



# STATE OF PLAY 2020

## REPORT



**“I love the game”**

“Played as a kid and just haven’t stopped”

**“Our club”**

“I couldn’t live without it”

“To stay active and to support my kids to be active and social”

“Great socially”

**“Enjoyment”**

“Fun, friendship, fitness and football”

**“Passion”**

“Football is the world game and cannot be scripted”

“wonderful volunteers”

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following various meeting and presentations the Institute of Sport (iSport) was contracted by Football Far North Coast (FFNC) to undertake an independent and objective overview of the 'state of play' of football in the region.

The following outcomes were sought:

- Fundamental knowledge base - aids decision-making and planning;
- Targeted problem solving - identifies challenges and canvasses solutions; and
- More effective strategic direction - future proofing.

Overall the project involved three interlinked phases:

### Phase 1: Information Gathering

1.1 Desk Research - statistics on football, sport in general (for context), strategic plans of pathway organisations, current finances, staffing, activities etc. Desk research and interviews with stakeholders.

### 1.2 Stakeholder Feedback

An online survey that gathers information from all stakeholders - seeking information and ideas around football and football issues in the region generally. Based on customer centric viewpoint and a range of stakeholders.

### Phase 2: Line in the Sand

Preparation of a 'State of Play' paper that takes its direction from the information gathered above. Disseminated widely to all stakeholders including Board, management, respondents and others as appropriate.

### Phase 3: Key Issue Forum

Based on the key findings of the survey and attendant report a semi-structured and independently facilitated forum will be conducted to discuss 4 to 6 key issues. Outcome focused rather than a talkfest with club allegiances and personal agendas prohibited.

This paper represents the culmination of phases 1 and 2.

The research discovered the following:

- The clear majority of people are intimately connected to the game through an abiding love of the game and its' role as a community connector;
- The best things about the game were related to playing with "relationships" and "comradery," the "social side" of the game and "friendships made over many years";
- The worst things about the game were related to matters around management and administration, officiating, coaching, female football, volunteering, pathways and competitions. Not surprisingly similar things were viewed as major issues for the sport in the region;

- Clubs were found to be the backbone of both junior and senior football on the FNC – this fits entirely with the social aspects mentioned previously. Clubs perceived themselves to be good administrators but were not without their problems - these related to volunteers and lack of support and strategy; and
- Junior and senior football experienced similar challenges.

The next part of this project is to workshop the key themes that have emerged from this research.

The recommended themes for discussion are (in no particular order):

Theme	General Area
1	Management and administration
2	Officiating
3	Coaching
4	Female football
5	Volunteering
6	Pathways
7	Competitions
8	Idea generation

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### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of this study was to provide valid and reliable data to assess a range of perceptions of Football on the Far North Coast. The research could then be used to guide future strategic planning activities for the organisation and the various personnel and clubs involved.

Online data collection methods were used to maximise opportunities for respondents to 'have their say'. The data was then analysed to bring out further information particularly around major challenges experienced in the code throughout the zone.

At various times this was then used to frame key themes central to the major challenges and was then further illustrated via quotations taken verbatim from the survey responses.

The major purpose of the research was to be constructive and specific with a view to driving further discussion and deliberation around the key themes. The researcher always sought to be objective and independent of Football Far North Coast, Northern New South Wales Football and any individual or club connected with these organisations.

It is acknowledged that FFNC commissioned the research following an approach from the author.

### 4. DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

The report has been compiled by the Institute of Sport (iSport). The information presented in this report is accurate at the time of printing. Whilst all care is taken to ensure its accuracy, no liability is accepted for loss or damage because of its content.

Findings and recommendations are based on the data of the current study; further research may be required in some areas to validate the findings of this study.

