The first decade of the Football Federation Australia (FFA) era 2004-15 has produced the most cohesive and progressive period ever seen in the administration of Australian Football at national, state and territory and local level.

The headline achievements include gaining membership of the Asian Football Confederation, qualifying for six FIFA World Cups for men and women, and establishing Australia’s first fully professional competition, the A-League.

Historically, the administration of Football has been fragmented and fractious. The first national body only lasted 10 years before being superseded in 1921. In 1960, Australia was expelled from FIFA for three years because of administrative in fighting between rival governing bodies. In 2003, a Federal Government inquiry resulted in the national body being disbanded and the demise of the National Soccer League.
Australian Football has used a federated model of national, states and territories governing bodies since the first state body was established in NSW in 1882.

Local associations and regional zones were set up within the states and territories as Football expanded and from time to time informal groups of clubs have augmented the formal structures.

Today, there is one national governing body, nine state and territory federations and over 100 district, regional and local zones and associations.

In addition there are about 100 unaffiliated organisations covering schools, regional, ethnic community, corporate and church Football competitions. There are also a large number of private providers who operate events and competitions.

In summary, the administration of Football has grown in an organic way to meet local demand under the governance of a traditional federated model. Much of the boom in participation over the past two decades has occurred in areas not controlled by the official structures of the game, such as schools and indoor and the array of casual, church and ethnic community competitions.

The question for Australian Football: is the current model with its overlapping official jurisdictions and many unaffiliated organisations the right one for the 20 years ahead and the century beyond?
CHALLENGES

Based on the direct feedback of the game’s administrators, public Whole of Football Plan forums and online portal results, Football’s administration faces these challenges;

- The sheer scale and size of the Football community place enormous pressure on resources and capabilities. Football has over two million participants, with around 600,000 in highly organised, registered outdoor club competitions. Each and every individual wants a quality experience and value for subscription fees. No other Australian sport is required to service as many participants.

- The geographical spread of the Football community over a huge island continent is a burden when trying to achieve equality of access, consistent quality experience and to be on the ground to help grow Football in rural and regional communities, especially those with indigenous populations.

- In some areas there are five levels to Football’s administration. This can result in five conflicting perspectives, five different administrative fees and five different sets of behaviour. This structure confuses government and is not delivering the most cost effective and efficient system it can and should to its participants.

- Football has been unable to deliver the commercial outcomes that are necessary to reduce the cost of participation and improve community facilities. Brand and organisational fragmentation affects the game’s ability to garner, maximise and retain corporate support. Football has many mouths to feed and not enough to go around.

- The game’s objective to be the largest and most popular sport in Australia means converting more participants into fans, but the tangible links between Top Tier clubs and community Football remain underdeveloped and this is inhibiting growth.

- Overlapping jurisdictions and cluttered engagement across the Football Community has made it difficult for participants to choose suitable participation opportunities. For example, the feedback from school administrators speaks of confusion and lack of clear direction. Furthermore, the multitude of service providers makes it difficult for participants to feel part of something bigger.

- National programs, such as the roll-out of the National Premier Leagues, should be able to be implemented in as timely, efficient, cost effective and nationally consistent way as possible. Administration in this context should be an enabler of positive initiatives not an obstacle. The focus on the experience of the participant is often not top of the agenda.
Private providers offer a range of Football services including Football camps and training programs. By their very “for profit” nature, the bulk of private providers are focused on generating revenue not the development of the game. The majority of social Football is also currently delivered by private providers.

Schools deliver Football to thousands of children around the country. Currently, a wide range of stakeholders offer services to schools; as a result Football lacks one clear coherent direction in schools.

**TARGETS**

Once the content of the Whole of Football Plan is digested by Football’s stakeholders and then translated into specific strategies and action plans for the next few years, it’s important that there is also clarity over the roles and responsibilities for those entrusted with delivering the strategies to remove unnecessary duplication.

While no single answer emerged during the consultation to the question “how should the game be administered”, there was a broad consensus on the principles that should underpin the administration of the game and any reform of current administrative and organisational structures.

The overriding common themes were “streamlining, national consistency, unity of purpose and efficiency”.

There was also consensus that change is and should be a constant and the administrators of the game at all levels have the responsibility to take up the challenge on an ongoing basis to seek, identify and adopt continuous improvement measures.

This requires an understanding of the current system, identification of current roadblocks or simply areas where things could work better, and a commitment to change to bring about better results.

A new national working party representing Football’s key stakeholders is to be established to undertake a review of the current model.
There are many administration models that are available to Football as the game’s stakeholders take a longer term view of what’s best to meet the game’s challenges and opportunities.

An Australian Sports Commission discussion paper identifies three possible models of administration that can form the basis of formal consultation across the game:

1. **Federated model**: This model is based on a single national body with affiliated state/territory member federations, each with their own Board of directors, operating as separate businesses. The traditional federated structure creates layers of administration and management.

   This structure leads to duplication in strategic planning, reporting, financial management, marketing and commercialisation and therefore a large number of inefficiencies for the entire sport. Such inefficiencies often impact on a sport’s ability in generating sufficient revenues to be a sustainable business, as such, sports operating under this model are synonymous with ‘bottom-up’ funding.

2. **National Behaviour model (or One Management model)**: This model is based on a federated governance structure, but the administration is based on centralised services and management structures. State/territory member federations are still governed as separate organisations.

   This model demonstrates behaviours such as trust, transparency, integrity, collaboration and recognition. Some of the results from the alignment include: a collective targeted investment approach; shared services; one strategic plan for the sport; a more agile organisation; and a collaborative approach to budgeting where funding is allocated on merit to projects aligned with the highest whole of sport priorities.

3. **Unified model**: This model removes the administrative inefficiencies inherent in the federated structure and retains the one management efficiencies of the National Behaviour model. This model delivers substantial advantages from the perspective of strategic direction and operational implementation. Each state/territory member federation operates as a branch of the single national body. State committees play an advisory consultative role providing the national body and its state officials critical local guidance. The model adopts a unified management structure where finances and other services are centrally pooled.