

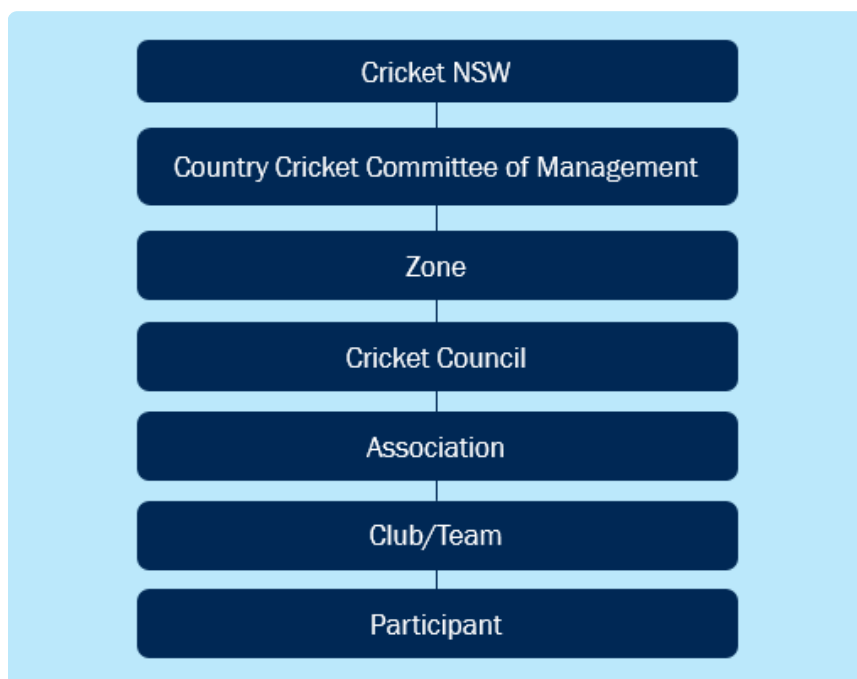
### What this means

Recruitment alone will not increase female representation if the environment into which women are recruited remains unchanged. Culture is not a secondary issue. It is a primary barrier to participation in governance.

## Finding 3: Governance complexity concentrates control workload and blocks new voices

Cricket governance in the North Coastal Zone operates across multiple overlapping layers, from Cricket NSW through to clubs and participants. Three Cricket Councils and fifteen associations, some of which run separate junior and senior structures, mean that a small number of volunteers hold multiple roles across multiple levels. This concentrates workload and decision-making responsibility in the hands of very few people.

Figure 9: North Coastal governance structure



Cricket NSW's own review of its delivery model has described the current country cricket governance structure as cumbersome, inefficient, and misaligned with current best practice, noting that it creates significant volunteer workload and duplication of effort. There is growing sentiment in the cricket community that the current system is outdated and inefficient.

The evidence from this project confirms the assessment and adds a dimension that the delivery model review does not explicitly address. Governance complexity is a direct barrier to women's participation in decision-making.

### Common patterns identified

- Decision-making knowledge is concentrated among long-serving members
- Entry points to governance are unclear or difficult to access
- Volunteers must navigate multiple committees and systems
- Targeted recruitment efforts by some clubs have failed to resolve the issue
- AGM-based structures favour existing insiders
- Volunteer fatigue limits the ability to attract and retain new people

This structure disproportionately affects women, who are less likely to have long-term exposure to cricket's systems and networks.

## What participants said

*"Too many levels of governance and volunteer fatigue is a huge factor."*

(Survey respondent, Port Macquarie)

*"Too many different committees in the North Coast."*

(Survey respondent, Tweed Coast)

*"We've sent emails to everyone, going back six years. We didn't get any response."*

(Interview, Mid North Coast)

## What this means

Where governance is simplified, participation improves. Entry-level programs such as Cricket Blast are often disconnected from club structures, so parents who engage early do not transition into ongoing volunteer or leadership roles. Simplifying structures, reducing layers, and creating clear entry points will make it easier for new volunteers, particularly women, to contribute. Without reform, the system will continue to favour long-standing participants and limit who can participate in decision-making.

