



NEW SOUTH WALES RUGBY LEAGUE

INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY





**NEW SOUTH WALES RUGBY LEAGUE
RESPECTS AND HONOURS THE
TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE
LAND AND PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THEIR
ELDERS PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE.**

We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the lands we
meet, gather and play on.

» LETTER FROM THE CEO

David Trodden
Chief Executive Officer



I am excited to introduce the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) 2024-28 Infrastructure Strategy, an essential initiative that aligns with our broader NSWRL Strategic Plan. NSWRL is committed to serving and leading our Rugby League community to support its continued growth and delivering on its vision to be “the game for all”.

The mission for the NSWRL is to nurture and grow Rugby League pathways that strengthen both our community and the game itself. This objective is grounded in our unwavering commitment to community, which remains central to everything we do. Within NSW, Rugby League continues to experience strong growth:

- » Rugby League has experienced continued participation growth since COVID
- » The playing population across NSW is forecast to grow by 10 per cent by 2030
- » The growing popularity has translated to ongoing growth in registered participants across the state, reaching over 117k in 2024

While we are excited by the future growth of Rugby League, we recognise that without proactive strategic action, this demand will create additional pressure on existing infrastructure and community facilities. Ensuring high-quality infrastructure across the network is crucial to creating strong, lifelong community experiences for everyone and all communities.

NSWRL wants to address the problem which has become more pronounced in recent seasons where games are cancelled because surfaces have been unable to cope with wet weather due to overuse.

Our new Infrastructure Strategy reinforces NSWRL’s commitment to all Rugby League clubs within New South Wales to ensure clubs continue to provide safe, inclusive environments for participants of all genders and backgrounds.

The cornerstone of the new Infrastructure Strategy is the establishment of the NSWRL Infrastructure Fund that will provide much-needed funding support to Rugby League community clubs across the state.

This strategy would not have been possible without the valuable input and contributions from key stakeholders across the NSWRL ecosystem, including our community club representatives, Local Councils, and State Government. Their insights have helped develop a strategy that will continue to benefit and serve the sport across the state for years to come.

I would also like to acknowledge The Gemba Group, one of Australia’s leading sport and entertainment consultancies, for their expertise, guidance, and support in developing the NSWRL Infrastructure Strategy.

NSWRL is fully committed to the implementation of this Infrastructure Strategy. We are confident that it will play a crucial role in creating a stronger foundation for thriving, inclusive and enjoyable Rugby League clubs across the state for years to come.

David Trodden
Chief Executive Officer

» CURRENT STATE

RUGBY LEAGUE'S POPULARITY CONTINUES TO GROW IN NSW

117k

Participants in 2024

58%

Growth in women and girls' participation since 2019

14.5%

Growth in total participants since 2019

661

Rugby League community venues in NSW/ACT

756

Full-sized playing fields (1.3k playing surfaces in total)

154

Participants per full sized playing field

609

New teams projected by 2031 (equivalent to ~+10.3k new participants)

» ISSUES AND HEADWINDS

What we are seeing with our Community Infrastructure?



What is coming our way?



» OVERVIEW OF NSWRL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT FUND

An effective statewide Infrastructure Strategy is required to support and enable the continual growth of Rugby League across NSW/ACT

WHAT IS THE INFRASTRUCTURE FUND?

The Infrastructure Investment Fund (IIF) provides financial assistance for all eligible Rugby League community clubs, across the state, with the aim of supporting the upgrade and improvement of their respective club facilities and infrastructure.

HOW WILL THE FUND WORK?

Fund creation:

- » Contributions will be made by NSWRL to the dedicated Infrastructure Investment Fund of up to \$2m
- » NSWRL will seek co-contributions from other parties to supplement the fund

Priority project selection and management:

- » The fund will be administered by an Infrastructure Investment Fund Committee, comprising of key representatives from NSWRL and co-contributors
- » Prior to the beginning of every financial year, the Infrastructure Investment Fund Committee will select priority projects to receive funding support based on key selection criteria aligned with NSWRL's Infrastructure Strategy

» DECISION MAKING AND APPROVALS PROCESS

1 INITIAL SCREENING

NSWRL staff to conduct an initial review of all submissions to ensure eligibility and compliance.

2 DETAILED REVIEW

The Infrastructure Investment Fund Committee will conduct a detailed evaluation of each proposal based on proposed selection criteria.

3 BOARD APPROVAL

Infrastructure Investment Fund Committee to recommend selected projects by end of financial year to NSWRL Board for final approval.

