



New South Wales Fencing Strategic Plan 2022 – 2032

Our Vision

To be the strongest fencing State in Australia in participation and performance. To lead Australia's efforts to make a mark in international fencing.

We aim to achieve these goals by promoting fencing as a sport open to all, embracing everyone who wants to fence, teaching them how to fence to the best of their desire and ability, presenting competitions to test their skill and providing pathways to success for fencers with the potential to compete against the best in Australia and the world.

Our Values

A culture fostering teamwork, inclusiveness, integrity, a sense of community, respect and care for each other.

An inclusive sport welcoming everyone from all cultural backgrounds so everyone feels welcome, respected, cared for and treated equally.

A fair and safe environment for all fencers, especially children and young people.

To strive for success and pursue excellence in everything we do.

To uphold the proud traditions of fencing – respect for opponents, respect for referees, respect for the rules, respect for fair play and courtesy to all.

The horizon beckons

The horizon for this Strategic Plan is the 2032 Brisbane Olympics.

We want NSW fencers to stand the best chance for selection to represent Australia.

The path to the Brisbane Olympics starts now – the athletes who will be fencing for Australia are already in their teens and early 20s.

Between now and then, our fencers have many opportunities and challenges. There will be two other Olympics – Paris in 2024, Los Angeles in 2028 – interspersed with 11 World and Asian Championships, 11 Australian Championships and numerous other international, national and state competitions.

But the 2032 Brisbane Olympics are not a mesmerising goal. Only a select few will qualify. In the meantime, we must focus on developing our sport for the benefit of all participants. In this sense humble beginners are as important as elite athletes.

Nor can the 2032 Games be the limit of our ambition. Beyond the Games, there will be more targets to set, more mile posts to reach and more achievements to record.

In the meantime, our main work will continue to be the development of fencing for all ages, attracting new entrants to our sport, raising proficiency in fencing and coaching and providing pathways to success for our high performance athletes.

The task for NSW Fencing today is to build on what has been achieved so far and grow even stronger and more successful in the future.

We can do this with a clear-eyed vision of what we want the future of our sport to be and how we are going to reach the goals we set.

Achieving the vision will be an ongoing process over the next decade. This Plan will need to be continually reviewed and adjusted.

There are many variables that will need to be taken into account, some outside our control. As the pandemic of the past two years has shown, the unexpected may occur.

But there is much we can control – the standards we set, the governance protocols we follow, the quality of management we apply, the effort we put into professional development, the resources we can muster to improve our facilities.

The NSWFA Strategic Plan is consistent with and supportive of the AFF's Strategic Plan.

NSWFA will support the AFF in its role of managing and developing fencing in all its aspects across Australia.

Strategic priorities

Priority 1 – enhance governance

NSWFA will advance fencing if it is led and directed in accordance with enduring principles of good governance and contemporary governance standards.

Essentially, these require Directors to make decisions and apply them in the interests of all members and for the overall benefit of the sport.

Directors must ensure that the organisation complies with legal and regulatory obligations.

Guidance on developing and maintaining a good governance framework is offered by the Australian Sports Commission (SportAUS) through its Sports Governance Framework and the NSW Office of Sport through its Sports Governance Capability Framework. These are key points of reference for NSWFA in developing and maintaining proper standards of governance.

The primary governance document for NSWFA is the Constitution which sets out membership criteria, the roles and responsibilities of directors and procedures for the conduct of general meetings and election of directors.

The Constitution is underpinned by a suite of governance policies, chief among them:

- NSWFA Governance Policy & Procedures
- The NSWFA Code of Conduct
- The AFF Member Protection Policy (which covers NSWFA)
- NSWFA Child Safeguarding Policy and Child Safe Practices
- Social Media Policy

- Privacy Policy

These are kept under review, updated as necessary and published on the NSWFA website.

The most recent review of the Constitution was in 2016 and changes were approved by a general meeting of members.