### Mid North Coast: Simplifying how governance works

The committee has reduced volunteer burden by moving routine decisions to a WhatsApp group, reserving face-to-face meetings for contentious issues only. Subcommittees make decisions independently, and the main committee adopts their recommendations unless they are unconstitutional.

Competition rules and constitutional templates from Cricket NSW have been adopted rather than rewritten locally.

The result is a leaner governance model that takes less time, requires less assumed knowledge, and is easier for new voices to enter. Mid North Coast has the strongest female committee representation in the zone at 20% in season 2025/26.

*"We took away the dictatorship, and we actually put it back to the committees making decisions."*

(Committee Member on the Mid North Coast)

## Finding 4: Confidence and perceived knowledge gaps are blocking participation

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Women consistently report low confidence in stepping into governance roles, not because of a lack of capability, but because they believe cricket knowledge is required. Survey results show that most female respondents are either not at all confident or only slightly confident about nominating for committee roles. Many do not know how to nominate, and some are unaware of governance structures altogether.

### Common patterns identified

- Belief that cricket knowledge is required for governance roles
- Limited understanding of available roles and how to access them
- Lack of visible pathways into leadership
- Skills of women involved are overlooked or underutilised
- These perceptions are reinforced by who is currently in the room, how meetings are run, and how roles are described.

### What participants said

*"I don't know anything about cricket. I'm very new to the sport."*

(Survey respondent, Taree/Wingham)

*"Girls don't really get considered in the decision-making process."*

(Survey respondent, Pottsville/Bogangar)

*"You don't need to know the rules of cricket to be the treasurer or secretary."*

(Interview, Casino Cricket Club)

*"Being a girl wanting to get involved in cricket, especially if you don't know anything about the sport, you may have to ask others for advice. Most times, that other person would be male. This may cause some girls to shy away from asking questions to avoid being seen as not knowing enough, and so they avoid volunteering in the first place."*

(Survey respondent, Grafton)

Workshop participants reinforced that women often do not volunteer because they do not feel experienced or qualified enough, despite holding transferable skills in finance, communications, governance, and event delivery. In some cases, women already involved in governance are not contributing at a strategic level, with skills underutilised and roles limited to operational tasks.

## What would make a difference?

Survey respondents were clear on what would help:

- Clear role descriptions
- Mentoring or shadowing opportunities
- Encouragement from existing leaders
- Seeing more women in leadership roles

These are not complex interventions. They are signals that governance is accessible and that women's skills are valued.

## What this means

The barrier is not capability; it is confidence and clarity. The confidence barrier is compounded by the governance complexity identified in Finding 3. A system that is difficult for long-serving insiders to understand is even more impenetrable to newcomers. Reducing complexity and building confidence must be addressed together. Neither alone will be sufficient.

## Finding 5: Regional conditions amplify barriers to participation and leadership

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Across the North Coastal Zone, regional geography intensifies the barriers identified in the earlier findings. Distance, access, and service consistency make participation, progression, and governance challenges harder to overcome and more likely to lead to dropout. This issue affects both participation and women's core desire to play, lead, and engage with other women in cricket.

### Common impacts identified

- Limited access to local female-only competitions, particularly at junior and youth levels, increases the isolation felt by female players
- Long travel distances to representative programs create high cost and time barriers for families
- Inconsistent delivery of programs across the region, particularly outside major centres
- Lower female committee representation in more remote areas, with organisations affiliated with the Far North Coast Cricket Council at 11% in season 2025/26
- Greater reliance on Cricket NSW to deliver participation programs due to the demands of travel and cost at other levels

The North Coastal Zone spans over 500 km, making consistent service delivery difficult with standard models.

## What participants said

*“We are rural. We are extremely disadvantaged. This is why we are losing female players from the bush.”*

(Survey respondent, Taree/Wingham)

*“There is no local competition for girls and women.”*

(Survey respondent, Tweed)

*“To reach higher levels requires long travel. There's a big financial burden and the pathways are unclear.”*

(Workshop participant, Far North Coast)

These challenges compound at key transition points for female participants. Between the ages of 16 and 18, limited local female-only or junior options force them to progress into men's competitions, and travel demands make ongoing involvement difficult, leading to a significant increase in dropout rates.