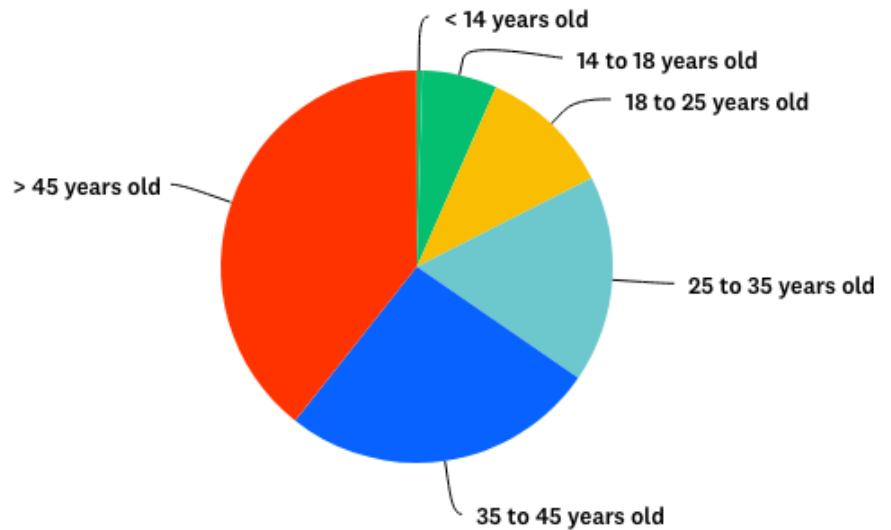
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## 5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The survey was widely distributed through emails to clubs, FFNC website, Facebook with a total of 210 people responding.

Of these, 38% were female and 62% male ranging in ages from 14 to more than 45 years.



The clubs were central to the survey and responses were received from all FFNC clubs *except for* Italo Stars FC, Nimbin Headers Sports Club, Shores United Soccer Club, and Suffolk Park FC.

In terms of respondent involvement with Football Far North Coast the following table shows most respondents (55%) were involved as senior players (either male or female) with parents/caregivers (44%) the next most represented and club volunteers (35%) third. An interesting number (5%) came from walking football.

**NB Respondents could indicate more than a single response to this question.**

Junior player (under 16)	3.33%	7
Senior player (17 or older)	54.76%	115
Sponsor	7.14%	15
Parent/caregiver	44.29%	93
Referee	11.43%	24
Club volunteer	34.76%	73
FFNC Board member	0.48%	1
Club committee member	24.76%	52
Club coach	28.57%	60
FFNC representative coach	1.43%	3
Interested spectator	21.90%	46
Involved in walking football	4.76%	10

## 6. INVOLVEMENT IN FOOTBALL

### Survey Question:

#### Tell us why are you involved in the sport of football generally?

As may have been expected a range of responses were found to this question. These revolved around four major themes all of which can be seen to be positive:

**1. A love of the game;**

*"I have loved football for as long as I can remember*

*"Soccer is the best game in the world"*

*"I love the sport and everything to do with football"*

**2. A childhood history of playing;**

*"Just played since I was a kid and haven't stopped yet"*

*"I've played football since I was 12 years old – so 40 years"*

*"Started at 5. This is my 40th unbroken season"*

**3. The family plays/did play;**

*"My child plays and I love being involved in the coaching side seeing the kids improve"*

*"Family has been involved for years"*

*"My daughter loves the game"*

**4. Social interaction.**

*"I've gained so much from being a member of my football club, lifelong friends, exposure to great peers and mentors. I really value the comradery and sense of community from my football club"*

*"I like meeting people"*

*"Because I love to play soccer and it is a great social event"*

This is interesting for several reasons...the four themes are intertwined around history and tradition and family and social cohesiveness – key planks of any 'grass roots' sporting organisation. Tied into this are notions of volunteerism, of club loyalty and of lifelong engagement with the sport through club affiliation.

There was no reference to playing for premierships, winning grand finals, smashing the opposition etc., and only a couple of veiled references around the competition and competitive aspects. This shows what people value about the game, why they are involved and what clubs and to some extent FFNC should be fostering.



## 7. THE BEST THING ABOUT FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST

### **Survey Question:**

**What is the BEST thing about being involved with football on the Far North Coast generally?**

The responses to this question, perhaps unsurprisingly echo the general themes alluded to in the previous question. There is some mention of competition “friendly competition” “tribal nature” and “good competition” but most of the BEST things were related to playing with “relationships” and “comradery,” the “social side” of the game and “friendships made over many years”.

Once again, such comments are wholly positive and revolves around the club as a central point, a community strongpoint with football (the “common interest”) as the sport that brings people together over the long term.

In addition, aspects such as being able to play a sport within a close geographical area, exercise and opportunity were also commented on by respondents.