4 PROJECT MONITORING

Funded projects to be monitored to ensure the timely completion and compliance against criteria.

GUIDELINES FOR ELIGIBILITY

All Rugby League clubs across NSW and ACT are eligible to receive funding under the following guidelines and provisions:

- » Clubs have completed club facility audits and project priority submissions by end of respective financial year
- » Clear demonstration of alignment to both NSWRL Infrastructure Strategy and Strategic Plan
- » Typical funding amounts granted per project may vary from \$10,000 - \$500,000 with exceptions considered on an individual basis

SELECTION CRITERIA

PROJECT VALUE AND SCALE

Expected scale of the project and project capital required.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Extent of alignment to NSWRL Infrastructure Strategy.

PROJECT FEASIBILITY

Degree of effort for implementation and timelines.

CO-FUNDING POTENTIAL

To what extent are projects co-funded by other parties?

See NSWRL website for more details

INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The NSWRL Infrastructure strategy is underpinned by four strategic pillars and realised through 13 strategic priorities.

OUR VISION

All Rugby League Club facilities and infrastructure across NSW are supported to enable growth in club engagement and participation at all levels.

1 ELEVATE FACILITY PLAYING STANDARDS

OBJECTIVE Enable a safe playing experience across all NSW Rugby League clubs

- PRIORITIES**
1. Ensure regular auditing of all clubs across NSW to understand state of on-field conditions
 2. Allocate dedicated investment to specifically address unsafe facilities
 3. Establish partnerships to better maintain the condition of Rugby League pitches

- METRICS**
1. Number of guideline compliant venues
 2. Number of renewal projects delivered

2 CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE FACILITIES

OBJECTIVE Create more inclusive environments across all Rugby League clubs

- PRIORITIES**
1. Ensure the preferred facilities guidelines include requirements specifically for inclusive facilities
 2. Develop a new inclusive facility layout and blueprint
 3. Mandate all new NSWRL supported developments must adhere to gender inclusive guidelines

- METRICS**
1. Percentage of venues with gender neutral compliant facilities
 2. Amount in grants from inclusive female friendly facilities

3 UNLOCK ADDITIONAL CAPACITY

OBJECTIVE Grow capacity of Rugby League facilities to enable future growth

- PRIORITIES**
1. Identify and pursue expansion opportunities in-line with Government Planning Strategies, private development initiatives and growth corridors
 2. Develop stronger relationships with other sporting codes that share facilities and better understand and define roles and responsibilities
 3. Establish an infrastructure fund to invest in the development of new and existing facilities

- METRICS**
1. Number of new venues and facilities
 2. Dollar value allocated towards a dedicated Infrastructure Fund