## What this means

Regional geography does not create new barriers. It amplifies existing ones. Where governance is complex, culture is unwelcoming, or pathways are unclear, distance and limited access make those problems harder to overcome and increase the likelihood of disengagement. Sustaining growth in participation in the North Coastal zone will require locally responsive delivery models, not scaled-down versions of metropolitan approaches.

### Hastings: Built from nothing

Two women on the Mid North Coast identified a gap and filled it. With no formal governance structure they established the Hastings Women's Twilight Competition. Within two summers, it has grown from zero to seven teams, with players aged 13 to 63. More teams have already expressed interest for 2027. The competition has since led to the formation of two all-girls teams now playing in the local mixed Saturday junior competition.

The format was deliberately designed to remove barriers. Twilight scheduling suits women with work and family commitments. Games are played at the same family-friendly location every week, and food trucks add to the ease and carnival atmosphere. The focus on inclusion and fun rather than performance attracted women who had never played cricket before, as well as those returning to the game after years away.

*"I recently started a women's twilight cricket competition in my local area. It has been amazingly well received. We have seven teams competing. This has also encouraged the formation of two all-girls teams that now play in our local mixed Saturday junior league."*

(Interview, Mid North Coast)

## Finding 6: Where women lead, participation and culture improve

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There is clear local evidence that outcomes improve when women hold decision-making roles or take the lead in their communities. Multiple examples across the region show increased participation, more inclusive environments, and better alignment between programs and community needs.

### Common outcomes identified

- Increased female participation and retention
- More inclusive and welcoming club environments
- Greater focus on girls' programs and pathways
- Stronger community engagement and communication

Clubs with higher female representation also report more balanced decision-making and a broader focus beyond traditional structures.

### What participants said

*"I think it helps that we have a female component to our committee, and we have players that are comfortable saying, what about us?"*

(Interview, Casino Cricket Club)

*"What motivates me is the other women in the club making it more comfortable to play and train."*

(Workshop participant, Far North Coast)

*"Yes, in clubs and associations that are progressive, we see the positive outcomes from this."*

(Survey respondent, Wauchope)

This pattern is consistent across interviews, survey responses, and community engagement. Where women are part of leadership, decisions are more likely to reflect the needs of women and girls, and participation follows.

While a direct causal relationship cannot be proven from this data alone, the direction of impact is clear and consistent. The current growth in entry-level participation in the region is largely driven by Cricket NSW programs. Sustaining and extending that growth at club level will require supporting female initiatives and reimagined governance structures that reflect the communities they serve.

## What this means

Female leadership is not a symbolic goal. It is a practical driver of participation, culture, and sustainability. Evidence from the North Coastal Zone is consistent: where women lead, outcomes improve.

## Case Study: Casino Cricket Club

### Building participation through local leadership

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Casino Cricket Club on the Far North Coast shows what is possible when women hold genuine decision-making power within a regional cricket club. With four women on its committee, Casino has built a culture where diverse perspectives actively shape decisions, and the needs of women, girls, and families are treated as central rather than an afterthought.

Governance that reflects the community

Casino's committee did not set out to be different. It evolved that way as women with relevant skills and genuine commitment stepped forward and were welcomed. Female committee members have driven advocacy for participation initiatives, pushed for inclusive facilities and practices, and consistently raised the needs of girls and women in decision-making conversations.

*"I think it helps that we have a female component to our committee, and we have players that are comfortable saying, what about us?"*

Kate Rowlands, Casino Cricket Club

The committee has also reduced pressure on volunteers by leveraging Cricket NSW's support for program delivery and administration, freeing members to focus on participation and community outcomes rather than administrative burdens.

Participation pathways that work for regional families

On the field, Casino has introduced flexible, entry-level formats designed around the realities of regional life. A six-week twilight women's competition running before Christmas provides a low-commitment, social entry point for women who would not otherwise play. A locally driven women's carnival has brought girls and adult women together in a format that prioritises connection and enjoyment over performance.

