



# FOOTBALL VICTORIA

## Optimal Referee Model Review- Key Themes

SBP ADVISORY - COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE - DECEMBER 2021



SBP Advisory

# INTRODUCTION

SBP Advisory (SBP) has been engaged by Football Victoria (FV) to conduct a review of refereeing in Victoria. The review explored all key components of the referee ecosystem to identify how the current structure and pathways for referees will need to evolve in order to meet the increasing demand for referees driven by increased football participation in Victoria.

## Key elements of the review process include:

- Reviewed key documents including previous referee reviews, competition reviews, FV's strategic plan and FV referee datasets.
- Conducted 26 in-depth stakeholder interviews with key referee stakeholders and other sporting organisations.
- Analysed 335 responses to an online strategic survey with all current and former Victorian referees since 2016.
- Facilitated four workshops with key referee stakeholder groups.

After an exhaustive process, a final report was produced. The final report includes ten key themes which are broken up into four key strategic priority areas and the following pages outline the key findings and recommendations in each area.

# KEY THEMES

## CULTURE AND RESPECT



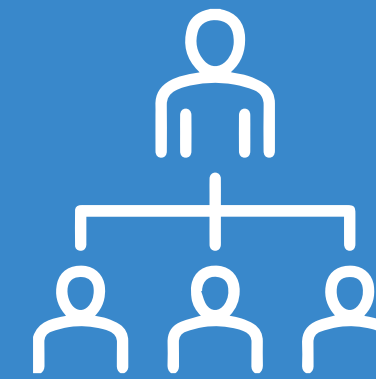
- Culture towards Referees
- Referee Welfare
- Club Responsibility and Accountability

## DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT



- Recruitment and Retention
- Referee Coaches, Assessors and Mentors
- Referee Training and Development

## STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION



- Branch Structure
- Appointments and Payments

## EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES



- Women and Girls
- Regional Support

# CULTURE AND RESPECT

## Culture Towards Referees

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- A culture of referee abuse exists within football.
  - 38% of active referees reported being verbally or physically abused while refereeing.
  - 32% reported being subject to verbal or physical abuse at least once a month or more.
- Alarming, only 54% of referees reported this abuse to FV or their Referee Branch.

### We are committing to:

- Refresh and relaunch the existing Respect campaign, with the purpose of helping club's understand their responsibility in protecting referee welfare.
- Investigate the use of an app or other options where referees can provide a quick assessment of their game and match-day experience.

## Referee Welfare

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- The current levels of support available to referees when they experience abuse is limited.
- Many referees reported assisting the discipline process to be an intimidating experience with little or no support offered to them.

### We are committing to:

- Football Victoria to invest in the training and development of welfare support officers.
- Introduction of a third-party welfare service for referees to access support by qualified professionals.
- Review the current GDT system to ensure there is greater support for referees.

# CULTURE AND RESPECT

## Club Responsibility and Accountability

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- Some clubs fail to prepare a safe working environment for referees. Many referees said it was unclear or difficult to identify a club official to address any of their concerns whilst referees also reported that some clubs did not take the need to provide Ground Marshals seriously.
- In addition, some clubs fail to set up the grounds or provide adequate changing rooms for referees, exacerbating the challenges they face.

### We are committing to:

- Develop training and accreditation for club Ground Marshals.
- Create an incentive program to reward clubs for consistent good behaviour.
- Hold clubs accountable for preparing match-ready facilities including adequate changing rooms, correctly setting up the field of play and providing Ground Marshals.

## Recruitment and Retention

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- Recruitment has remained consistent since 2015 whilst the number of referees leaving the game has increased.

#### Key factors contributing to this trend are:

- Consistent negative referee experiences,
- Lack of support and guidance for new referees, and;
- Limited pathways for referees to enter the game.

**Note:** All key themes identified in the review contribute to FV's ability to retain referees

### We are committing to:

- Expand the roll out of the Referee Schools Program in 2022.
- Deliver a minimum of 4 development sessions per year specifically for first year referees.
- Contact all referees who do not re-register for season 2022 to investigate the reasons for discontinuing and identify any consistent themes.
- Instigate targeted recruitment programs for example targeting ex-players, clubs and football participants interested in officiating.





# DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

## Referee Training and Development

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- The majority of referees felt the training and education provided was adequate.
- However, areas such as the duration of the Level 4 practical sessions, the mentoring of first year referees in only their first two games and training venues were identified as key areas for improvement.

### We are committing to:

- Expand the supervision and mentoring of first year referees beyond their first two matches.
- Conduct an audit of current referee training facilities.
- Expand the duration of the practical session in the beginner referee course.

## Referee Coaches, Assessors and Mentors:

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- A key limiting factor of the development of refereeing in Victoria is the low numbers of referee coaches, assessors and mentors compared to active referees. This means that many striving referees don't have access to regular game-day development opportunities

### We are committing to:

- Develop training resources to upskill more referees to become referee coaches.
- Review the existing coaching procedures to provide greater flexibility and less time constraints.
- Expand the online self-paced learning material for all referees.

# STRUCTURE, ADMINISTRATION & EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES

## Branch Structure

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- The refereeing community was serviced for many years by dedicated and hard-working volunteers in the branches.
- Whilst this structure still functions effectively in regional Victoria, Metropolitan Melbourne has seen significant increases in expectations on referees and subsequently requires a more professional structure.

### We are committing to:

- Restructure the existing metropolitan branches to become Training Centres where the focus is on training, development and welfare support, with an increased level of support from FV.
- FV to formalise roles and descriptions within new training centres for a greater level of consistency across all regions
- FV Referees Department to be more actively involved with the new training centres to develop a stronger relationship with all referees.

