

IGNITING POSITIVE CHANGE



Water Polo WA - Whole of Sport Review

Summary Presentation | July 2026

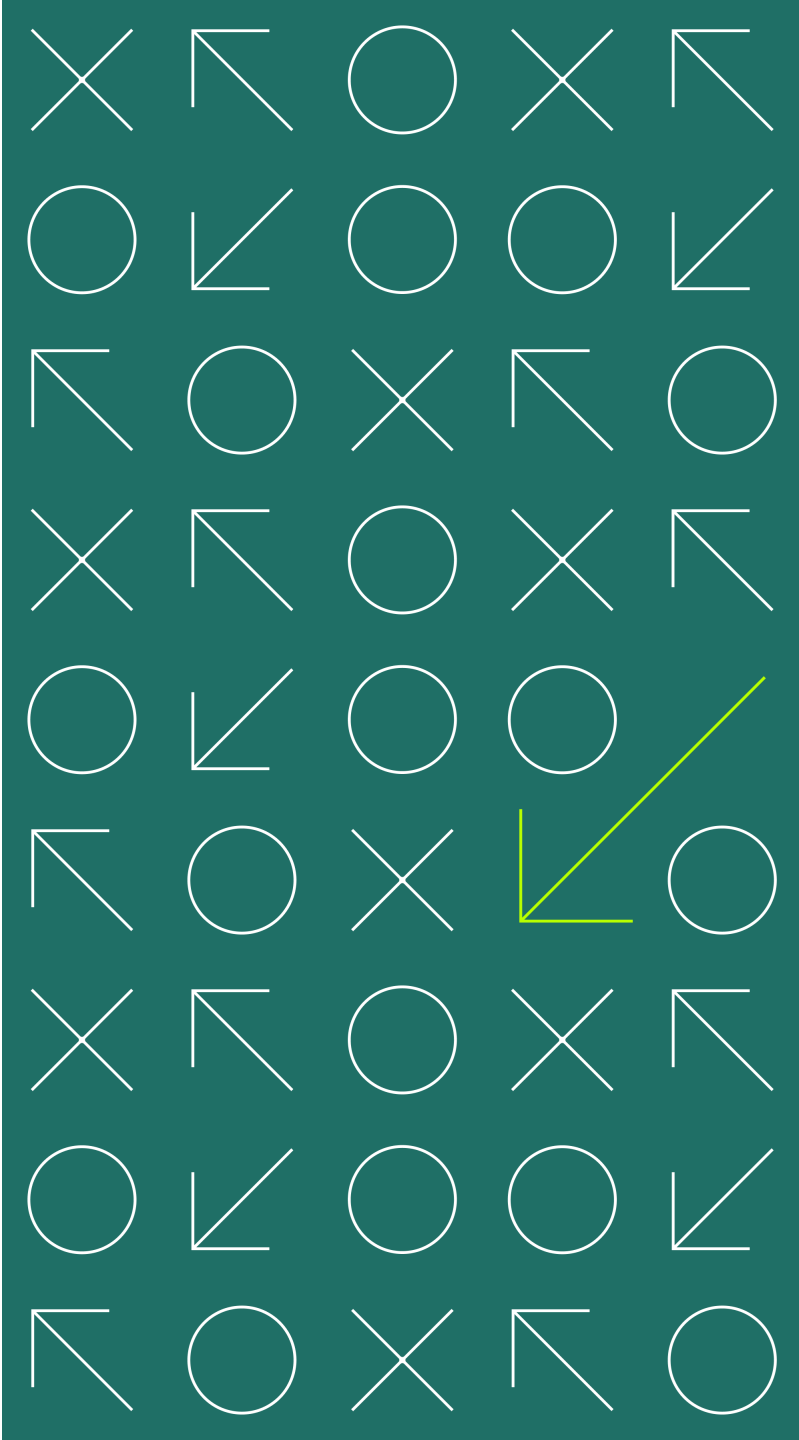
SAPA \ Sports Advisory
Partners Australia

Purpose of the Review

Water Polo Western Australia (WPWA) engaged Sports Advisory Partners Australia (SAPA) to undertake an independent Whole of Sport Review (the Review) to assess the current state of water polo across Western Australia and identify the reforms required to support the sport's long-term sustainability, growth and success.