## 8. THE WORST THING ABOUT FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST

### Survey Question:

**What is the WORST thing about being involved with football on the Far North Coast generally?**

## 9. MAJOR ISSUES FACING FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST

### Survey Question:

**In your opinion what are the FOUR major issues facing football on the FAR NORTH COAST?**

These questions were brought together to provide corroborating evidence for each. As may have been expected a range of responses were found to these questions. The researcher felt that the general football community on the FNC had been looking for an opportunity to express themselves in an independent and safe environment (this applied to the best things too).

Overarching every comment made was an abiding love of club and football – something that is clearly illustrated throughout this document. Respondents (and the FFNC community) desperately want to see football succeed and prosper and they want this done in an efficient and effective manner.

The responses to these questions revolved around seven key themes:

#### 1. Management and Administration;

*“poor organisation and administration”*

*“people criticising the FFNC hierarchy and not considering what is best for the future”*

*“no direction where the game is going”*

*“FFNC is top down and out of touch with grass roots”*

#### 2. Officials;

*“match official abuse can be very bad at times”*

*“referees aren’t supported. Players abuse and foul language is getting worse”*

*“refereeing is of very poor quality”*

*“the seemingly negative attitude towards referees and refereeing in general”*

#### 3. Coaching;

*“the level of game leadership and coaching is poor”*

*“lack of quality coaching for all age divisions”*

*“coaches show no interest in becoming better coaches”*

*“holding our breath at the start of the season to see if there are decent coaches”*

#### 4. Female Football;

*"no care for women's soccer"*

*"I coach girls and women's teams and I am continually frustrated with lack of growth"*

*"FFNC doesn't seem to care about women's football"*

*"I feel the promotion & inclusion of all women's grades is lacking"*

#### 5. Pathways;

*"lack of junior development other than Liverpool model"*

*"no pathway to high performance or professional soccer"*

*"limited opportunity for young people, especially girls & limited pathways for girls"*

*"there is no genuine pathway to elite football"*

#### 6. Competitions

*"unfair competitions"*

*"the organisation of games and competitions and teams"*

*"low standard of competition"*

*"the competition is deteriorating every year"*

#### 7. Volunteers

*"not enough people involved (referees, spectators and players)"*

*"increase in administrative requirements such as protocols and timeframes"*

*"watch how clubs grade team. Don't have prems players playing in the lower division"*

*"excessive administration and workload for 'volunteers' makes it difficult to encourage people to get involved"*

In addition, there were a range of other issues mentioned. Many have their origin in the themes above, these include: walking football, communication, funding, costs, spectator behaviour and consistency.

This brief analysis shows the concerns people have with the game on the Far North Coast. The concerns are largely not regionally specific nor even sport specific with many similar challenges and concerns expressed across sport in general in Australia and overseas.

This is corroborated by an analysis of the responses to the question around the two major issues facing football generally. All themes alluded to previously were mentioned to some extent however officials, women's football, pathways, costs and volunteers were pre-eminent among responses.