The club also fields an Under 14 girls team in the local competition, providing a clear pathway for younger players. Several girls have since transitioned into senior grades, demonstrating that the pathway is working.

#### Community engagement beyond the boundary

Casino's ambition extends beyond cricket. A recent family-focused Christmas event combined cricket with water slides, obstacle courses, and informal games, creating a welcoming environment for players, siblings, and parents. Designed using participation data and delivered at a family-friendly time, the event reflects a deliberate shift towards connection and retention rather than competition alone.

This broader community focus has contributed to strong growth in junior and female registrations. It has also positioned Casino as a club that families want to be part of, not just a place to play cricket.

#### Challenges and what comes next

Casino is not without challenges. Sustaining female participation through the teenage years remains difficult, as it does across the zone. Female representation above club level, at association and Cricket Council levels, remains limited. The club's success has not yet translated into broader governance change in the Far North Coast.

But Casino demonstrates that the barriers identified in this report are not insurmountable. When governance is accessible, communication is clear, participation models are flexible, and women are genuinely welcomed into decision-making roles, regional clubs can create meaningful and lasting pathways for women and girls in cricket.



## Action Plan Recommendations

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The findings of this report point to a clear conclusion. Female participation in cricket across the North Coastal Zone is growing, but the governance structures that should sustain and extend that growth are not keeping pace. The recommendations that follow directly address that gap. They are practical, staged, and grounded in evidence of what works.

This action plan is not a checklist of new initiatives. It incorporates actions and programs already underway, alongside new recommendations that build on existing foundations. The sequence is deliberate, with early actions creating the conditions for later ones. Governance culture does not change overnight, but it does change when the right levers are pulled in the right order.

Incentives for clubs, associations, and Cricket Councils that demonstrate progress should be developed once baseline data on female representation and governance capability have been established. This will ensure incentives are meaningful, measurable, and fairly applied.

Cricket NSW should play a leadership, support, and coordination role across all recommendations.

Clubs, associations, Cricket Councils, and zones are essential partners in this work. The 'How the cricket community can make a difference' section of each recommendation sets out what that partnership looks like in practice.

### Actions at a glance

#### Group 1: Act now

- 1.1 Support female-only alternate format competitions
- 1.2 Audit facilities and introduce interim solutions
- 1.3 Maximise existing CNSW resources
- 1.4 Make governance Easier to enter
- 1.5 Fix communication clarity and impact

#### Group 2:

- 2.1 Establish Women of the North Sub Committee
- 2.2 Strengthen governance capability
- 2.3 Strengthen schools' delivery and participation link
- 2.4 Expand the development academy model

#### Group 3:

- 3.1 Annual WOTN Cricket Forum
- 3.2 Local government advocacy campaign

## Group 1: Act now

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These recommendations address gaps where inaction risks losing current momentum, alienating existing participants, or missing a narrow window of opportunity. Most can be implemented within the current season with existing or modest additional resources.

### 1.1 Support and resource female-only alternate format competitions

Female-only alternate-format competitions are the most consistently requested initiative across all data sources.

Competition design is critical. The framework should prioritise inclusion, fun, and community over representative pathways. Women entering cricket for the first time are focused on belonging, not performance. Flexible formats, such as T20 and twilight competitions, suit regional families. Early planning, adequate lead times, and clear communication are essential to reducing barriers to participation.

#### Role of Cricket NSW

|                   |                                                                     |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Lead</b>       | Provide seed funding, coordination advice, and calendar alignment   |
| <b>Support</b>    | Assist clubs with PlayHQ setup, promotion, and sponsorship guidance |
| <b>Coordinate</b> | Liaise with local government on ground access and scheduling        |

#### How the cricket community can make a difference

- Identify a local champion to lead competition planning and logistics
- Promote events through existing club communication channels and develop ways to reach families already exposed to Cricket Blast and school programs
- Collect contact details of interested players and supporters at events to build a local database for future competitions

#### Application by zone

- Mid North Coast: showcase and build on existing success
- North Coast: spark participation where female-only competitions are absent
- Far North Coast: reduce travel burden through locally delivered events

## Outcomes

Increased female participation across all age groups. Growth in cricket literacy and confidence among new players. Entry points for women into volunteer and leadership roles supporting these competitions.

