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Sydney Football League (SFL) established as NSW premier competition from 2027

In short:

- *The Sydney Football League (SFL) will be established as New South Wales' premier Australian Rules Football competition from 2027.*
- *The SFL will consist of four divisions: Senior Mens, Senior Womens, Under 19.5 Mens and Under 20 Womens.*
- *Nine clubs have been granted a license to compete in the SFL, including: South West Sydney Blues, St. George Dragons, Sydney University, UNSW Eastern Suburbs Bulldogs, UTS Bats, North Shore Bombers, Manly Warringah Wolves, Pennant Hills Demons and East Coast Eagles.*
- *The SFL's 'Match of the Round' will be available to stream live via Kayo Freebies on Kayo SPORTS in 2027.*

The AFL has today confirmed the Sydney Football League (SFL) will be established as New South Wales' premier competition from 2027.

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

Recommendations from this review and an extensive consultation process with the AFL Commission and Executive, AFL Sydney clubs, stakeholders and partners determined a Sydney-based premier competition would be formed.

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

AFL Chief Operating Office Tom Harley said: *"The AFL has a long-term commitment to grow Australian Rules Football in New South Wales, and the Sydney Football League represents a significant investment by the AFL in the state's football landscape.*

"The depth of talent emerging from the state is undeniable. We are seeing more AFL and AFLW draftees from New South Wales, more local coaches progressing through the talent pathway and more officials making an impact across the game.

"The SFL has been designed to support and accelerate that growth and will provide a clear and accessible pathway for those aspiring to reach the highest level.

“This is about ensuring New South Wales continues to produce elite football talent, while strengthening the foundations of the game for generations to come.”

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

There will be four divisions of competition when the SFL commences in 2027: Senior Mens, Senior Womens, Under 19.5 Mens and Under 20 Women.

To support the elevated level of competition, the AFL will initially have nine clubs competing. Licences were awarded after a tender and assessment process.

Clubs that have been granted a license to compete in the SFL from 2027 are:

- South West Sydney Blues (South West)
- St. George Dragons (South)
- Sydney University (City and Inner West)
- UNSW Eastern Suburbs Bulldogs (East-Bayside)
- UTS Bats (East Parkside)
- North Shore Bombers (North Shore)
- Manly Warringah Wolves (Northern Beaches)
- Pennant Hills Demons (North West)
- East Coast Eagles (West)

A dedicated panel was assembled to assess the club license tenders, overseen by AFL Commissioner Andrew Ireland and comprised of AFLW General Manager – Growth Emma Moore, Head of AFL NSW/ACT Andrew Varasdi, Sydney Swans Executive Director of Club Performance John Longmire and GWS GIANTS Executive General Manager – Football Operations Jason McCartney OAM.

The tender process required clubs to satisfy a series of prescribed minimum and optimal standards, while the panel carefully considered the geographic spread of clubs to ensure a truly Sydney-wide competition representative of the key regions in Greater Sydney.

As of August 2026, New South Wales and the Australia Capital Territory boasts over 78,000 registered AFL participants, with over 39,000 participants in Greater Sydney alone. Western Sydney continues to steadily rise in AFL participation, seeing over 12,000 participants in 2026.

Head of AFL NSW/ACT Andrew Varasdi said: *“The Sydney Football League is the result of a deliberate and strategic shift in how we support and develop Australian Rules Football in New South Wales.*

“Demand for AFL in New South Wales has never been stronger, and the SFL has been designed to meet that demand by providing a premier competition that can cater to emerging talent and keep them or attract them to New South Wales.

“Together with our investments in participation, facilities, club development and talent programs, the SFL will help ensure our football system keeps pace with the growth of the game while creating stronger pathways and higher standards across the board.

“We are investing in the people, clubs and competitions that will drive the next phase of growth for Australian Rules Football in New South Wales, and the SFL will play a critical role in that future.”

Previously, the SFL existed as a community football competition in Sydney before it merged with the former Sydney Football Association (SFA) in 2009, which has since evolved into the AFL Sydney competition known today.

The SFL competition announced today represents a significantly elevated, premier competition, while its name pays tribute to the rich history of Australian Rules Football in Sydney and across New South Wales.

Mens and womens players from the nine SFL clubs will gather at Sydney’s iconic Henson Park today for the special announcement, alongside AFL COO Tom Harley and Head of AFL NSW/ACT Andrew Varasdi.

Today’s announcement of the SFL is accompanied by the unveiling of its new branding, which honours the heritage of the former competition while evolving into a modern identity befitting of its stature as a premier league.

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

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

The SFL ‘Match of the Round’ across Senior Mens and Senior Womens will be broadcast live via Kayo Freebies on Kayo SPORTS when the competition commences in 2027.

Foxtel Group Executive Director, Commercial Sport Adam Howarth said: *“We invest more than \$1 billion each year in sports rights and production to bring fans closer to the game and support the pathways and grassroots programs and community facilities that help the game grow and drive greater participation outcomes for girls and boys. It’s something our business is extremely proud of.*

“As the official streaming partner of the Sydney Football League, Kayo Freebies is bringing more visibility and accessibility to a vital tier of the AFL competition, lifting the profile of players, clubs and competitions, and supporting the continued growth of Australian Rules Football in New South Wales.

“It also complements our unrivalled AFL coverage on Kayo Sports, including every AFL game of every round, every match of the AFLW season and a game of the week in VFL, giving fans access to every level of the game.”

For more information about the SFL, visit play.afl/nswact.

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