The review focused on the following areas:

- 01.** Governance
- 02.** Participation & Growth
- 03.** Financial Stability
- 04.** Operational Effectiveness
- 05.** Stakeholder & Community Engagement
- 06.** Culture



Executive Summary

Water Polo Western Australia (WPWA) engaged Sports Advisory Partners Australia (SAPA) to undertake an independent Whole of Sport Review to assess the current state of water polo across Western Australia and identify the reforms required to support its long-term sustainability, growth and success.

The Review found that water polo in WA has strong foundations, including a passionate community, committed volunteers, established clubs and a strong history of athlete development. Participants continue to derive significant enjoyment, social connection and community benefit from the sport, while the lead-up to Brisbane 2032 provides an important opportunity to build greater momentum.

However, the central finding of the Review is that water polo in WA is not currently operating as a fully aligned and connected system. Clubs have increasingly been required to operate independently, contributing to varying capability, inconsistent participant experiences and differing approaches to participation, pathways, governance and culture. Stakeholders also identified challenges relating to trust and transparency, facility access, affordability, competition and pathway alignment, financial sustainability and behavioural standards.

These issues are interconnected. Governance influences trust and engagement; facilities and affordability constrain participation; competition structures affect both participation and performance; and culture impacts retention, recruitment and stakeholder confidence. At the same time, WPWA is attempting to oversee a broad range of activities with limited resources, contributing to an operating environment that is often reactive rather than strategic.

The Review therefore concludes that incremental change will not be sufficient. WPWA should transition towards a more coordinated, system-led model that provides clearer leadership, governance, standards, accountability and support across the sport.

The recommendations centre on:

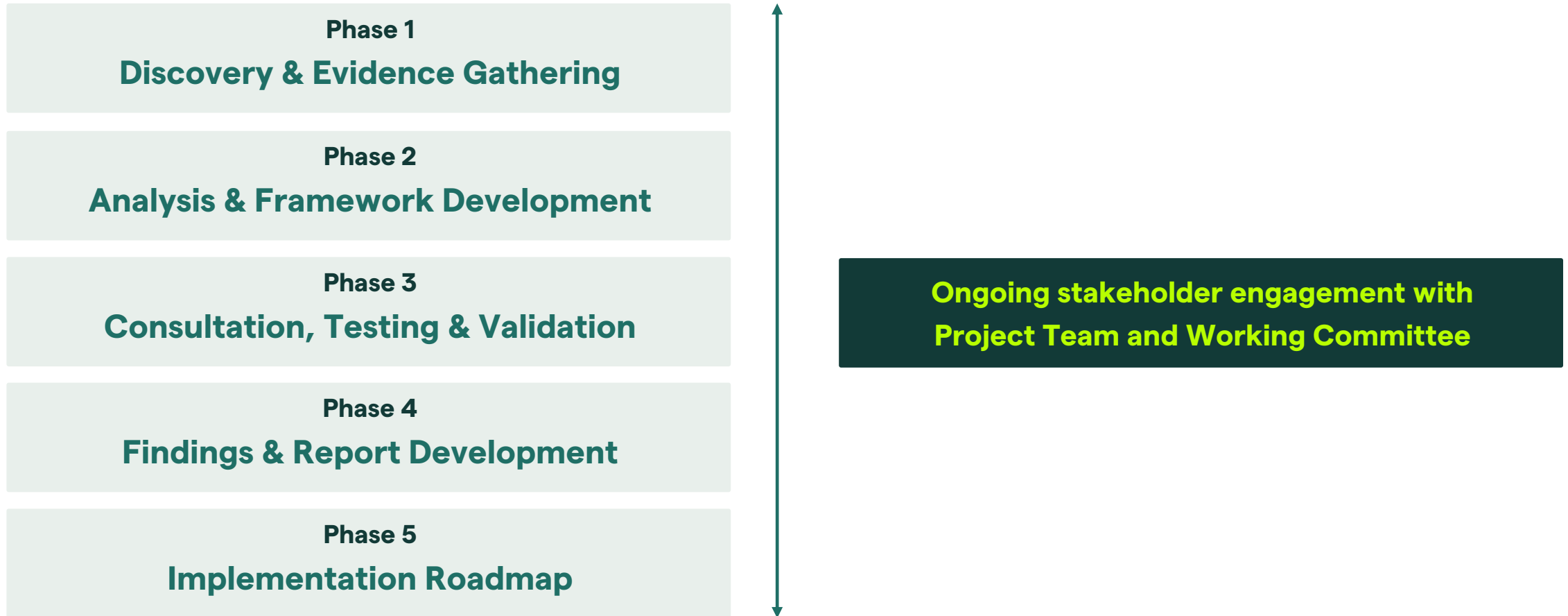
- establishing a clear Whole-of-Sport Operating Model;
- creating more connected participation, club and pathway structures;
- redesigning competitions to better support participation and performance outcomes;
- developing coordinated participation growth and statewide facilities strategies;
- strengthening governance, financial transparency and club accountability;
- establishing clearer behaviour, conduct and culture standards; and
- improving stakeholder engagement, strategic alignment and the statewide value proposition for water polo.