### 1.2 Audit facilities and introduce interim solutions

Poor or inappropriate facilities were the most commonly identified barrier to long-term female participation, cited by 70% of survey respondents. Conduct an audit of the change rooms and toilet facilities across the grounds in each Cricket Council area, and develop a published map for each region. The map will serve as a planning resource for scheduling female fixtures, provide transparent information to players and families, and support advocacy for permanent upgrades.

The audit should include operational details on who holds keys and is responsible for opening facilities. The presence of facilities does not always translate into access for women.

As an interim measure, seek grant or sponsor funding to create a Cricket NSW-branded pop-up changing solution. The rollout creates a communications opportunity that makes the facilities gap visible and supports the broader advocacy program. Use audit findings to prioritise strategic advocacy in areas requiring permanent upgrades.

## Role of Cricket NSW

|                   |                                                                 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Lead</b>       | Design and deliver facility audit and mapping                   |
| <b>Support</b>    | Provide tools and guidance for clubs to collect and supply data |
| <b>Coordinate</b> | Align findings with local government and funding bodies         |

## How the cricket community can make a difference

- Complete the facilities audit accurately and promptly, including operational details for key holders and access arrangements
- Ensure female fixtures are scheduled at grounds with appropriate facilities wherever possible, while permanent upgrades are pursued

## Outcomes

A publicly available facilities map for each Cricket Council area. An evidence base to support local government advocacy and grant applications. An interim solution that addresses the most acute facilities gaps while permanent upgrades are pursued.

## 1.3 Maximise existing CNSW resources

Cricket NSW has developed resources to support volunteer recruitment, training, and governance. Evidence from all data sources indicates that these resources are difficult to find and not widely used. They are treated as set-and-forget, created and uploaded to the website but not actively distributed to those who need them. No consistent mechanism exists to ensure that clubs and associations across the zone have access to, and act on, what is available.

This recommendation involves three actions. First, examine website visitation and resource download data to understand what is being accessed and what is being missed. Second, develop a printed resource guide to be distributed to all decision-makers across the zone. Third, establish a regular communications cadence to promote resources to clubs and associations throughout the season.

### Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                                 |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Audit, update, and systematically distribute existing resources |
| Support    | Provide clubs and associations with practical tools and guides  |
| Coordinate | Align communications across programs and regions                |

### How the cricket community can make a difference

- Nominate a committee member to be responsible for finding, reading, and sharing Cricket NSW resources with the broader club, association, or zone
- Incorporate relevant resources into the club's induction processes for new volunteers and committee members
- Provide feedback to Cricket NSW on which resources are useful and where gaps exist

### Outcomes

Resources and data already exist. Making them easy to find, use and regularly distribute costs little and could immediately improve governance capability across the zone.

## 1.4 Make governance easier to enter

The confidence and knowledge gap identified in Finding 4 is compounded by the current structure and communication of governance roles. The barrier is not the complexity of the roles themselves. It is the lack of clear information, accessible entry points, and inclusive meeting practices.

Simple, practical changes can significantly reduce these barriers:

- Introduce clear meeting standards covering agenda, time limits, and inclusive participation

- Replace informal language and assumed knowledge with plain English
- Develop and publish clear role descriptions outlining responsibilities and expected time commitment
- Expand the use of digital tools to reduce meeting load and improve accessibility

## Role of Cricket NSW

|                   |                                                           |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Lead</b>       | Develop templates and guidance for governance practices   |
| <b>Support</b>    | Assist associations and clubs to implement changes        |
| <b>Coordinate</b> | Promote and share successful local models across the zone |

## How the cricket community can make a difference

- Adopt meeting standards, including a written agenda, a time limit, and inclusive participation practices
- Publish clear role descriptions for all committee positions and ensure they are accessible to anyone who might be interested
- Review meeting times and venues to ensure they are accessible to people with work, family, and cricket commitments

## Outcomes

Clear roles, better meetings, and simpler ways of working are low-effort changes with high returns. Clubs and associations that adopt these practices will find it easier to attract and retain new volunteers, including women.