4 CREATE A MORE CONNECTED NETWORK

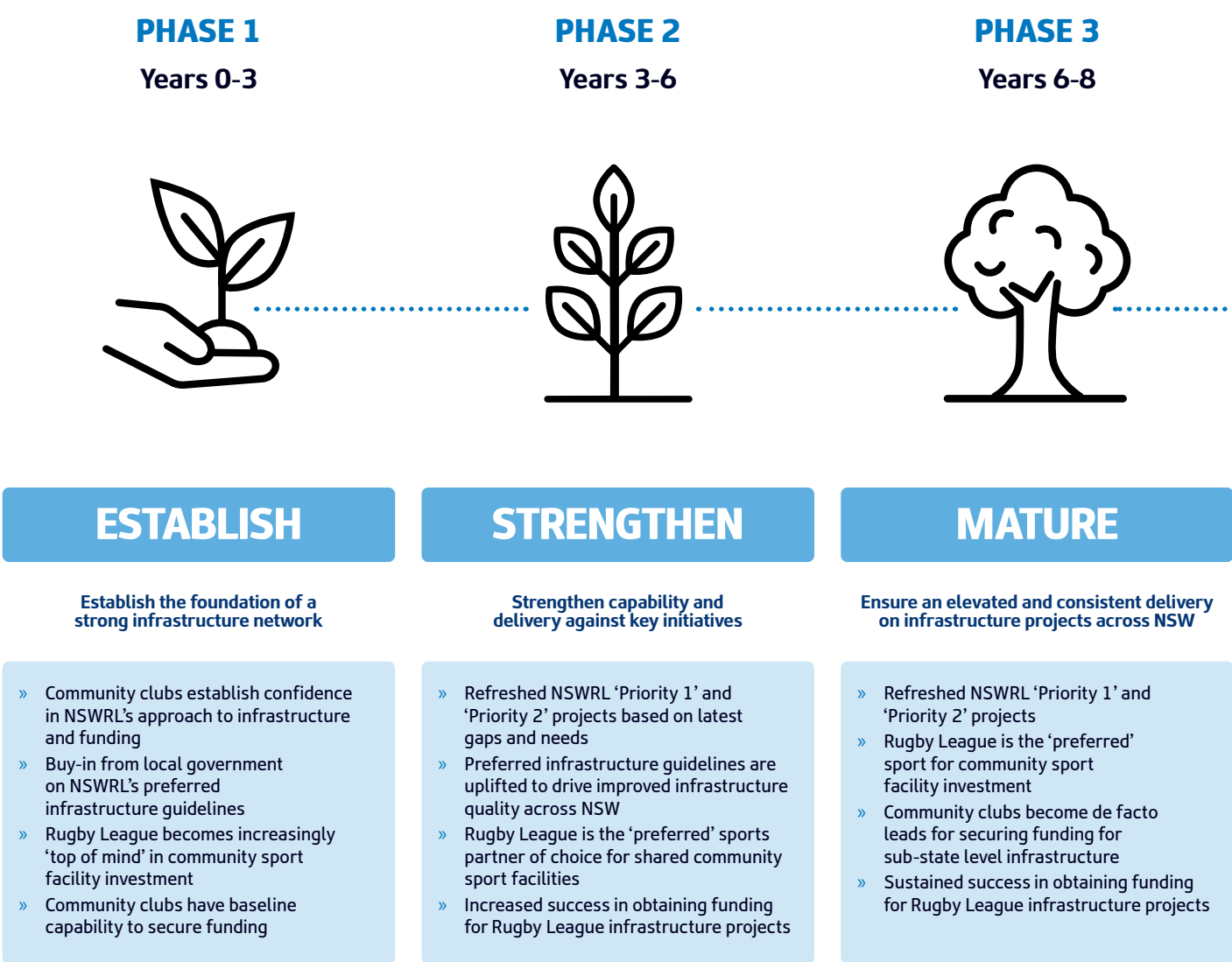
OBJECTIVE Create a more connected and aligned environment between NSWRL, Clubs and Government

- PRIORITIES**
1. Establish and grow the capability of a dedicated NSWRL infrastructure team
 2. Create a stronger connection and alignment between all NSWRL stakeholders
 3. Articulate the economic and social benefits that clubs provide to better advocate the value of Rugby League
 4. Ensure greater access and visibility of available grants

- METRICS**
1. Minimum number of resources hired
 2. Percentage of uplift in grants access and received

» IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Infrastructure Strategy will be executed across the next 6-8 years.



INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY DETAILS

1. Elevate facility playing standards
2. Create more inclusive facilities
3. Unlock additional capacity
4. Create a more connected network

» ELEVATE FACILITY PLAYING STANDARDS

1

Ensuring NSW Rugby League facilities meet a suitable minimum required playing standard is essential to support future demand.

Ensure regular auditing of all clubs across NSW to understand state of on-field conditions

KEY INITIATIVES

1. Develop a standardised audit reporting tool to evaluate the current state of Rugby League Facilities
2. Provide communications and training to all relevant stakeholders to use the audit tool
3. Ensure and incentivise all clubs conduct an audit at least every two years

Allocate dedicated investment to specifically address unsafe facilities

KEY INITIATIVES

1. Build on existing NRL facility guidelines to create NSWRL specific infrastructure tiers that reflect the needs of NSWRL clubs
2. Develop a communications plan to ensure the guidelines are socialised with key stakeholders
3. Explore options for NSWRL to generate and/or allocate dedicated capital for unsafe facilities (e.g. facilities levy)
4. Develop a broader pipeline of projects to address these gaps and weaknesses

Establish partnerships to better maintain the condition of Rugby League pitches

KEY INITIATIVES

1. Identify clubs that have shared facilities with other major sporting codes to understand field usage
2. Develop partnerships with local businesses to establish a preferred vendor list for field and turf maintenance for clubs to easier leverage
3. Establish stronger relationships with Local Council to create more effective support for pitch maintenance related requirements
4. Leverage NSWRL dedicated infrastructure resources to support accessing grants and funding relevant to pitch and turf maintenance

» CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE FACILITIES

2

Creating inclusive facilities has been identified as one of the most significant issues to address to cater for growth in participation.