Governance tasks

- In 2022, review the NSWFA constitution and assess its continued conformity with the SportAUS and NSW Office of Sport good governance principles. Present any proposed modifications to a general meeting of members in 2023.
- Keep other governance policies under ongoing review to ensure relevance to contemporary sport governance principles.
- Prepare a Governance Briefing Kit to ensure members who nominate for election to the Board are aware of the responsibilities and obligations they are taking on.
- Encourage Directors to undertake professional development courses in good governance and financial management.

Priority 2 - Increase participation

An over-arching goal is to increase participation and grow the capacity of our sport.

There is potential to achieve a higher profile for fencing among the panoply of sports that Australians engage in.

The key drivers of participation are:

- Visibility. Raising awareness of fencing as a sport that anyone can take up and enjoy
- Image. Promoting fencing as a healthy and attractive sport with good values – courtesy and respect – for children and adults
- Accessibility. Providing more opportunities for people to fence in metropolitan and regional areas via clubs, schools and NSW Fencing Centre programs.
- Viability. In terms of cost in money and time, making fencing as economically viable for families as possible

Participation targets

2022 – recover NSWFA membership to pre-Covid levels. Target: 1,000 members.

2023 on – increase total membership by 10% per year on average to double 2021 membership by 2032. Target: 2,000 members.

Priority 3 – Keep financially strong

NSWFA operates on a tight budget with annual surpluses (profit) averaging less than 5% over the past decade. This has been achieved through careful budget management and control of costs while keeping the price of participation as low as possible.

As we enter a new period of potential expansion post-COVID, NSWFA must continue to apply robust budget management to ensure financial stability and sustainability while seeking to build reserves to fund future priorities.

In this task, while the Finance Director and Finance Manager do the heavy lifting of budget planning, financial oversight and day to day administration of accounts, all Directors share a responsibility to understand NSWFA's financial position and to agree on future financial goals.

Financial goals:

- Achieve a 5-10% increase in revenue and surplus each year.
- Build and maintain cash reserves equivalent to not less than 3 months operating costs in the event of unforeseen crises (e.g. COVID-19).
- Before 2024, investment in professional resources, primarily the coaching team remains the No.1 priority
- Longer term, allocate at least 50% of the annual surplus to a Development Fund ear-marked for facility expansion, equipment purchase, coach training and club development.
- Continue to invest in professional resources, primarily the coaching team.

Priority 4 - Enhance performance

Performance is the outcome of cohesive team work. The commitment, grit and persistence of the athletes, together with leadership and guidance from a quality coaching team and support from parents and the wider fencing community, are the essential ingredients of success.

Of course at different levels, either at the grass-roots, community level in schools and clubs, or our high performance athletes at state, national and international level, the expectation of performance varies.

However, one thing is in common across the spectrum: good coaches are the glue that holds fencing together and the key to attracting, retaining and inspiring athletes.

While continuing to place an emphasis on training local coaches, we also have the option of tapping into international talent in the future as our coaching team grows and finances allow.

NSWFA will continue to support the AFF High Performance Program and the selected NSW fencers who participate in the program and represent Australia.

Performance targets:

- Each year, aim to win all of the Australian championship points trophies in all age groups.
- Aim to win at least half of the gold medals in individual and team events at Australian championships in all age groups.
- NSW fencers comprise at least half of the fencers selected for the AFF High Performance Program.
- NSW fencers achieve top 32 results in Asian Zone Championships and top 64 results in World Championships, World Cups and Grand Prix events.
- NSW fencers qualify for the 2024, 2028 and 2032 Olympics.

Weapon equity:

NSWFA is committed to giving all fencers, across all three weapons, both genders and all age groups an equal opportunity to access available resources at state level and compete at state competitions. Our objective is to ensure that when Australian fencers are chosen for the 2032 Olympics each NSW fencer with potential to fence at Olympic level will have been given an even chance to stake their claim for selection.

Priority 5 – Maintain a safe and welcoming sport environment

The physical safety of fencers is protected as much as practically possible by equipment standards, the rules of fencing and safe conduct of training and competitions. These standards and rules are kept under review by the FIE and applied in Australia.

Beyond physical safety, as in other sports, the personal and emotional well-being of fencers has become more important in recent years.