### 1.5 Fix communication clarity and impact

Cricket NSW programs currently attract 85% of new entry-level female participants in the zone (2025/26). Without a structured handover from these programs to clubs, families and players entering cricket through Cricket Blast and schools are not connecting with club environments. The volunteer pipeline is not being built.

Current communication is fragmented and reactive. People entering the sport must source information across multiple platforms, with inconsistent timing and unclear ownership.

This recommendation focuses on six changes:

- Develop clear, localised participation and volunteer pathways
- Improve the timing and consistency of key information, including season calendars, trials, and competitions

- Shift from passive to proactive communication with participants and families
- Establish a structured handover from Cricket NSW programs to clubs
- Review the use of social media accounts to streamline the number of channels and improve strategic communications
- Ensure equitable representation of participants in all communications

A key component is mapping the participant journey from first contact through Cricket Blast or schools to club involvement and potential leadership roles, identifying where participants are currently being lost.

## Role of Cricket NSW

|                   |                                                          |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Lead</b>       | Redesign communication approach and participant pathways |
| <b>Support</b>    | Provide clubs with templates and structured messaging    |
| <b>Coordinate</b> | Align program, school, and club communications           |

## How the cricket community can make a difference

- Establish a single, consistent communication channel for club news, pathways, and volunteer opportunities
- Make season calendars, trial dates, and competition information available to families at the start of each season, rather than on a reactive basis
- Actively follow up with families transitioning from Cricket Blast and school programs to club cricket

## Outcomes

Improved retention among female participants and a stronger transition into club environments. Clearer pathways will also support volunteer recruitment and reduce confusion for families entering the sport.

## Group 2: Short term and high impact

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These recommendations can be implemented within one to two seasons and are likely to produce visible results relatively quickly. Some require modest investment or coordination but do not depend on structural reform.

### 2.1 Establish Women of the North Sub Committee

The invitation gap identified across all data sources shows that women are waiting to be asked rather than self-nominating in environments that feel unwelcoming or unclear. This will not close on its own. A structured, supported environment is needed to actively recruit, develop, and connect women across the zone.

The Women of the North Sub Committee (WOTN) will bring together leaders and innovators in women's cricket from playing, volunteering, coaching, and community backgrounds. Membership should not be limited to those already embedded in formal governance structures.

WOTN will be endorsed and administered by Cricket NSW, chaired by a volunteer from within the cricket community, and will report directly to the Cricket Councils of each region. It could:

- Meet quarterly online for networking and progress check-ins
- Maintain a shared communications resource bank for clubs and associations across the zone
- Foster digital collaboration among women supporting each other
- Drive the annual WOTN Cricket Forum
- Lead targeted recruitment for female umpiring and coaching opportunities

### Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                                                 |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Establish and support the WOTN Sub Committee structure                          |
| Support    | Provide administrative and communication support                                |
| Coordinate | Connect WOTN Sub Committee outcomes to zone and Cricket Council decision-making |

### How the cricket community can make a difference

- Identify and nominate women from within their networks to participate in WOTN
- Create space in existing governance meetings for Sub Committee updates and outcomes to be discussed and acted on
- Champion the Sub Committee within their clubs and associations, treating it as a genuine governance body rather than a peripheral initiative

## Outcomes

WOTN is a pipeline, not just a network. It creates connections, builds confidence, and provides a clear pathway into leadership. It directly addresses the invitation gap identified in the research by establishing a structured environment in which women are actively recruited, supported, and developed. It also demonstrates that governance in cricket can look and feel different from the structures currently in place.

## 2.2 Strengthen Governance Capability

Tap-on-the-shoulder recruitment has not increased female representation. For example, six years of outreach for a single secretary role on a Mid North Coast committee produced no responses. A different approach is needed.

This recommendation supports committees at all levels in adopting a structured, skills-based recruitment model. A skills matrix clarifies that cricket knowledge is not a prerequisite for governance roles and broadens the recruitment pool. The Metro Cricket Council skills matrix, which helped achieve 50% female representation, provides a ready-made model for adaptation at the community level.