Implementation should be staged over the next four years and integrated into WPWA's next Strategic Plan and annual operating priorities, with clear Board and management ownership, disciplined prioritisation and sustained stakeholder engagement.

The opportunity is significant. With stronger alignment, clearer governance and a more coordinated approach to participation, pathways, competitions and stakeholder engagement, water polo in Western Australia can build a more sustainable, inclusive and high-performing system and capitalise on growing interest in the sport in the lead-up to Brisbane 2032.

Review Process

The Review was conducted using SAPA's five-stage methodology.



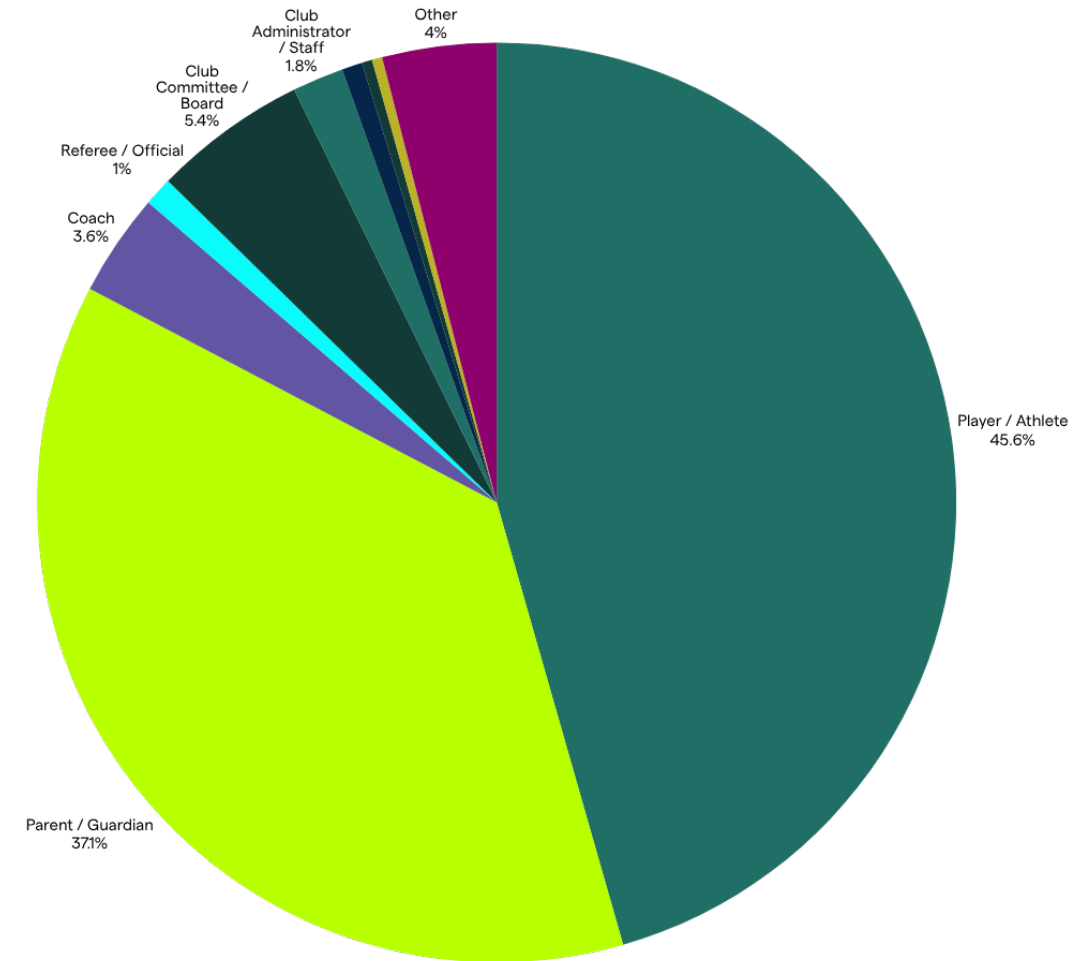
Stakeholder Consultation

To ensure the Review reflects the perspectives and experiences of those across the water polo ecosystem, SAPA undertook a structured program of stakeholder consultation.

This included:

- In-person workshops and interviews with WPWA Board members, staff, committee representatives, club presidents and selected external stakeholders; and
- An online stakeholder survey, completed by 277 respondents across the water polo community.

Please see Appendix A for a detailed list of the in-person stakeholder consultation.



Overview of Stakeholder Insights

Governance

1. Alignment between WPWA and clubs is weak and inconsistent
2. Stakeholder trust and confidence are materially low and is undermining alignment
3. Governance and decision-making processes lack transparency and consistency
4. Governance capability and maturity varies significantly across clubs
5. Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are not clearly defined or consistently understood.

Participation & Growth

1. Participation growth is constrained by structural barriers, not just awareness
2. Cost and perceived value are significant barriers to participation
3. Participation retention is being impacted by access, cost and scheduling barriers
4. Facility access is a critical structural constraint to growth
5. Participation pathways are inconsistent and lack system-wide coordination
6. The current model is not effectively supporting broader accessibility and inclusion
7. Growth responsibility is unclear and not actively driven at a system level
8. Participation pathways are unclear and are contributing to retention challenges

Operational Effectiveness