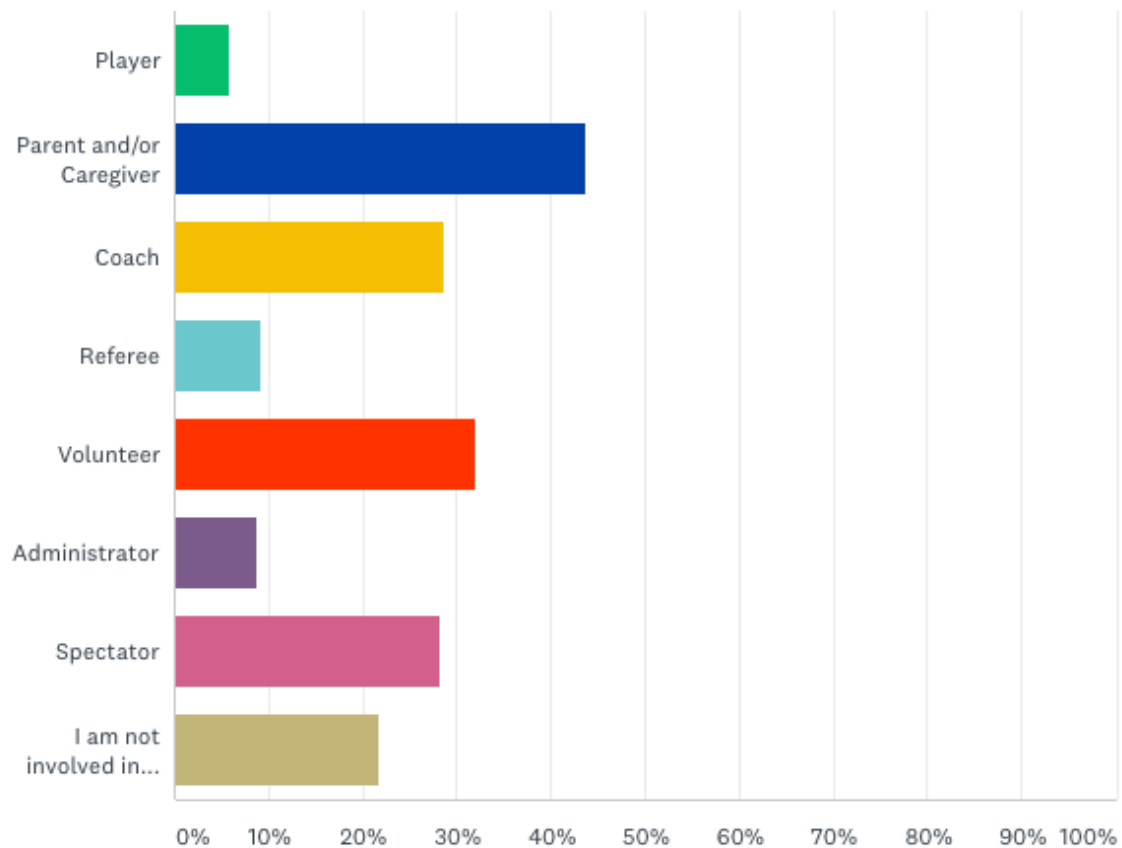
Summing up at this stage:

- Respondents are incredibly passionate about football – they love their sport, love playing with friends and, perhaps above all they love their club;
- Clubs are the social glue around which the sport is organised. Without clubs the sport will certainly flounder;
- Respondents have expectations around the administration and management that may or may not be totally realistic;
- The seven key themes are not unique to football or football in the region;
- The *themes are incredibly important* to respondents and represent significant barriers to the future of the code in the region;
- Themes must be addressed by Football Far North Coast.

The report now moves onto the two specific areas of the organisation of football on the Far North Coast – **Junior and Senior football**.

## 10. JUNIOR FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST

The following chart indicates how respondents were involved in Junior Football on the FNC. Not surprisingly most were parents and/or caregivers (43.7%), followed by volunteers (32%), coaches (28.6%) and spectators (28.2%) respectively. Obviously, some people are involved in more than a single manner – a characteristic of many sporting organisations and clubs in Australia.

