



South West Football Structure Review

October 2020

Report prepared by:

Dr Ingrid O'Brien

Murdoch University

INTRODUCTION

This review has been undertaken on behalf of Football West during August and September 2020. A background briefing document was provided to the Consultancy, summarising key issues in relation to the governance of football in the South West region.

Based on the RFT, the objectives for this project are:

1. Assess whether FFSW and the current governance structure represent an effective allocation of resources to support football participants in the South West; and
2. Where required, recommend a new governance structure for the region which does make effective use of resources.
3. Assess whether the current local association, league and club structure is the most appropriate to support all football in the region, and if not, recommend a new structure that will do so.

Key stakeholders were consulted as part of the process. In all cases in-depth interviews were held, either in person or via Teams or telephone, with the focus being on:

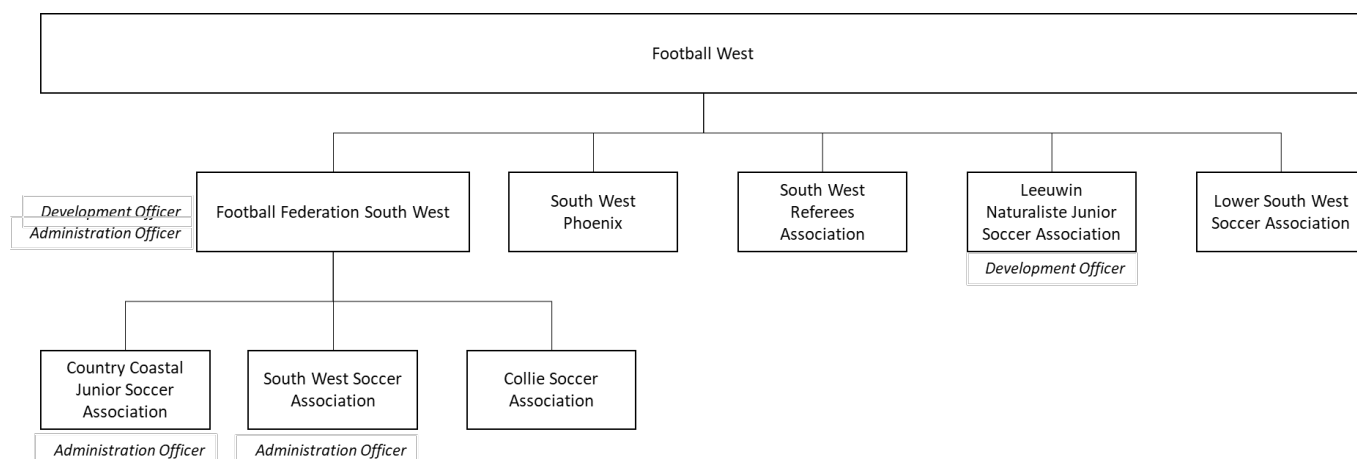
- Strengths of the current governance structure of football in the South West.
- The weaknesses and or pitfalls in the governance structure for football in the South West.
- Strategic areas of focus for any governing body of the South West.

The stakeholders consulted as part of the review includes:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| • Football Federation South West (FFSW) | • Shire of Harvey |
| • Country Coastal Junior Soccer Association (CCJSA) | • Shire of Collie |
| • South West Soccer Association (SWSA) | • Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes |
| • Collie Soccer Association (CSA) | • City of Busselton |
| • Leeuwin Naturaliste Junior Soccer Association (LNJSA) | • South West Phoenix |
| • Lower South West Soccer Association (LSWSA) | • Nicole and Steve Suttie |
| • South West Referees Association (SWRA) | • Gareth Johnston |
| • Football West (FW) | • Brett Mearns |
| • Department of Sport, Local Government and Cultural Industries | • Emma Whisson-Bourke |
| • City of Bunbury | • Karen Steele |
| | • Bernice Butlion |
| | • Kanella Hope |
| | • James Shepherd |
| | • Mick Hankin |

CURRENT STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE IN THE SOUTH WEST

The diagram below represents the current structure of governance for football in the South West. This structure has undergone some changes in recent years – notably LNJSa chose to no longer be part of FFSW due to governance concerns. LNJSa now work directly with FW, and any inter-regional cooperation or initiatives with CCJSA must be negotiated on an individual basis. Furthermore, LSWSA are no longer members of FFSW due to failure to attend meetings. SWP and the SWRA are not affiliated with FFSW.