Like other sports, fencing has an obligation to protect everyone who engages in our sport against discrimination, harassment and abuse. Especially so for children and young people.

It is in our best interests for fencing to earn a reputation of being a safe place and an activity where parents can have confidence their children will be well looked after.

A suite of policies developed by the AFF and NSWFA, including the AFF Member Protection Policy, the NSWFA Code of Conduct, the NSWFA Child Safeguarding Policy and Child Safe Practices and the NSWFA Social Media Policy has been prepared and communicated to the fencing community.

These policies will be kept under review during the course of this Plan. Meanwhile, there will be an ongoing effort to educate the fencing community to watch out for each other and keep everyone safe.

Safety Goals

In 2023, complete the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Policy including:

- Developing a network of Member Protection Information Officers (MPIO) qualified via the Play by the Rules/Sport Integrity Australia online training course. Ideally, every club should have at least one MPIO.
- Encouraging all coaches, officials and volunteers to sign an undertaking to know and abide by the Child Safeguarding Policy.
- Present regular member protection/child safeguarding online information webinars.
- There are zero instances of child abuse, alleged or proven.
- Encourage each club to appoint a Safety Officer to monitor safe practices to avoid accidents and injury.
- There are zero instances of serious injury caused by a failure of proper safety measures.

Priority 6 – Build operational capability

Fencing demands a high level of operational capability. It requires a large indoor space, preferably air conditioned; electronic scoring devices; competition management software; video refereeing and livestreaming of events.

A suitable venue needs to provide adequate space for multiple pistes, warm-up areas, spectator seating, café, change rooms, bag storage, armoury, equipment control etc.

Since 2017, NSW fencing has operated a central training and competition facility in Alexandria dedicated solely to fencing.

But already we are testing capacity limits and more room is needed for change rooms, spectators, warm-ups and storage. Not least, we need more pistes to cater for large competition entry numbers, especially for our schools and other youth events.

Over the 5-year term of our current lease, SWFA will actively explore practical and affordable options for a new training and competition space.

The NSW Government has a sports infrastructure program (including its Centres of Excellence Program). Grants tend to be focused on shared-use facilities, projects must be ready to go and often a co-contribution is required. Nevertheless, Government funding, bolstered by our own fundraising, is the most likely source of significant funding.

Facility goal:

- By 2026, move to larger premises capable of holding at least 20 competition pistes with adequate capacity for spectators, bag storage, change rooms, amenities, café, office space, storage etc. Ideally, a new venue will be capable of holding Asian circuit events.

Priority 7 – Invest in professional development

The quality of coaching is a crucial factor in the development of fencing at the grassroots and in producing a talent stream of fencers.

NSWFA has developed a competent team of professional coaches to run training programs at the NSW Fencing Centre, including fencers selected for the AFF High Performance Program. Their work is complemented by the efforts of coaches in clubs and schools who introduce fencing to beginners and develop competitive fencers to represent their clubs in State competitions and to represent NSW and Australia in National and International competitions.

NSWFA will continue to give top priority to maintaining a professional coaching team under the direction of the Head Coach that will evolve over time as coaches move through their career cycle and fresh talent is added to the team as finances permit.

Coach development may include attendance at training courses and overseas experience as finance allows.

The relatively new Level 1 online coach training module developed by the Head Coach and integrated into the AFF coach accreditation process has been successful in building a stronger cohort of qualified coaches and will be continued.

NSWFA will also continue to improve the quality of competition management through referee training clinics, the upgrading of competition management software and training of members of the Directoire Technique.

Priority 8 – Expand and support the club network

A network of up to 30 clubs across metropolitan Sydney and regional NSW offers opportunities to take up fencing, however there are coverage gaps in the metropolitan and outer metropolitan areas and many regional cities and towns do not have fencing clubs.

In recent years, the coach-entrepreneur model has emerged with individual coaches setting up a local club and running it as a sole-trader business. This model has been proved to work and these entrepreneurial clubs are now introducing many children to fencing and encouraging them to take part in competitions.

