

NSW RUGBY LEAGUE

■ **WOMEN AND GIRLS STRATEGY**

Action Plan for Advancing Women and Girls in
Rugby League in NSW

→ 2027-2032





ADVANCING

Women and girls in Rugby League in NSW

BUILDING

Stronger communities

INSPIRING

Future generations

STRENGTHENING

The game for everyone ... on and off the field

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MESSAGES

NSWRL CHIEF EXECUTIVE DAVID TRODDEN

The growth of Rugby League for women and girls has been one of the most exciting and important developments in our game.

I have witnessed extraordinary growth in the number of women and girls playing Rugby League across NSW. From 2016 to 2026, female registrations increased from 8,700 to 35,725 - growth of more than 310 per cent - as the game established an unbroken pathway from Under 6s to Open Women for the first time in its history.

In 2026, women and girls represent 28 per cent of all registered participants in NSW. That growth is changing the face of our game. It is bringing more families into Rugby League, strengthening clubs and communities, and creating new opportunities for women and girls to contribute as players, coaches, match officials, volunteers, administrators and leaders.

The progress we have seen on and off the field has also included a number of significant firsts for NSWRL. Professor Deborah Healey became the organisation's first female director in 2013, Jodie Cross became the first female appointed to a senior executive role in 2014, Yvette Downey was the first female appointed to an executive football leadership position in 2014, Kylie Hilder was appointed as our first female Origin coach in the professional era in 2021, Tarsha Gale became the first female True Blue appointed to the NSWRL Board in 2024, and Carolyn Campbell became the first female Chair of NSWRL in 2025.

These milestones matter because visibility matters. I have always believed that you cannot be what you cannot see. When women and girls see themselves represented across the game - in leadership, coaching, officiating, administration and performance environments - it changes what they believe is possible.

The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy is an important whole-of-game strategy because it recognises that the continued advancement of women and girls cannot rely on participation growth alone. It requires deliberate action, investment, accountability and a commitment to creating genuine opportunities across every part of the game.

The contribution of women brings different and important perspectives to Rugby League, strengthens decision-making and helps build a game that is more inclusive, more connected and more sustainable. This strategy is an important step in ensuring Rugby League in NSW continues to be the game for all - delivering excellence on and off the field.



NSW OFFICE OF SPORT PLAY HER WAY STRATEGY MANAGER, **KERRY TURNER**

It has been my privilege to lead the NSW Government's Play Her Way Strategy and work alongside sporting organisations that are committed to creating lasting opportunities for women and girls.

At the heart of Play Her Way is a simple but powerful ambition: that every woman and girl in New South Wales feels a strong sense of belonging in sport. Whether as a player, coach, official, volunteer, administrator, leader or in a sport-related career, we want women and girls to know that there is a place for them, that their contribution is valued, and that they can thrive in environments where they feel welcomed, respected and supported.

Play Her Way is built on the belief that women and girls should be at the centre of how sport is designed, delivered and experienced. By understanding their needs, listening to their voices and considering their experiences, sporting organisations can create environments where women and girls not only participate, but stay involved, progress and succeed.

That is why I am delighted to see NSWRL launch this strategy and demonstrate such strong alignment with the principles of Play Her Way. The strategy recognises that growing participation is only part of the story. Real and sustainable change happens when organisations take a whole-of-sport approach to building inclusive cultures, strengthening pathways, increasing visibility, and creating opportunities for women and girls at every level of the game.

Across New South Wales, we are seeing unprecedented growth in women's sport. With that growth comes an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that our systems, structures and environments evolve to meet the needs and aspirations of current and future generations. Strategies such as this play a critical role in ensuring that women and girls are not only participating in sport, but are helping to shape its future.

I congratulate NSWRL on the launch of their Women and Girls Strategy. By investing in the future of women and girls, NSWRL is helping to ensure the game remains strong, relevant and welcoming for generations to come.

I look forward to seeing the impact of this strategy and the opportunities created for women and girls across Rugby League and the broader sport community in New South Wales.

PLAY
HER
WAY





Photo Credit: News Ltd/ Newspic

NSWRL DIRECTOR AND TRUE BLUE **TARSHA GALE**

The importance of this strategy to ensure the sustainable growth of women and girls across NSW, at every level of Rugby League and in every role across the game, cannot be overstated.

When I first started playing in the mid-1990s, the opportunities available to girls and women looked very different. I would have relished the chance to play the game I loved at a much earlier age, rather than standing on the other side of the fence with my mum watching my brothers play.