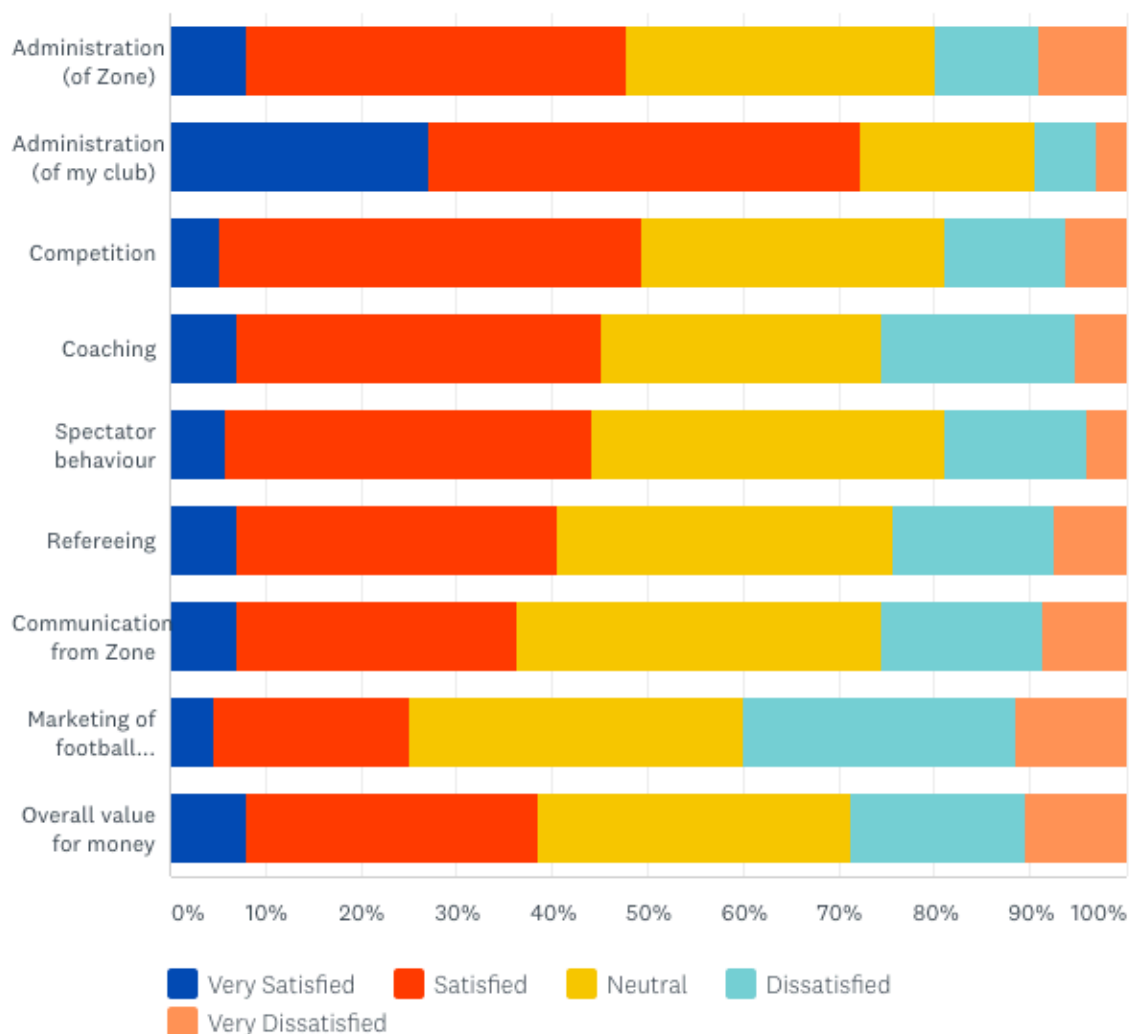


## 11. JUNIOR FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST - SATISFACTION

### Survey Question:

Indicate your level of satisfaction with the following general aspects of Junior Football on the FNC:

The following chart indicates responses to this question. Responses in blue (very satisfied) and red (satisfied) are 40% plus in all but 'marketing' (25.1%) and 'communication from the zone' (36.7%). Of significant interest is the high percentage (72.3%) of respondents who put club administration into these categories.



In addition, respondents could offer comments on each aspect. Some of the general comments are outlined below. Note they can be opposites depending on the respondent and their perspective!

**1. Administration**

*"Lack of vision or strategic plan inhibits growth particularly at grass roots level"*

*"Years of issues with the grading and scheduling of games"*

**2. Clubs**

*"Unable to find enough volunteers to take on roles like coaches, managers, or that have a willingness to do anything beyond their own children"*

*"Poor involvement by the community due to a small number of people thinking the club is theirs"*

**3. Competition**

*"The withdrawal of kids from local clubs to pursue Liverpool pathway has significantly finished the local comps"*

*"It's not growing, it's not getting worse"*

**4. Coaching**

*"Our club has a very high percentage of qualified coaches. If courses were made available more readily we would be able to get all of coaches fully qualified"*

*"There is a complete lack of coaching for coaches by clubs and no real understanding of the FFA curriculum"*

**5. Spectator Behaviour**

*"Certain clubs are well known for poor behaviour and lack of respect. Other clubs try really hard to curb inappropriate behaviour. Respect for referees is poor"*

*"Parents are too competitive as well"*

**6. Refereeing**

*"Some very good young referees. Some very ordinary older referees. Increasingly difficult job"*