Interestingly, Clubs in the Leeuwin region, such as Busselton City FC, essentially work within two strands of governance through LNJSa (and FW) for the juniors, and SWSA (and FFSW) for the senior competition.

MAJOR FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Rather than represent the views of each individual stakeholder across individual issues, this section will highlight the key themes and common views that emerged as part of the consultation process.

It is important to acknowledge positive contributions, and certainly there are many examples of great outcomes being achieved within football in the South West. FFSW appear to have made concerted efforts to create a more cohesive approach with CCJSA and SWSA. They believe they have been responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic, producing online material accessible to the region, a revitalised approach to Country Week and the Development Officer works with as many Clubs as possible, as well as offering many development initiatives.

Other highlights for the region include cooperation between SWSA and SWP given the relegation of the men's team for SWP, and the junior carnival in October. SWSA have made substantial changes within their organisation, ensuring regional representation on the governing Board and being transparent with their operations.

LNJSa are also largely happy with the revised realignment with FW. They have been able to direct the Regional Development Officer to focus on their priorities and have a good working relationship with SWP.

This is not meant to represent a full summary of achievements, but rather reflect that all is not broken within the South West. However, it is accurate to say that the tone of the consultation was certainly centred on the need for change – this was a consistent view across all stakeholders.

The following key issues were identified as part of the consultation process.

The (football) community want leadership from Football West

As the State governing body, stakeholders are looking to FW to provide guidance and support to ensure the sport continues to grow within the region. The multiple structures in place within the region is confusing. It is often unclear as to which organisation is responsible for the provision of advice, services and dispute resolution. Frustrations then develop (sometimes fairly, sometimes not) when FW are seen to not be responsive. The lack of clarity and understanding of the division of roles and responsibilities reflects poorly on FW – as the governing body naturally this is the group that all stakeholders look to in times of need.

Both State and Local Government, as well as independent providers, are looking for stronger leadership from FW. The multiple governing bodies makes it difficult for government and organisations to work with the sport, both for short term issues, but also when looking to understand the long-range needs of the sport. There is frustration with FW generally at the local government level with their apparent unwillingness to engage on specific initiatives and planning processes. Ultimately this will hamper the development of the sport in the region, particularly in respect to facilities.

All stakeholders recognise that football in the South West does not have a combined voice to advocate for the sport. In fact, other than FW, no single group can legitimately say they speak for the entire region. However given the current arrangements FW appear quite removed, so the perception is that that they do not truly understand the needs of the region.

A common complaint across all groups was the perceived value (or lack of) that they receive from FW for the funds provided. While this may not be a reasonable complaint (and football is not alone with this tension between grassroots and the hierarchy), FW clearly have a relatively poor reputation within the region and need to focus on improving the relationship going forward. Essentially clubs and associations feel forgotten by FW.

There is also a concern that FW don't have capacity to run the region. It is seen to be a metro centric body which, particularly post-COVID, is resource poor.

All of this makes for a challenging position of FW: while many stakeholders are looking for FW to take a leadership role within the region, it is with some wariness.

FFSW does not have a mandate to lead the region

As noted earlier, FFSW have made positive changes to their operation and the work being undertaken by the Development Officer has been positive for the region. However, there is undeniably a current level of dissatisfaction among some groups with the governance and leadership demonstrated by FFSW. There are claims that decisions are made outside of meetings, that personal views and friendships cloud decision making and that at times the Board forget that FFSW are there to serve the sport.

Furthermore, given that LNJSa and LSWSA are no longer part of FFSW, and that SWP and the SWRA are not affiliated with FFSW, the organisation has no legitimate basis on which to speak or advocate on behalf of the region.