In 1995, I was fortunate to play in the inaugural Australian Women's Rugby League team against New Zealand. We played in men's jerseys, sold raffle tickets in pubs, took time away from work and, in some cases, players sold their cars to afford the Australian kit and touring costs. Players were not only training and competing; they were often sitting on committees, creating draws, booking referees and organising grounds. Support staff were almost non-existent, and team managers were often friends and family members who stepped in because we asked them to help.

The game has come an enormous way since then. Female participation numbers now reflect the demand, passion and potential that have always existed. But there is still more work to do to ensure the growth of female players, coaches, referees, administrators and leaders is sustainable, supported and properly nurtured.

NSWRL has an opportunity to be recognised as a leader in advancing women in every facet of Rugby League, from grassroots to the boardroom. This strategy is vital because it provides a clear, whole-of-game commitment to building pathways, strengthening systems and creating visible opportunities for women and girls across NSW.

NSWRL CHAIR **CAROLYN CAMPBELL**

Throughout my career in sport I have seen the profound impact that well-governed, inclusive and ambitious sporting organisations can have on people and communities.

Sport gives people confidence, connection, discipline and belonging. It creates pathways for participation and leadership, and it has the power to shape stronger, more resilient communities.

As Chair of NSWRL, and as someone who has worked across state and national sporting organisations, I know that sustained growth does not happen by chance. It requires clear strategy, strong governance, investment in people and a willingness to build systems that allow talent to develop and thrive over the long term.

The growth of women and girls in Rugby League is one of the great opportunities for our game. Participation has accelerated, visibility has increased and more women are contributing across clubs, competitions, pathways, administration, officiating and leadership. The challenge now is to ensure that growth is matched by the structures, environments and opportunities needed to make it sustainable.

The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy is an important step in that direction. It recognises that advancing women and girls is not the responsibility of one area of the game; it is a whole-of-game commitment. It asks us to think beyond participation alone and to focus on the leadership, coaching, officiating, facilities, workforce and governance settings that will determine the future strength of Rugby League in NSW.

This strategy also reflects the broader direction of Australian sport. Across the sector, there is increasing recognition that diversity in leadership and decision-making strengthens organisations, improves performance and better reflects the communities we serve.

Rugby League has an opportunity to lead with purpose and to ensure women and girls can see a place for themselves in every part of the game.

As NSWRL's first female Chair, I am proud to support a strategy that is ambitious, practical and accountable. The progress already made across the women's game should be celebrated, but the next stage requires deliberate action and shared responsibility. By investing in women and girls, we are investing in the future of Rugby League - a stronger game, a more inclusive game and a game that continues to thrive for generations to come.

BACKGROUND

Advancing women and girls in sport is a global priority and a strategic opportunity for Rugby League in NSW. Across the sporting landscape, leading organisations are embedding gender equity into governance, participation, talent development and workforce planning, recognising that sustainable growth depends on women and girls having genuine opportunities to play, lead, coach, officiate, volunteer and contribute at every level.

International bodies including FIFA now mandate female coaching representation in women's competitions, reinforcing the direction of travel for sport globally.

For NSWRL, the growth of women and girls is one of the most significant shifts in the modern history of the game. In 2026, female registrations reached another record high, with 35,725 women and girls registered to play Rugby League in NSW, representing 28 per cent of total player registrations. This growth has been supported by the establishment of an unbroken pathway from Under 6s to Open Women, expanding competitions, strengthened representative opportunities and increasing visibility of female athletes, coaches, match officials, volunteers and leaders.

This strategy positions NSWRL as a leader nationally, while aligning with global trends in women's sport and international best practice. It is strategically aligned, evidence based and future focused, and recognises that the next stage of progress requires deliberate investment in systems, culture and pathways that convert participation growth into long-term leadership, performance and community outcomes.

CURRENT STATE

Female participation is growing strongly, however the 2026 snapshot (Pages 9 and 31) shows that women and girls remain under-represented in several areas that influence the future of the game. Women and girls now make up 28 per cent of registered players, but only 14.5 per cent of coaches and 19.5 per cent of match officials across Community Rugby League. Representation is stronger among volunteers, where women make up 36 per cent, demonstrating the significant contribution women are already making to club and community environments.