*"I think by controlling the abuse match officials get will entice more Refs back to the game"*

*"Clubs should be making an effort to recruit referees"*

**7. Communication from Zone**

*"Facebook should not be only means of communication"*

*"Communication is a two-way street, listening is just as important"*

**8. Marketing**

*"Given the challenges I think the local organising body is always trying to encourage and improve the football community"*

*"Girls being seriously neglected"*

### 9. Overall Value for Money

*"Very good value for money"*

*"It is the clubs and volunteers that keep the cost down. Just go north and see what clubs charge juniors"*

*"I think that socially it is value for money however from a development perspective it falls short"*

Respondents were also asked to comment about 'the one thing FFNC could do to improve Junior Football on the FNC' and 'whether they had any further comments'.

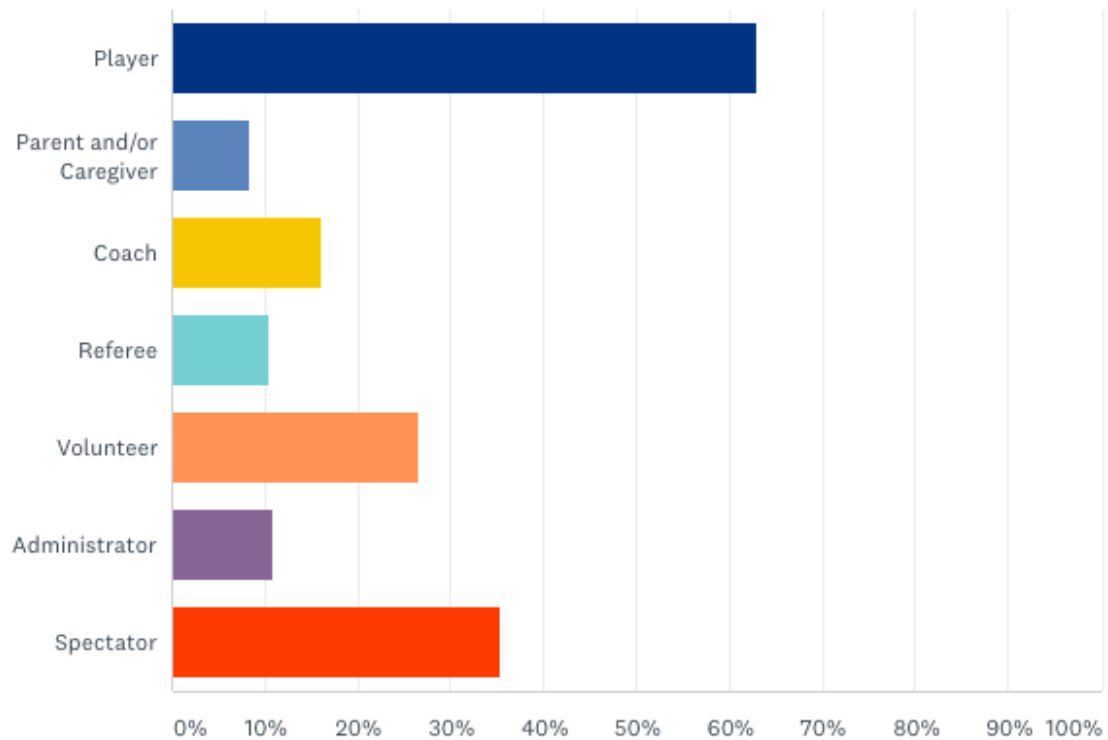
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 courses stay pathway Start quality lost skill division  
 Liverpool academy quality coaches

The word cloud above gives some measure of what was said. The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned!



## 12. SENIOR FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST

The following chart indicates how respondents were involved in Senior Football on the FNC. The majority were players (63%), followed by spectators (35.4%), volunteers (26.6%) and coaches (16.2%) respectively. To a lesser extent than in junior football, people fill more than a single role – as stated, a characteristic of many sporting organisations and clubs in Australia.