Multiple associations and groups lead to duplication; different priorities and missed opportunities

Some of the quotes from the interviews include:

"The fragmented structure within the region destabilises the sport"

"The best interests of the game don't necessarily prevail"

"The structure is not inclusive"

Across FFSW and the associations there are paid administration roles, multiple competition managers, and doubling up of volunteer roles. In a sector which largely derives its income from player fees and relies heavily on volunteers, it appears highly inefficient to have such duplication of roles.

Exemplars of different priorities is perhaps best evidenced through the approaches to development. It was argued by some that LNJSAs are focused on elite player development, whereas CCJSAs are focused on grass roots development. It is outside the remit of this review to ascertain firstly the accuracy of the claims, and secondly the appropriateness of either approach. However, the comments illustrate a varying approach in the region.

There is also confusion as to the role and responsibilities of each group when FW and Perth Glory are responsible for school visits in the region, and contact clubs about development opportunities from time to time.

There are undoubtedly opportunities where collaboration between all groups would be beneficial. For example, taking a regional approach to female soccer development would seem to be a sensible approach, particularly with the intention to leverage hosting the World Cup. There were also suggestions raised about developing an A and B division competition for certain age groups. However, in both instances the level of effort required to negotiate, cajole and mediate in order to get a combined approach is simply too hard (*"volunteering is hard enough, having to mediate as well is exhausting"*).

Moving forward: A cohesive structure with a unified vision, designed for the entire region

There are three core elements within this theme – a unifying vision; the need to focus on strategic versus operational issues; and the unique context of the region.

Clearly separation within the region is not ideal when looking to develop a unified vision for the region. Building and coordinating strategic initiatives and programs are more challenging to implement given the lack of cohesion across the governing bodies. The absence of a clear vision for the region also allows associations and clubs to operate independently and in accordance with their individual priorities (*"there appears to be a 'my' mentality across the associations and clubs – more so than other codes"*). This makes it extremely difficult to tackle strategic issues such as retention and skill development, ultimately to the detriment of football within the region.

There were also examples cited where stakeholders were frustrated with the response from FFSW or one of the associations in respect to an idea, initiative or even a complaint. There is a general belief that personal views are often the driving force behind decisions, rather than against an agreed vision, strategic plan or agreed KPIs.

Some associations believe that they are spending too much time on operational rather than strategic matters.

The unique needs of the region must be reflected in any revised structure and approach. FFSW believe that their strength is the ability to be responsive and flexible in responding to the needs of the region. There is a fear that should a restructure occur, the region will be managed from afar. Equally the outer regional clubs in Collie and the lower south west (for example) want their needs to be recognised and incorporated i.e. managing the need to travel, as well as getting access to referees. The question was raised whether FW would do a better job of ensuring the needs of the entire region are met, rather than the Federation which can be Bunbury-centric.

There is no clear, cohesive pathway for player development within the region

A common view across all stakeholders is that there needs to be a clear pathway to facilitate the development of those players (and coaches and referees) who wish to build on their skills and strive to participate at the

highest level. In the absence of a clearly documented pathway, misunderstandings and at times mistrusts become the dominant belief, i.e. *“South West Phoenix only want to steal players for their Club.”*

As it currently stands, there are a number of development opportunities for players within the region. FFSW, CCJSA, LNJSa and SWP all provide player and coaching development opportunities, which is a great reflection of both financial and volunteer resources being invested into the region. However, there is very little cooperation, coordination or communication between these three parties.

There is also frustration surrounding SWP (both internal and external to the Club). There is confusion about the role and intention of the Club, and clearly many in the region are not encouraging or supporting the SWP pathway. Going forward it is strongly argued for SWP to have a clear mandate of creating representative sides for the region. This would remove the dual registration issue, allowing players to continue to play for their own club. Much like FFSW, representatives of SWP were willing to acknowledge mistakes made in the past and are wanting to work collaboratively in the region for the benefit of all.

