

The Backbone of regional community spirit: Gippsland Football Netball Clubs



Saturday Game Day between two Mid-Gippsland Football Netball League clubs

Football netball clubs within Gippsland are more than a sporting club, they are the heart of the community.

The cold and wet final training session of the week before a game against long-time rivals, and the excitement of hearing the team list read out at club dinners. Thursday nights are bustling at the local football netball club around Gippsland.

Football and netball clubs throughout the region have always been a community. From clubs with hundreds of years of history, to clubs with fifty years or less of history. Locals from Gippsland towns come together on a Saturday to barrack for their club. Providing a space that supports social connection and mental wellbeing.

However, these clubs are facing challenges that they may not have anticipated 30 years ago, with increased costs and volunteer shortages.

Grace Berryman is a B-Grade netball player, at her local club Fish Creek Football Netball club.

Berryman was part of Fish Creek's winning B-grade grand final team last year and has played at the club where her family has played for years.

Being part of her local football netball club has shaped a big part of who Berryman is. Through the club she has learned the importance of volunteering for the club but also for the local community. Berryman said “second family” when describing what the club means to her. A feeling that many other Gippslanders have.

Fish Creek Football Netball Club has a long-standing history, playing their first game at Foster in 1891 and made local headlines with the club's grand final successes. Over recent years the club has made state headlines with an article in The Age published in 2023, when a fire broke out in the club rooms destroying honor boards and trophies.

“I still remember the day the club rooms burnt down. I struggled to believe it.” - Grace Berryman.

This tragedy hurt the club. With the club having to use the local bowls club facilities so the club could still function, which they're still using today. However, this tragedy turned into a show of strength from the town and surrounding regional towns.



Image: Fish Creek Football Netball Club canteen (left) and the temporary sheds for footballers (right)

Local builders and electricians helped the club set up temporary sheds for the footballers' facilities. But further, the community started a go fund me for people to contribute what they could into helping the club pay for repairs and damages. This show of strength demonstrates the importance that football netball clubs have to Gippsland communities, with community members rallying to help and donate to the club.

“You get to know all these people purely by going to football and netball.” - Brett Tessari, West Gippsland Football Netball League Operations Manager.

Gippsland communities become part of people's identity and social life, with these clubs being a place for people to socialize, strengthen and create relationships with friends and family.



Image: Meeniyian Dumbalk United gate where tickets are sold for the club raffle every home game

Meeniyian Dumbalk United (MDU) netball football club is in a small South Gippsland town called Meeniyian. This small-town club prides themselves on being a family oriented and inclusive club, being a support network for locals helping them stay connected to the club.

The connection stems deeper with social functions and game day socializing strengthening the sense of belonging in the club and town. Recently MDU had a past players day where past players could come and train and connect with current and old teammates. This also allowed them to connect with family members in the club.

“Obviously your social functions and we've, as a club, tried to connect with our past a lot more.” - David Trotman Meeniyian Dumbalk United Football Netball club Co-president.

Local football clubs are facing challenges such as lack of volunteers and decreasing club loyalty.

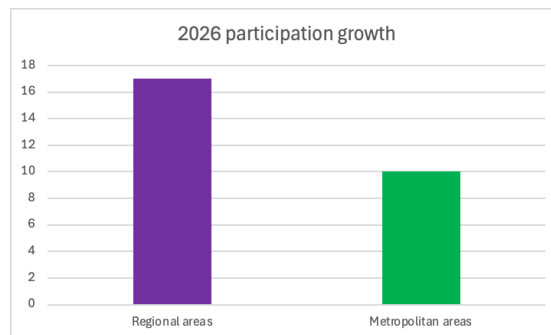
[Volunteer rates](#) across Australia have been in decline for some time now, with increasing living pressures and time poverty being key factors for the decline. With households often having a dual income and the individuals who once volunteered are now getting older, it's harder to find people to take their spots. With people being more time-sensitive and unlikely to contribute. Terry Ginnane, local Leongatha supporter, says that society has changed with people not wanting to take on an extra role outside of their work commitments.

“Young people are not stepping up.” - Terry Ginnane, Leongatha Football Netball club supporter.

Another challenge that smaller country Gippsland clubs face is the high cost for players now. Many smaller clubs can't afford large financial payments to their players unlike other clubs that have more money. These small clubs also struggle to recruit school leavers. With these clubs being in small towns they are unable to offer employment or a form of further education, without having to travel a distance. This means that young people must leave the area, leaving their club to play in a metropolitan area, or at a club with money that can support them or closer to the city.

“Many (young people) find other clubs in the metropolitan area and do not return.” - Terry Ginnane.

These clubs foster a connection with their members, creating a sense of belonging, which many in regional and rural areas long for. In 2023, [Vic Health](#) reported that participation in organized sport in Victoria was higher in regional areas with 17% regional growth, compared to metropolitan areas with only 10% of growth. These results reflect Australia's love for sport in regional areas.



Graph: Representing the contrast in growth between metropolitan and regional areas

Last year, as a nation [the AFL](#) reported that participation in Aussie rules football was at an all-time high, with 625,000 football players taking the field in 2025. A seven percent increase from 2024. Netball Australia's focus over the last few years has been building growth in audience and attendance. It's been reported by [Netball Australia](#) that 2025 was the biggest Suncorp Super Netball season ever with the league being the most attended Australian women's sport. Last year's success of viewership of the Suncorp Super Netball league and participation in AFL, solidifies Australia's love for netball and AFL, only encouraging others to play, whether they be young or old.

Despite these challenges, football and netball clubs' role within Gippsland is more than the sport. It's the community connection and sense of belonging it brings with it. For many, going to watch the local football and netball is a Saturday tradition. Whether it be sitting in the car or talking to old team mates at the bar. Watching the game till the final siren sounds. Win, lose or draw, football and netball clubs in Gippsland the love for the sport is because of the community that comes with it.

“You go around from town to town, and you see the same people from each community support their club.” - Brett Tessari.