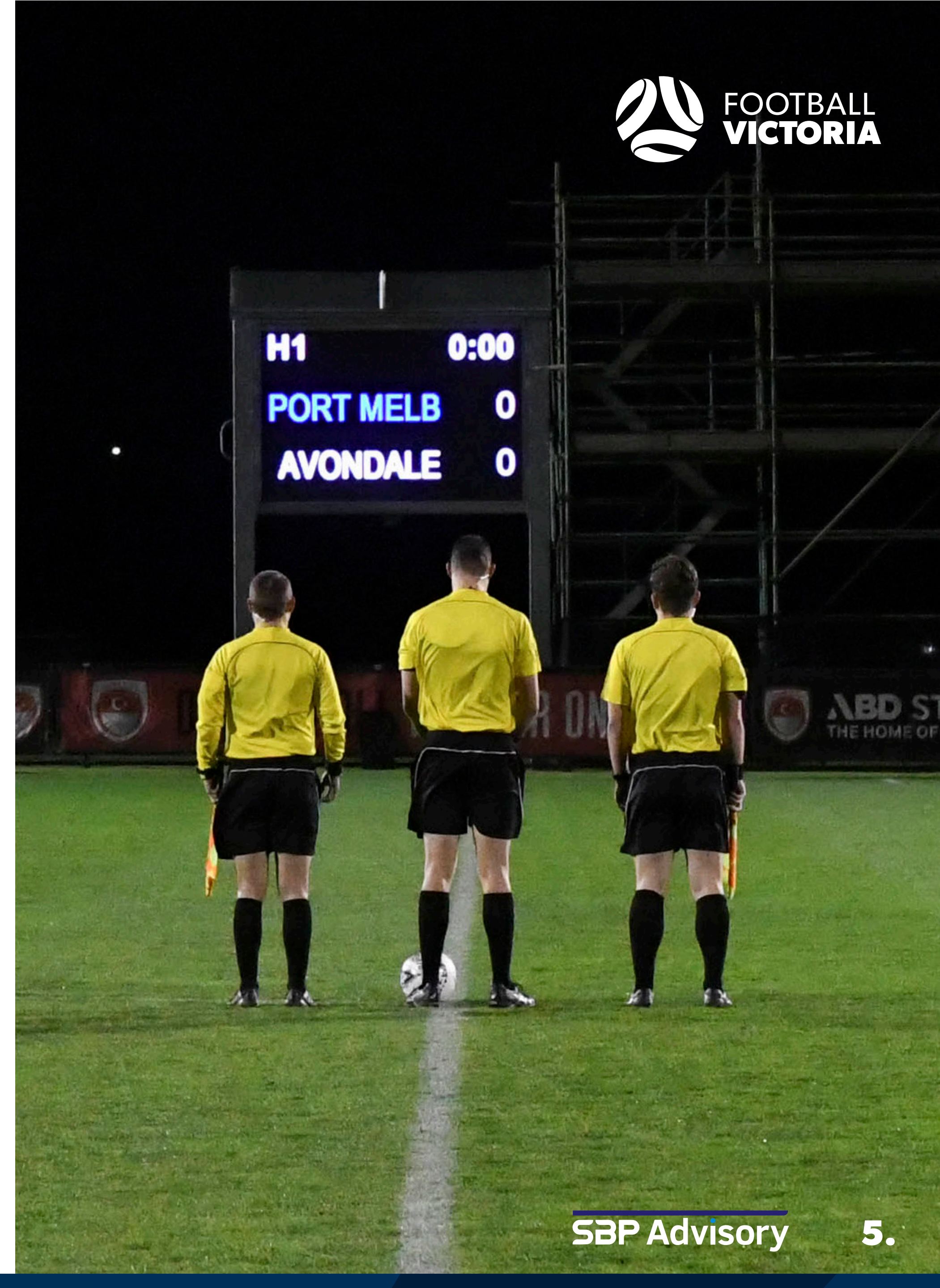
## Appointments and Payments

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- The current appointment system requires high levels of manual oversight and does not provide the level of visibility or detail required to effectively manage and appoint referees.
- As a result, FV has outsourced a large proportion of the responsibility to contractors who experience pressure to cover the maximum number of games per week and who aren't supported with the necessary technology or information to complete the job at the level expected by FV and the refereeing community.

### We are committing to:

- Centralise the administration and oversight of metropolitan referee appointments.
- FV to clearly define and communicate the referee pathway and appointment process.
- FV to explore alternative appointment systems that can better service the refereeing community.



# STRUCTURE, ADMINISTRATION & EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES



## Women and Girls

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- Women and Girls are underrepresented within the refereeing cohort and experience a number of challenges in their participation. These include:
  - Incidents of sexual harassment on the field and in referee branches
  - Being pigeon-holed to female-only games
  - Being told their position within the branch is not 'real', and;
  - Wearing male referee uniforms that are uncomfortable and unflattering.

### We are committing to:

- Invest, prioritise and resource the recruitment, development and support of female referees.
- Providing all referees and training centre staff with a clear reporting process on all member protection matters including discrimination, harassment, bullying and abuse.
- Compulsory training for all training centre staff regarding expectations of them and how to deal with reports of inappropriate behaviour.
- Investigate the creation of a specific Women and Girls Sub-Academy, to be renamed Women and Girls Development Program.
- Engage a female referee working group to redesign the current referee uniform.

## Regional Support

### The Refereeing Community told us:

- Regional referees do not believe there is an equitable pathway for them to reach the same level as their colleagues in Metropolitan Melbourne.
- The inequity is felt mainly through access to training and development, being pigeon-holed to regional matches and access to fitness testing.

### We are committing to:

- FV to integrate development opportunities for regional and metropolitan referees by providing equitable opportunities and access to fitness tests, appointments and training.
- FV to continue facilitating referee theory training utilising the hybrid model (in-person and online).