The region has been plagued by poor governance

There were many examples cited of poor governance within the region. Decisions are not transparent; Boards are stacked, and people feel disenfranchised if they question decisions or approaches. Clubs are perceived to have infighting, and do not follow appropriate governance procedures. The same criticism has been directed towards the Referees Association (*“the associations are too hard to work with”*).

There are also criticisms of the quality of leadership across FFSW and the associations and clubs– *“there are people in charge who like control, but don’t necessarily value the things that are important to community sport”*.

Referees – the approach needs to change

The current and future supply of good quality referees is clearly an issue for the entire region. Interestingly when talking to stakeholders, it felt as though each individual group/Association was trying to solve the problem. As an example, the Referees Academy has been established, but at times this does not lead to membership of the local Branch. The SWRA reported a dysfunctional relationship with FW, and also reportedly have problems regarding appropriate governance in accordance with the Constitution. Many of the same issues such as internal politics and personal agendas were raised about the SWRA.

Undoubtedly the supply of good quality referees for the South would be better addressed through a cohesive, region-wide approach focusing on development and recruitment processes.

Strategic priorities for the region:

Understandably, the emphasis on particular issues differed, but there was general consensus that the strategic priorities for the region are:

- ✓ Stronger local clubs
- ✓ Development:
 - Players – both general skill levels and pathways
 - Coaches
 - Referees
- ✓ Strong participation and retention
- ✓ Developing a cohesive culture and approach within the region

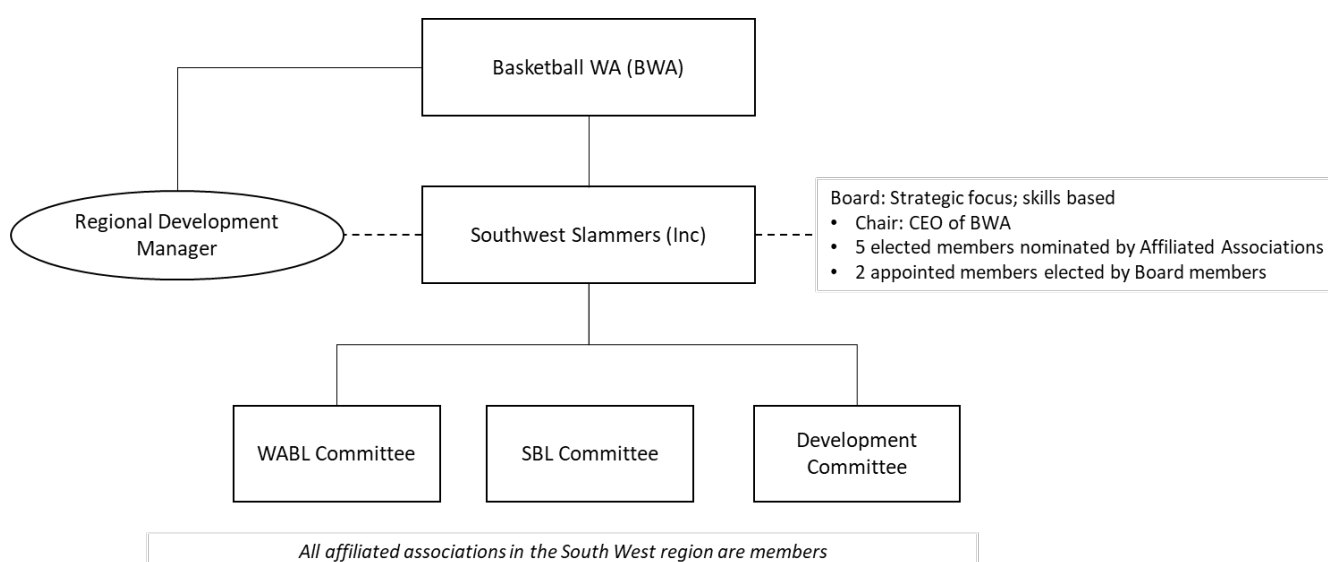
Other codes are doing it better in the region

It was reported that other sports such as basketball and netball have a more cohesive approach within the region and stronger direct ties to the state governing bodies.