An approach that prioritises professionalism includes:

- Development and implementation of a Skills Matrix
- Board training package developed and delivered across the zone
- Club Health Check expanded to cover inclusion and culture
- Incentives for clubs, associations, Cricket Councils, and zones demonstrating positive change

## Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                      |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Develop training, tools, and skills matrix framework |
| Support    | Assist clubs and associations with implementation    |
| Coordinate | Align with WOTN and regional priorities              |

## How the cricket community can make a difference

- Adopt a skills-based approach to committee recruitment, actively seeking candidates for what they can contribute rather than for how long they have been associated with the club
- Participate honestly in the Club Health Check and use the findings to identify specific areas for improvement
- Actively recruit at least one new committee member each season from outside the existing committee member networks

## Outcomes

Research confirms that 30% female representation is the tipping point for meaningful influence in governance. A skills-based approach is the most effective way to reach that threshold without the resistance that formal quotas generate.

### 2.3 Strengthen schools' delivery and participation link

Schools are a critical entry point for girls into cricket, yet the pathway from school participation to club cricket is inconsistent and underdeveloped. Where strong connections exist between schools and clubs, participation grows. Where they do not, the opportunity is lost.

This recommendation strengthens and standardises the school-to-club pipeline:

- Develop a consistent, high-quality school program offer across the zone
- Strengthen alignment between school programs and local clubs
- Create structured transition points from school participation to club competitions
- Provide targeted support to schools in lower-participation regions
- Position school programs as both participation and volunteer recruitment opportunities, engaging parents and teachers
- Consider retired teachers as a source of casual staff to deliver Cricket NSW school programs

## Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                   |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Design consistent school program delivery model   |
| Support    | Assist clubs to connect with local schools        |
| Coordinate | Align school programs with participation pathways |

## How the cricket community can make a difference

- Identify local schools with cricket programs and establish a direct relationship with the teacher or coordinator responsible
- Attend school events where possible to make the link between school cricket and club cricket visible to students and families
- Create a clear, simple pathway for students transitioning from school programs to club competitions, and proactively communicate it to schools

## Outcomes

Improved conversion of school participants into club players and volunteers. Reduced dropout at key transition points and increased engagement in regions with lower participation.

## 2.4 Expand the Development Academy model

The development academy model is valued by female players but is unevenly accessible across the zone. Players based on the Far North Coast face the greatest barriers due to travel distance and inconsistent delivery. The model also currently functions primarily as a performance pathway, missing an opportunity to develop skills, build broader engagement and leadership capability.

This recommendation expands and repositions the model:

- Introduce expressions of interest for coaches to deliver female-specific skills clinics, particularly in the Far North Coast and North Coast
- Strengthen the link between academy programs and school teams to create a clearer participation pathway
- Integrate micro-volunteering opportunities within academy delivery, such as assistant coaching and team support roles
- Ensure consistent delivery standards across all regions

### Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                                |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Co-design program footprint, coach recruitment, and objectives |
| Support    | Provide resources for zone delivery                            |
| Coordinate | Align academy with school and participation pathways           |

### How the cricket community can make a difference

- Encourage eligible female players to attend academy programs and provide families with information about what is involved
- Create micro-volunteering opportunities within club training environments that mirror the academy model, building a local pipeline of assistant coaches and team supporters
- Provide Cricket NSW with feedback on barriers to academy access in their area, particularly travel and timing

### Outcomes

Improved access to development opportunities for female players across the zone. Stronger links between participation, skill development, and leadership pathways. Additional opportunities for girls to play cricket exclusively with other girls.

## Group 3: Medium term sustained change

---

These recommendations require sustained investment and coordination but are essential to embedding the changes achieved in Groups 1 and 2. They build on the structures and relationships developed in the earlier phases.

### 3.1 Annual WOTN Cricket Forum

The annual Women of the North Cricket Forum will serve as a visible, recurring anchor for female participation, leadership, and connection across the zone. Designed and delivered by WOTN, it will bring together players, volunteers, coaches, and administrators each year.