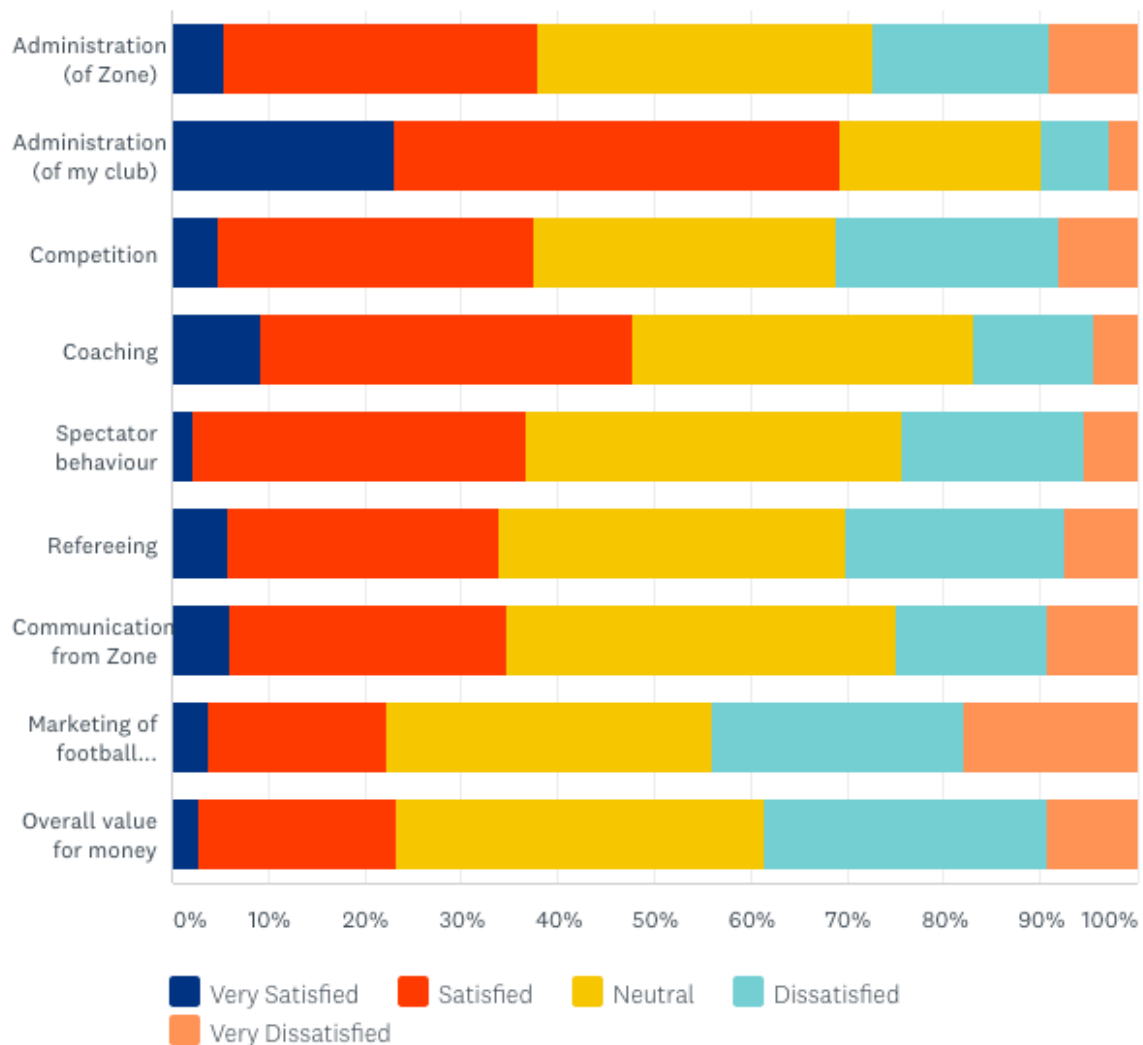


### 13. SENIOR FOOTBALL ON THE FAR NORTH COAST - SATISFACTION

#### Survey Question:

Indicate your level of satisfaction with the following general aspects of Senior Football on the FNC:

The following chart indicates responses to this question. Responses in blue (very satisfied) and red (satisfied) was only evident in two categories namely 'coaching' (47.8%) and club administration (69.2%). High levels of dissatisfaction were evident in 'marketing' (40%) and 'value for money' (38.6%).



In addition, respondents could offer comments on each aspect. Some of the general comments are outlined below. Note quotes can be opposites depending on the respondent and their perspective!