For the AFL, they have a Football Advisory Network which is driven by the Regional Manager in the South West who are employed by the WAFC. The Regional Manager's role focuses on four pillars:

- Football Participation and Development Initiatives and Events
- Club and Volunteer Development Initiatives
- Positive Game Day Development
- Facility Development

Basketball WA were also cited as a good example who have managed to introduce substantial change in the governance structure in the South West in recent years. While the competition and club structure within basketball is quite different to football, there are relevant learnings from their experience. The current governance structure is represented in the figure below:



For basketball, the vehicle for cohesion was seen to be the Southwest Slammers and creating a pathway association. The objectives of the Southwest Slammers include:

- a) to facilitate, regulate, encourage, administer, promote and advance in conjunction with Basketball WA, programs, activities and pathways for South West associations and/or members who are affiliated with Basketball WA;
- b) facilitate regional basketball competitions and programs that allow for the development of players, coaches, officials, administrators and volunteers;
- c) to provide the governance and operational structure necessary to support sub-elite pathways and programs in the South West region.

In establishing this new structure, it was agreed that for an initial period (years rather than months) the Chair of the Board would be the CEO of Basketball WA, and that the founding Board members were effectively hand-picked. The pathway focus of the Slammers means that BWA can still drive initiatives in the region via their Regional Development Manager such as club development, facilities, player programs etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the issues raised during the review, the conclusion is that the current governance structure does not represent an effective allocation of resources to support football participants in the South West. The lack of cohesion, duplication of roles, evidence of poor governance and significant frustration amongst government stakeholders suggests there must be a better way.

The Australian Sports Commission published a guide on 'Sport Governance Principles' in March 2020, with some key principles relevant to this review and the recommendations for a revised approach.

Principle 1: Values-driven culture and behaviours

Principle 2: Collaborative governance

Principle 3: A clear vision that informs strategy

Principle 4: A diverse board to enable considered decision-making

Principle 5: The rulebook (documentation)

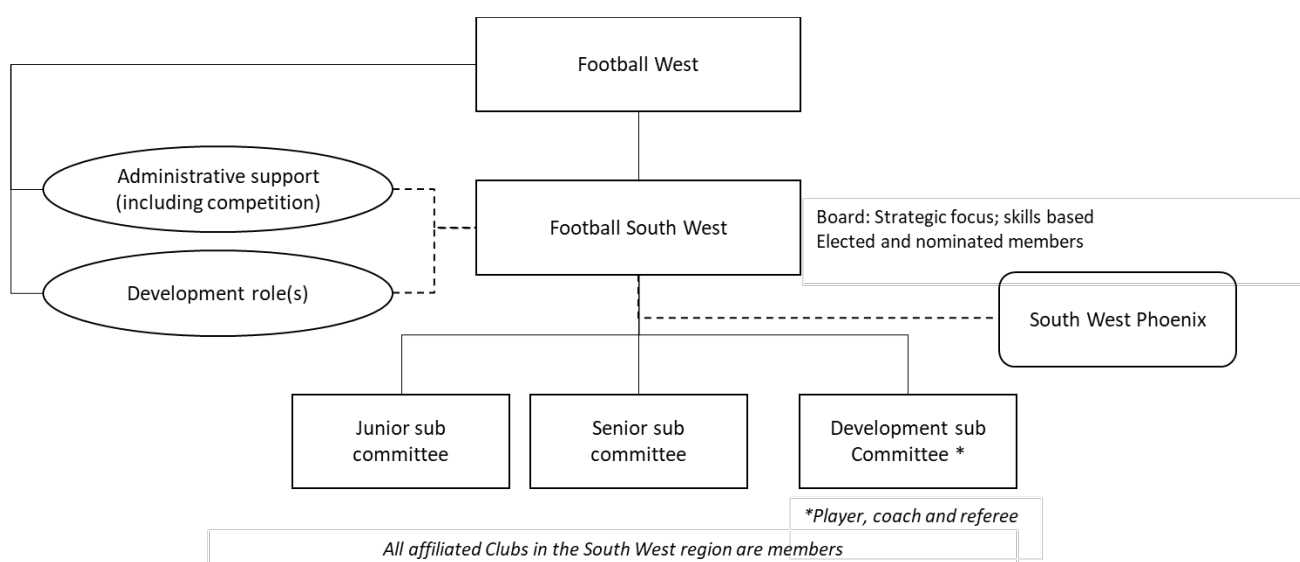
Principle 6: The playbook (transparency and accountability)