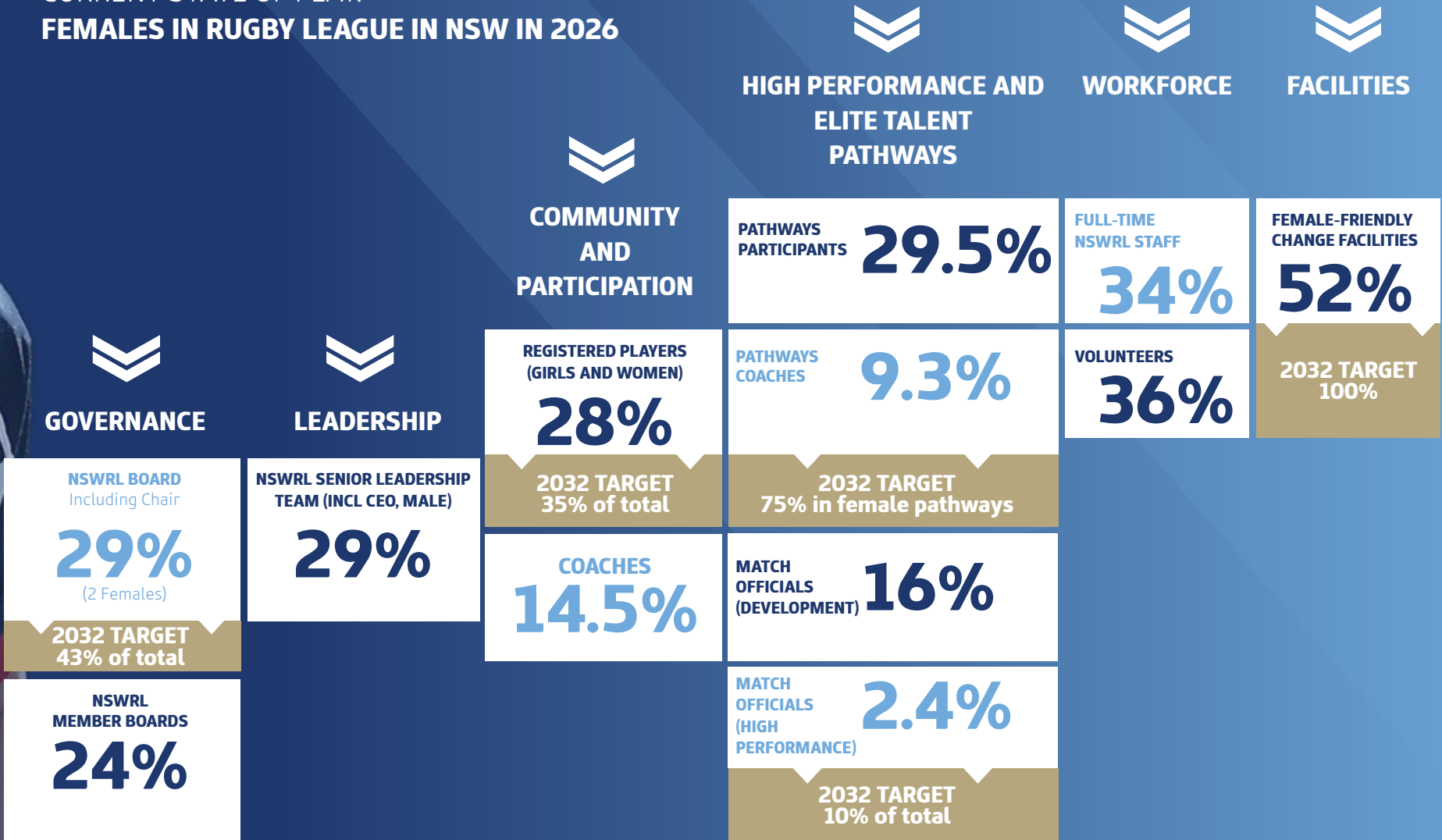
The data also highlights where targeted action is needed. Women hold 29 per cent of positions on the NSWRL Board, including the Chair, while across the boards of NSWRL voting members, female representation sits at 24 per cent. In high performance and elite pathways, female representation remains limited in key technical roles, including 2 per cent of high-performance match officials and 9.3 per cent of pathway coaches.

Facilities are also a critical part of the current state. With the facilities audit 86 per cent complete, only 52 per cent of community fields audited have available female-friendly change facilities. This reinforces the need for the strategy to address not only participation and pathways, but also the environments that enable women and girls to feel safe, supported and valued in Rugby League.

Together, these figures show both strong momentum and a clear case for structured intervention. The growth in participation confirms the appetite and opportunity for women and girls in Rugby League, while the gaps in coaching, officiating, governance, pathways, facilities and leadership show where NSWRL must focus to ensure that growth is sustainable, equitable and reflected across the whole game.