1. Operational resourcing is insufficient to support current and future demands
2. Operational delivery is largely reactive rather than proactively planned
3. Workforce is being stretched beyond sustainable levels

Overview of Stakeholder Insights

Stakeholder & Community Engagement

1. Stakeholders do not feel meaningfully engaged or heard
2. Communication is inconsistent, unclear and lacks transparency
3. Engagement is reactive rather than structured and proactive
4. There is no clear stakeholder engagement framework

Culture

1. Behaviour and conduct issues are impacting participant experience
2. Culture is contributing to player drop-off, particularly at key transition stages
3. Accountability for poor behaviour is inconsistent and often ineffective
4. There is no clearly defined or consistently applied code of conduct across the system

Financial Sustainability

1. Stakeholder confidence in the financial sustainability of the sport is extremely low
2. Financial transparency is limited, and stakeholders do not understand how funds are allocated
3. The current model is heavily reliant on participant fees, creating barriers to growth
4. There is limited evidence of a coordinated commercial growth strategy
5. Financial capability and sustainability varies significantly across clubs
6. Financial decision-making is not clearly linked to strategic priorities

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Establish a Whole-of-Sport Operating Model

Objective

Create a clear, aligned and sustainable structure for how water polo is governed, delivered and grown across Western Australia.

Recommended approach

Establish a formal Whole-of-Sport Operating Model that positions WPWA as the system leader and clearly defines the respective roles of WPWA, clubs, WPA, WAIS and other key stakeholders.

Key actions

- Define what WPWA will lead, design, enable and regulate.
- Clarify roles, responsibilities and decision-making authority across the sport.
- Identify the organisational, technology, systems and data capability required to support delivery.
- Use the Operating Model as the foundation for WPWA's next Strategic Plan.

Recommendation 2

Implement Connected Club Participation & Pathway Model

Objective

Create a clear and transparent system that recognises the different roles clubs play in participation, development and performance.