The Forum will:

- Provide practical development opportunities in coaching, officiating, and governance
- Showcase local success stories and role models
- Include clinics and keynote sessions featuring NSW and Australian players
- Strengthen connections across regions and reduce the isolation felt by women in areas with limited local female cricket activity

The Sub Committee will decide whether the Forum rotates across the zone or is held consistently at a central location accessible to all three Cricket Council areas.

### Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                                       |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Co-design funding model including sponsorship and logistics           |
| Support    | Assist the Women of the North Sub Committee in planning and promotion |
| Coordinate | Connect stakeholders and contributors across the zone                 |

### How the cricket community can make a difference

- Actively promote the Forum to players, volunteers, and families across their networks each year
- Support members to attend by treating Forum participation as a legitimate and valued part of involvement in cricket
- Send at least one representative to the Forum each year and ensure learnings are brought back and shared with the broader club or association

## Outcomes

Greater visibility of female leadership and participation pathways. Stronger networks, improved confidence, and sustained engagement of women across all levels of cricket. A media and promotional opportunity for women's cricket in the North Coastal Zone.

### 3.2 Local government advocacy campaign

Individual clubs currently advocate for facility improvements independently, yielding inconsistent outcomes and limited influence. The facility audit under recommendation 1.2 provides the evidence base for a coordinated, zone-wide approach that will be significantly more effective.

This recommendation establishes a structured advocacy program:

- Use facility audit data from recommendation 1.2 to identify priority areas
- Develop a clear, evidence-based case for investment in female-friendly facilities
- Establish CNSW as the key point of contact between the sport and local government
- Engage local government and grant funding providers through coordinated, professional advocacy
- Align messaging across clubs, associations, and Cricket NSW
- Position cricket as a key contributor to community health, participation, and inclusion
- Prioritise the North Coast and Far North Coast, where facilities most significantly limit participation

## Role of Cricket NSW

|            |                                                        |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Lead       | Develop and deliver advocacy strategy                  |
| Support    | Provide clubs with data and messaging                  |
| Coordinate | Align engagement with local government across the zone |

## How the cricket community can make a difference

- Document facility-specific issues with photographs and participant feedback to support the zone-wide evidence base
- Align local advocacy efforts with the coordinated messaging developed by Cricket NSW to maximise impact

## Outcomes

Improved access to appropriate facilities for women and girls. Stronger relationships with local government and greater success in securing funding and infrastructure support.

## Conclusion

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Cricket in the North Coastal Zone is at a turning point. Female participation has grown at a rate that would have been hard to imagine six years ago. New players, families, and communities are entering the game. The foundations for a genuinely inclusive sport are being laid, often by women who have built opportunities from the ground up with little formal support.

But participation growth alone does not guarantee a sustainable future for cricket in the region. The governance structures that shape competitions, pathways, and culture have not kept pace. Women hold 18% of club committee positions, 9% at association level, and no positions at Cricket Council level. The people making decisions about the future of cricket in the North Coastal Zone do not yet reflect the community that cricket is working hard to attract.

This is not a criticism of what has been built. The volunteers who have sustained cricket in regional communities across generations deserve genuine recognition. But the evidence from this project is clear. The current governance model was not designed with new voices in mind, and it is filtering out the very people cricket needs most.

The findings of this report are consistent across every data source. The barriers preventing women from participating in decision-making roles are structural, cultural, and practical. They are also well understood, because they are not unique to cricket. Women across netball, basketball, rugby league, and other community sports describe the same patterns. Across those sports, the same solutions are beginning to work.

None of the recommendations in this action plan is out of reach. The resources largely exist. Local examples of what works already exist. The women who would step forward if given the right conditions already exist. What is needed is a deliberate, staged commitment to creating those conditions and sustaining them over time.

The question is not whether female participation in cricket will continue to grow. The question is whether the governance structures around it are ready.

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## About Huddle Community Advisory

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Huddle Community Advisory is a specialist advisory partnership that supports community organisations in building strong, sustainable foundations.

With deep, lived experience across community sport, not-for-profits, and volunteer-led boards, Huddle provides practical support in strategic planning, governance, and communications.

Their approach is grounded, structured, and outcomes-focused, helping organisations move from reactive decision-making to clear, confident leadership while reducing the volunteer burden and strengthening long-term capability.

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