Principle 7: Good risk management

Principle 8: Integrity

Principle 9: A scorecard: internal controls to track performance

The diagram below represents the recommended governance structure for football in the South West.



In this structure:

- FW would be ultimately responsible for football in the South West. FW (in cooperation with 'Football South West') would develop a South West Regional Plan designed to reflect both the strategic priorities and approach to football in Western Australia overall, as well as the unique strategic priorities for the South West.

- 'Football South West' would have a strategic focus for the region. As the key representative body for the region it would have an integral role in working with FW to develop the Regional Plan and be charged with overseeing the successful implementation of this plan.
- The creation of 'Football South West' provides a formal avenue for the region to have a combined voice, to develop a shared vision and an agreed set of priorities. It is not an organisation which operates autonomously from Football West, it is not solely responsible for how and where funds are spent in the region, nor will it be responsible for hiring and managing regional staff. The role of 'Football South West' is very much strategic, not operational.
- The Board of Football South West would be skilled based and consist of a mix of elected and non-elected members. It is recommended that for the initial 3 years, the Chair of the Board is either a senior representative of FW or an independent Chair capable of driving cultural change within the region.
- If budgets allow, both administrative and development roles should be appointed in the region, reporting to FW. The focus and KPIs for these roles will reflect the priorities of the Regional Plan – which should represent a shared vision for the region among all stakeholders. These roles will report to FW to facilitate improved coordination and cooperation across the State. They would also operationalise the Regional Plan, working closely with Football South West and its sub committees.
- Depending on the extent of resources available, the administrative and development functions should include:
 - Support for Club development
 - Competition administration
 - Player pathways and development
 - Coach development
 - Referee recruitment and development
- Within this structure, South West Phoenix would be clearly identified as part of the formal pathway for player development, with all representative sides playing under South West Phoenix. Clarification of the representative nature of the Club should solve the issue of dual registration.
- While the diagram depicts South West Phoenix above the sub committees, this is not meant to represent any hierarchical differences, rather the fact that it is the nominated pathway for representative teams.
- Within this structure, there will be no need for individual associations to exist – specifically Football Federation South West (FFSW); Country Coastal Junior Soccer Association (CCJSA); South West Soccer Association (SWSA); Collie Soccer Association (CSA); Leeuwin Naturaliste Junior Soccer Association (LNJSA); Lower South West Soccer Association (LSWSA); South West Referees Association (SWRA).

The revised structure has been reviewed by a representative of DLGSC, who responded positively to the proposal. Given regional funding allocations have been allocated to FW rather than a formal splitting between FFSW and LNJSA, the new structure would be aligned to the preferred grant and funding allocation.

The implementation of this new structure is likely to take time and needs to be highly consultative with the region. Understandingly, many volunteers will have detailed questions about what it will mean for them, their role, their child, their club and so forth. It is recommended that a Working Party be established to set out a detailed implementation plan.

When reviewing the 'Sport Governance Principles', it is intended that this new structure meets the principles of collaborative governance, a clear vision, and a diverse Board. It is imperative that appropriate planning, documentation, analysis and reporting meet Principles 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Principle 1 (Values-driven culture and behaviours) will undoubtedly be the biggest challenge.

FW have a clear focus within their strategic plan to achieve outstanding delivery through a values-led culture – acting with mutual respect, fair play and excellence. These must be the driving values when implementing this structural change for everyone.