To encourage the move for fencers to qualify as coaches and set up local clubs, in late 2020 NSWFA set up an online coach training and accreditation program to provide an effective, timely and convenient way to train Level 1 coaches.

Setting up a new, local club is a challenging process and NSWFA will help as much as possible.

Regional clubs

NSW is fortunate to have some well-established regional clubs, however we need better coverage in regional areas. The accompanying Regional Fencing Development Plan sets out ways in which fencing outside the metropolitan area can be better promoted and developed.

We also aim to have quarterly regional clubs networking zoom evening to support each other.

Club support initiatives

Under this Plan, NSWFA will assist the formation and development of new clubs by:

- Appointing a member of the Board as Director of Regional Development
- Encouraging members from regional clubs to stand for election to the NSWFA Board
- Providing a simple, model club start-up template
- Waiving the first year's affiliation/registration fee for new clubs
- As finances permit, provide a start-up club grant of up to \$2,000 for new clubs to purchase equipment
- Support clubs in their applications for Government grass-roots sport facility funding
- Continue to support Regional Championships through a lower-cost membership category for regional fencers
- Host a free camp for regional fencers to train and learn at NSW Fencing Centre

Priority 9 – Expand schools fencing

Since the early 1990s, NSW schools competitions have been the source of many young fencers who have gone on to compete successfully at State, National and International level.

However, the conversion rate from school fencing to senior competitive fencing is generally low as students move on to university, pursue their careers and find other priorities in life

The current schools program is dominated by a small number of schools that offer fencing as a designated school sport. Boys significantly outnumber girls.

The challenge is to attract more schools to take up fencing as a school sport, particularly girls' schools.

This can be achieved by:

- encouraging schools that previously offered fencing to re-introduce it to their sports program
- Introduce fencing to schools that currently don't offer it as an organised school sport
- Encourage schools that offer fencing but don't support the NSW Schools Championships to enter students

Critical components to schools fencing are a commitment by schools to support fencing as a school sport, enthusiastic leadership by teachers, the availability of coaches and supply of equipment.

NSWFA will help schools wanting to start a fencing program by offering advice and helping to place qualified coaches in schools.

School fencing initiatives

- In 2022-23, identify and approach 10 new schools that may be interested in fencing as a school sport, recognising that it may take 1-2 years for a school to work up to the point where it can enter its students in the School Championships
- Develop a 'how to do it' kit for schools interested in taking up fencing
- Assist schools to take up fencing by introducing qualified Level 1 coaches
- Encourage clubs to 'adopt' local schools and run training sessions for students

Priority 10 – Reaching out to the community

Fencing is an inclusive sport that welcomes people from all backgrounds, united in their love for our sport.

NSWFA will pro-actively engage with community groups that are interested in taking up fencing.

Two initiatives for 2022-2023:

- Establish a Paralympic Fencing Program under the leadership of an experienced Paralympic Fencing Coach and in co-operation with the NSW Wheelchair Sports Association
- Explore opportunities to encourage young people from the indigenous community to become involved with fencing
- Pursue opportunities to introduce fencing to cultural and linguistically different (CALD) communities

Two of the NSWFA Directors have been tasked with developing these initiatives.

Priority 11 – Smart marketing and continuous community engagement;

NSWFA needs to supplement the income we receive from membership and competition entry fees with new sources of revenue.

Social media and the internet offer opportunities to promote fencing to potential supporters and sponsors at little to no cost.

NSWFA will:

- Appoint Directors of Community Engagement to work with the Director of Marketing in reaching out to community groups to encourage children and young people to try fencing
- Be bold and innovative in trying different ways to promote our sport and attract sponsors
- Identify potential sponsors with an affinity for fencing, e.g. the recent initiatives with 90Plus and Crimson to offer fencing families access to programs to enhance their HSC results and have a better chance to be accepted by top overseas universities.
- As finances permit, allocate a dedicated marketing budget to support these efforts
- Improve our communication through social media and other channels with clubs, fencers, parents, officials and potential target groups
- Expand our limited base of sponsors through identifying potential sponsors with synergy between fencing and their corporate objectives

Approved by the NSWFA Board – March 2022