Ensure the preferred facilities guidelines include requirements specifically for inclusive facilities

KEY INITIATIVES

1. Evaluate the needs of female Rugby League participants via consultation with both current and past participants
2. Benchmark the state of 'inclusive' club infrastructure across other community sports to understand 'best practice'
3. Build and update the existing NRL facility guidelines, as needed, based on these agreed definitions

Develop a new inclusive facility, layout and blueprint

KEY INITIATIVES

1. Develop a clear and aligned definition of inclusive and female friendly facilities
2. Co-develop an inclusive facility layout and design blueprint with Local Government
3. Undertake feasibility studies to understand the viability and potential for roll-out of the new facility design
4. Seek formal endorsement and approval of the standardised facility design
5. Develop an engagement plan with relevant stakeholders socialise the facility design eligible clubs

Mandate all new NSWRL supported developments must adhere to gender inclusive guidelines

KEY INITIATIVES

1. Announce the mandate for all NSWRL supported developments
2. Develop a consistent NSWRL design for gender neutral (or female) change facilities and all abilities inclusive facilities for players and officials across all new developments
3. Circulate guidelines to community clubs and Local Councils to inform future design and requirements

»

UNLOCK ADDITIONAL CAPACITY

3

Identifying additional field space is essential to unlocking a greater ability to service the growing demand for Rugby League participation.

Identify and pursue expansion opportunities in-line with Government Planning Strategies, private development initiatives and growth corridors

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Establish stronger connections with Local Government to seek greater support and advocacy for Rugby League infrastructure projects
2.

Understand the future pipeline of Government projects to identify and potentially prioritise infrastructure projects located in regions with high demand for Rugby League participation
3.

Identify and build relationships with private developers to better position Rugby League facilities within new developments

Develop stronger relationships with other sporting codes that share facilities and better understand and define roles and responsibilities

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Identify and prioritise common issues from clubs that share facilities with other community sports
2.

Develop a stakeholder engagement plan with other relevant codes (SSOs) to align on roles, responsibilities and usage requirements
3.

Identify opportunities to collaborate with other ‘outdoor pitch sports’ to unlock investment for multi-sport venues
4.

Establish a more regular and fixed meeting cadence to identify, discuss and prioritise common issues between codes
5.

Explore opportunities to leverage and utilise underutilised sporting facilities and pitches

Establish an Infrastructure Fund to invest in the development of new and existing facilities

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Establish an Investment Fund Committee
2.

Co-design an endorsed investment framework
3.

Continue to build an emerging set of key priority projects for the Investment Committee to consider
4.

Develop a business case to support and justify and assess the ROI of contributed capital from relevant stakeholders to support the fund

»

CREATE A MORE CONNECTED NETWORK

4

The delivery of the infrastructure strategy will be underpinned by creating a stronger and more connected environment.

Establish and grow the capability of a dedicated NSWRL infrastructure team

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Identify the required capabilities and expertise to deliver the agreed infrastructure initiatives and priorities
2.

Agree on the roles and responsibilities of the new role(s) that will form the new infrastructure team to clearly identify what support they will and will not provide
3.

Employ centralised NSWRL infrastructure resources to support execution of the Infrastructure Strategy

Create a stronger connection and alignment between all NSWRL stakeholders

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Establish a government relations capability (likely within the centralised infrastructure resources as per initiative 4.1)
2.

Present NSWRL Infrastructure Strategy to Local Council and Government to generate buy in and raise priority projects
3.

Develop and strengthen relationships with Local Council and State Government
4.

Appoint one ‘Infrastructure Champion’ for each operating zone and establish a recurring statewide Infrastructure meeting cadence between the ‘Champions’ and dedicated NSWRL resources to monitor delivery and grow the networks of relationships

Articulate the economic and social benefits that clubs provide to better advocate the value of Rugby League

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Establish community and club experience and satisfaction surveys to monitor the club experience (with infrastructure being a key component of the club experience survey)
2.

Conduct social health and impact study to articulate the economic and social value of Rugby League infrastructure and activities across all NSW regions
3.

Establish stronger connections with Local Council to understand community sentiment towards infrastructure projects and champion future infrastructure initiatives

Ensure greater access and visibility of available grants

- KEY INITIATIVES
1.

Establish an easy to access grants portal (to include e.g. grant webinars) to provide greater visibility, information and support for clubs when applying for relevant grants
2.

Develop a set of standard funding documents and other templates for both the Infrastructure team and community clubs to improve efficiency in accessing and securing grants
3.

Promote these resources to be used by community clubs to support future funding bids





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