AT A GLANCE

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY:
FEMALES IN RUGBY LEAGUE IN NSW IN 2026



TIMELINE: SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN RUGBY LEAGUE IN NSW

This timeline celebrates the progress made by women and girls in Rugby League in NSW, from early pioneers through to record participation, expanded pathways and landmark leadership achievements.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

NSWRL is committed to advancing women and girls in Rugby League as part of its overarching vision to be “the game for all ... delivering excellence on and off the field”. The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy provides a whole-of-game framework to embed gender equity across participation, pathways, leadership, performance, facilities and workforce planning.

THE STRATEGY DIRECTLY SUPPORTS:

NSWRL NEW STATE STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-26

The NSWRL New State Strategic Plan 2024-26 identifies the need to promote inclusion, recognise the diversity of the community and invest in a female strategy that links all facets of the game.

The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy gives effect to that commitment by providing a clear roadmap for advancing women and girls across the whole game.

NSWRL INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2024-26 (Gender Equity pillar)

The NSWRL Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2024-26 includes Gender Equity as one of its five key pillars, with a commitment to grow female participation sustainably and accelerate opportunities for women and girls in all areas and levels of the game.

FORWARD INTEGRATION INTO THE 2027-2032 NEW STRATEGY

In 2026, 35,725 women and girls were registered to play Rugby League in NSW, representing 28 per cent of total registrations. While this participation growth is significant, women remain under-represented in coaching, officiating, governance, leadership and high-performance roles, reinforcing the need for a coordinated and accountable strategy.

The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy embeds female advancement across Community Rugby League, competitions and high performance, rather than operating as a standalone initiative. It is a whole-of-game commitment.

The Strategy has been developed by the NSWRL Women’s Pathway Committee and will be implemented through coordinated action across NSWRL departments, clubs, members and partners.



OUR VISION FOR ADVANCING WOMEN AND GIRLS

NSWRL is committed to growing the women's game sustainably, celebrating achievement at every level, and creating environments where women and girls are respected, supported and inspired to reach their potential, on and off the field.

PURPOSE

To create a bold, inclusive and sustainable future for women and girls in Rugby League across NSW, ensuring every woman and girl can play, lead and thrive, on and off the field.

STRATEGIC INTENT

NSWRL will be recognised as a leader in advancing women and girls through policies, education and practices that embed equity, open genuine pathways and drive excellence across the whole game.

The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy positions NSWRL as a national leader in the sport sector, aligned with global best practice and future policy direction.

It is a strategic investment in the long-term strength, relevance and sustainability of Rugby League in NSW.

HOW FAR WE HAVE COME

The story of women and girls in Rugby League in NSW is one of persistence, leadership and sustained progress. From the first recorded women's match in 1921 to the establishment of an unbroken female pathway from Under 6s to Open Women, each milestone has helped build the platform for the next stage of growth.

This Strategy builds on that legacy. It recognises how far the game has come, while setting a clear direction for the systems, pathways, leadership and environments needed to ensure women and girls continue to thrive in Rugby League across NSW.



OUR PRIORITIES

The NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy is structured around four interconnected priorities that translate the Gender Equity Roadmap into practical action across the whole game.

Together, these priorities address the key areas of governance and strategy, leadership, community and participation, high performance and elite pathways, facilities and infrastructure, and workforce.

THE STRATEGY WILL BE DELIVERED THROUGH FOUR PRIORITIES:



PRIORITY 1: **PLAY**

Grow the number of women and girls playing Rugby League and participating across all roles in the game

■ Inspire participation, strengthen competitions, and connect with new communities

OUR FOCUS

EXPAND

Participation across clubs and community programs

STRENGTHEN

Female competitions across all age groups and formats

SUPPORT

Regional and metropolitan growth through inclusive local competitions

BUILD

Connections with underrepresented communities to ensure the game truly reflects NSW

2032 ASPIRATION

35% of total registered players

- Based on current projections that would mean at least 45,000 women and girls registered to play Rugby League in 2032

More women and girls than ever before actively involved in Rugby League, in clubs, pathways and community competitions

PRIORITY 2: **LEAD**

Empower women to lead with confidence as coaches, referees, administrators and board members

■ Build capability, visibility and opportunity through mentoring, education and governance reform

■

OUR FOCUS

▲

ACHIEVE
Board structure compliant with NSW Office of Sport gender equity requirements

DELIVER
Education, mentoring and leadership programs for aspiring coaches, match officials and administrators

BUILD
A visible network of female leaders across clubs, competitions and governance

PROMOTE
Male allyship and shared responsibility for advancing gender equity in Rugby League

■

2032 ASPIRATION

▲
Gender equity coaching requirements in NSW female pathway competitions (75 per cent)
Visible, supported and connected female leaders engaged in decision-making across all levels of Rugby League, from local clubs to the NSWRL Board



PRIORITY 2: LEAD

Key Initiatives

“During the development of this strategy by the NSWRL Women’s Pathway Committee, two key initiatives have been approved by the Board for immediate implementation and funding has been received through a NSW Government Investing in Women Grant to run the program”.