### 1. Administration

*"FFNC have been proactive and introduced a senior Championship division with promotion and relegation"*

*"It would be pleasing to see clubs actively involved in discussion and ideas sharing forums and the adoption of ideas of value"*

*"grading is always an issue"*

### 2. Clubs

*"The club is very poorly run"*

*"A few people work very hard to keep the club running"*

*"Clubs need more support, someone taking the initiative in FFNC to improve facilities and grounds"*

### 3. Competition

*"inability to foster women's football has resulted in combined competitions and lack of direction"*

*"clubs across the zone continually abuse the privilege of nominating into divisions. They nominate lower than they should"*

*"Lack of growth over a long period of time! Our last girls summer youth league comp had 4 teams. 3 years ago, it was 10"*

### 4. Coaching

*"Highly variable in terms of standard, although cannot fault commitment"*

*"Some very good coaches, only a few of them and not seeing the next generation of coaches coming through sadly"*

*"Need more courses available to all coaches"*

### 5. Spectator Behaviour

*"Unfortunately every club has some people that seem to have unsavory personalities. It is up to the club to take a strong stance about how unsocial behavior will not be tolerated toward anyone else, whether in their own club or external"*

*"On the whole spectators are generally pleasant. Occasionally referees have to become involved but they generally do a fantastic job of regulating any improper behaviour"*

*"Spectator behaviour varies greatly. Education and expectation assists. Ground Officials are difficult to attract and the time commitment for a weekend of football is arduous"*

## 6. Refereeing

*"Referees have a tough job and unfortunately don't always get the respect they deserve. Somehow, we need to get the more engagement with the clubs/players"*

*"Most fans are fine with the referee if they're consistent"*

*"it is what it is"*

## 7. Communication from Zone

*"There's no communication"*

*"Communication from the zone is great"*

*"I feel sometimes that FFNC don't provide enough information relevant to competition"*

## 8. Marketing

*"FFNC does a good job of marketing the game with limited resources. More space in the newspapers would be good if that's possible. The clubs working together to promote themselves (on Facebook etc.) and the game would be good"*

*"Female football is not pushed enough and not given enough help at club level"*

*"No newspaper info. Social media under-utilised"*

## 9. Overall Value for Money

*"Senior fees are right up there and I think inhibit a lot of people from playing. Once again, I think that the fee structure from Northern needs to be looked at. Especially the insurance costs"*

*"Football in the far north coast could be cheaper. It is 1 of the most expensive sports in the area. What exactly do we get from the football community further up the food chain like FFA or northern NSW football"*

*"If costs were lowered, more would be involved"*

Further analysis of responses found that:

- 38 respondents were concerned with set-up of divisions and/or teams;
- 27 respondents were concerned with refereeing; and
- 20 respondents were concerned with costs.

Respondents were also asked to comment about 'the one thing FFNC could do to improve Senior Football on the FNC' and 'whether they had any further comments'.

support comp go men improve abuse old social see premier  
 division highest official teams playing lower divisions cost  
 Less division Marketing reduced Lower football  
 promotion relegation Encourage many junior lower  
 grade teams lower grades day coaches FFNC  
 competition system teams scheduling  
 game comment players allow play give  
 clubs women s referees back grades bring  
 better Promote senior take Make Cheaper  
 fees Lower costs weekend division reserve grade S  
 allow players top start local refs time money need game  
 day women will quality matches Better referees keep  
 support clubs throughout senior football sport Try

The word cloud above gives some measure of what was said. The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned!

## 14. FURTHER COMMENTS

### Survey Question:

#### Do you have any further comments regarding any aspect of football on the FNC:

The respondents to this question tended to repeat previous assertions which adds weight to the themes previously outlined.

## 15. CONCLUSION

The overarching aim of this report was to crystallise opinion and to group that opinion into themes prior to exploring the issues in greater detail. It has certainly achieved that!

There were a wide variety of opinions both good, bad and indifferent however the abiding tone of the responses was always coloured with a massive respect for the game itself and the people involved.

As one respondent in the final section offered:

*“Football is strong in the area and will continue to flourish I feel. You can never please everyone but we all have to be positive in going forward”*

This sets the field well for the workshops to follow...

## 16. CONTACT DETAILS

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