Female Coaching Quotas

The NSWRL Board has approved the phased introduction of coach and assistant coach quotas across the NSWRL female pathway competitions - Lisa Fiaola Cup, Tarsha Gale Cup and NSW Women’s Premiership - as follows:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2027 | Clubs are to have at least 1 Female Head Coach and 1 Female Assistant Coach |
| 2028 | Clubs are to have 60 per cent of their coaching positions within the female pathway filled by females
*Clubs can appoint female coaches to male pathway teams to also meet this quota |
| 2029 | Clubs are to have 75 per cent of their coaching positions within the female pathway filled by females
*Clubs can appoint female coaches to male pathway teams to also meet this quota |

Female Coach Mentor Program

The inaugural Female Coach Mentor Program, to be launched on 1 September 2026, is a key initiative under the Lead Priority and has been developed to strengthen female coaching pathways, increase the representation of women in coaching leadership roles and to support the immediate phased introduction of coaching quotas across NSWRL female pathway competitions.

Ten high-potential female coaches currently working within NRL pathways systems have been identified for the program, proudly funded by the NSW Government, through the Investing in Women Grant program.

Through a structured development framework, participants will receive targeted education, leadership development, independent mentoring and practical coaching experiences that build readiness for coaching leadership positions within the game.

Delivered over 18 months, the Female Coach Mentor Program will help create a sustainable community of female coaches who can mentor, inspire and support others, strengthening the game’s leadership pipeline and contributing to long-term gender equity across Rugby League in NSW.



PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Identify and develop high-potential female coaches within NRL pathway system.
- Build coaching capability, leadership confidence and readiness for senior coaching opportunities.
- Provide structured mentoring and independent support to help participants navigate coaching pathways.
- Support clubs to meet future female coaching requirements across pathway competitions.
- Strengthen the visibility, connection and sustainability of female coaches across Rugby League in NSW.



PRIORITY 3: **PERFORM**

Strengthen pathways to produce first-rate female players, coaches and match officials

Align programs and competitions, invest in holistic athlete development, and support elite success

OUR FOCUS

SUPPORT

Capacity-building in regional Academy programs

POSITION

The NSW Women's Premiership as the state's premier female competition

DEVELOP

Emerging female coaches, administrators, referees and support staff

EMBED

Holistic athlete development focusing on wellbeing, education and leadership



2032 ASPIRATION

Consistently succeed in representative competitions

Clear and aligned female performance pathway opportunities that feed into the NRLW from NSW competitions, from grassroots to elite

PRIORITY 4: **THRIVE**

Build environments, facilities and workplaces where women and girls feel safe, valued and celebrated

■ Deliver female-friendly facilities, inclusive workplaces and a culture of respect and recognition

■

OUR FOCUS

↑

DELIVER
Female-friendly facilities across all affiliated clubs

ACHIEVE
Annual compliance with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency

PROMOTE
Safe, respectful and inclusive workplace practices

PROVIDE
Flexible and supportive employment policies for staff and volunteers

CELEBRATE
Women's contribution to Rugby League through visibility, storytelling and recognition

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2032 ASPIRATION

↑

NSWRL-affiliated facilities align with Infrastructure Strategy goals (100 per cent female-friendly)

Inclusive, female-friendly facilities and a culture of respect, equity and opportunity embedded across the game



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Equity, not equality:** Recognising that different approaches are needed to achieve fair outcomes.
- **Visibility:** Celebrate the role and impact of women in Rugby League.
- **Sustainability:** Build long-term systems and culture, not one-off programs.
- **Partnership:** Work collaboratively across clubs, schools, government and community.
- **Accountability:** Measure progress and report outcomes transparently.

MEASURING SUCCESS

By 2032, we will see measurable and lasting change.

2032 Success Indicators

- Gender equitable governance aligned with Office of Sport requirements
- Year-on-year growth in female participation across all roles
- Clear, respected female performance pathways
- Female-friendly facilities and inclusive workplace culture
- Strong visibility and recognition of women across Rugby League

DELIVERING THE PLAN

A detailed NSWRL Women and Girls Strategy Action Plan will set out specific initiatives, responsibilities, timelines and success measures under each priority

Progress will be reviewed annually, reported to the NSWRL Board and shared with our stakeholders and community



CURRENT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
(From NEW STATE 2024-26 Strategic Plan and OSP Requirements)

AREA	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMEFRAME
Governance and Strategy	Achieve Board structure compliant with NSW Office of Sport gender equity requirements	NSWRL Chair (Carolyn Campbell) Head of Social Impact (Tracie Edmondson)	30 June 2027
Leadership	Run annual Women in Sport Leadership Program Develop Alumni program for the graduates	Head of Social Impact (Tracie Edmondson)	Annual Sept-Dec
Community and Participation	Leadership course/ program/ workshop - Mentors for emerging leaders - Incentives/rewards for clubs/leagues progressing women's leaders - Network of females within RL, coaches, volunteers, referees - Women's Leadership conference – potentially women's Origin in NSW (2025) - Education for males on positive impacts of female participation – subset on coaching females and awareness - Director training offered for female officer bearers with Regional and Metro Members	Community Rugby League Manager (Peter Clarke) Community Rugby League Operations Manager (Tyrone Collins)	2025-2026
High Performance and Elite Pathways	Develop Female Academy programs within the established Andrew Johns Cup and Laurie Daley Cup Academy set-up Develop statewide top tier competition model for women, with Regional State Premiership teams	Head of Competitions (Yvette Downey) Female Pathways Manager (Kylie Hilder)	2027
Facilities and Infrastructure	Facility audit – entire state	Head of Govt Relations (Daniel Ristic)	2026
Workforce	NSWRL to submit an annual Workplace Gender Equality Report	Chief of Staff (Adam Bowen)	31 May 2025, 2026
	NSWRL to provide paid parental leave, flexible working options and paid domestic leave for employees		Ongoing
	NSWRL Workplace Behaviour policy and associated training provided to all staff to promote a safe and respectful work environment free from discrimination		Ongoing

SNAPSHOT – STATE OF PLAY:
Women in Rugby League in NSW 2024-26

PILLARS	DESCRIPTION	STATE OF PLAY: 2024			STATE OF PLAY: 2025			STATE OF PLAY: 2026			2032 Targets
		F	M	F%	F	M	F%	F	M	F%	
Governance	NSWRL Board	1	6	14%	2 (incl. Chair)	5	29%	2 (incl. Chair)	5	29%	43% (of total)
	Boards of NSWRL voting members	45	196	19%	N/A	N/A	N/A	45	190 (89% audit)	24%	N/A
Leadership	NSWRL Senior Leadership Team	3	4 (+ CEO)	43%	2	4 (+CEO)	33%	2	4 (+CEO)	33%	N/A
Community and Participation	Registered players	29,686	87,489	25%	33,336	89,168	27%	35,725	90,508	28%	35% (of total)
	Volunteers	10,680	20,781	34%	12,271	22,752	35%	12,729	23,114	36%	+5%
	Coaches	1187	8292	13%	1434	8980	13.70%	1553	9181	14.50%	+5%
	Match Officials	430	2280	16%	513	2439	17%	602	2487	19.50%	+5%
	Trainers	3426	12,633	21%	4319	14,272	23%	4367	14,392	23%	+5%
High Performance and Elite Talent Pathways	Pathways - Participants	2177	5909	27%	1670	4007	29%	1591	3803	29.50%	N/A
	Pathways - Coaches	49	422	10%	43	423	9.20%	45	440	9.30%	+5%
	Match Officials (HP)	1	40	2.4%	1	40	2%	1	40	2%	10% (of total)
	Match Officials (Development)	15	70	18%	15	80	16%	14	68	17%	+5%
	HP (Origin) – Coaching Staff	3	4	43%	2	5	29%	2	5	29%	N/A
	HP (Origin) - Staff	8	17	32%	7	22	24%	6	22	21%	N/A
Facilities and Infrastructure	Community fields – available female -friendly change facilities	No data			No data			86% audit complete		52%	100% (of total)
Workforce (Internal and Volunteers)	Staff (FT)	34	51	40%	26	53	29%	30	59	34%	N/A
	Volunteers	10,680	20,781	34%	12,271	22,752	35%	12,729	23,114	36%	+5%



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