Recommended approach

Establish three complementary club roles within one connected system - Participation Clubs, Development Clubs and Performance Pathway Clubs - with appropriate responsibilities and WPWA support for each.

Key actions

- Recognise clubs according to the role they can realistically and sustainably perform.
- Provide differentiated support, resources and pathway responsibilities.
- Establish clear expectations for Performance Pathway Clubs.
- Treat athlete progression between clubs as a system success rather than a club loss.
- Apply the model flexibly to recognise differences in location, facilities and club capability.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 3

Redesign the Competition and Pathway Framework

Objective

Ensure competitions and pathways are fit-for-purpose and aligned to participation, development, retention and performance outcomes.

Recommended approach

Redesign the framework around clearly defined participant segments and competition purposes rather than administering all competitions the same.

Key actions

- Clearly define the purpose of each competition, grade and pathway segment.
- Review the future purpose, structure and viability of the PWL.
- Improve connections between FlippaBall, schools, junior, senior and performance pathways.
- Review grading, eligibility and player movement to improve fairness and competitive balance.
- Better align competitions with facility, referee, coach and volunteer capacity.
- Stage any significant reforms following consultation and testing.

Recommendation 4

Deliver a Coordinated Participation Growth Strategy

Objective

Grow participation by improving access, consistency, affordability and retention.

Recommended approach

Develop a coordinated participation strategy focused on attracting new participants, retaining existing players and creating more accessible pathways into and through the sport.

Key actions

- Standardise FlippaBall and other entry-level programs.
- Develop a coordinated schools engagement model.
- Expand 'come and try', modified and flexible participation formats.
- Address junior-to-senior drop-off and improve transition pathways.
- Support clubs and schools with participation toolkits, coaching and volunteer resources.
- Use participation data to identify growth and retention gaps.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 5

Develop a Statewide Facilities Strategy

Objective

Improve access to water space and ensure facility planning supports participation, competitions and pathways.

Recommended approach

Develop a statewide facilities strategy that treats available pool space as a system asset, rather than solely a club-controlled resource.

Key actions

- Audit existing facility access across clubs, regions and participant groups.
- Map current constraints, underutilised facilities and future demand.
- Develop principles for the allocation of water space.
- Strengthen relationships with VenuesWest, local government, schools and aquatic centres.
- Advocate for water polo within future aquatic infrastructure planning.
- Prioritise access that enables entry-level participation and smaller-club growth.

Recommendation 6

Reset Governance, Leadership and Accountability

Objective

Rebuild trust and ensure WPWA has the governance capability required to lead system reform.

Recommended approach

Undertake an independent governance and Board capability review, including WPWA's committee structures and the separation between governance and operational delivery.

Key actions

- Review Board skills, independence, composition and succession.
- Strengthen conflict-of-interest management and decision-making protocols.
- Clarify the roles and authority of Board, advisory and operational committees.
- Standardise committee Terms of Reference and reporting arrangements.
- Introduce a Board skills matrix and conflict-of-interest register.
- Identify the governance and organisational capabilities required to implement the Review.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 7

Introduce Club Affiliation Agreements and Minimum Standards

Objective

Create a consistent and enforceable relationship between WPWA and affiliated clubs.

Recommended approach

Introduce formal Club Affiliation Agreements and minimum standards as a condition of participating in WPWA-sanctioned competitions and programs.

Key actions

- Establish minimum governance, conduct and safeguarding standards.
- Set appropriate financial, operational and data-sharing requirements.
- Require alignment with relevant WPWA policies and strategic priorities.
- Establish clear dispute, escalation and non-compliance processes.
- Support clubs through templates, planning tools, governance assistance and education.
- Provide realistic transition periods for clubs to meet new standards.

Recommendation 8

Build a Transparent and Sustainable Financial Model

Objective

Improve trust, financial sustainability and perceived value across the sport.

Recommended approach

Develop a transparent financial model that clearly connects revenue, expenditure and investment decisions to WPWA's strategic priorities.

Key actions

- Clearly explain how participant fees are allocated and invested.
- Improve financial reporting to clubs and members.
- Review the cost and value proposition of competition segments.
- Reduce reliance on participant fees through commercial, sponsorship, event and funding opportunities.
- Align budgets and investment decisions with the new Strategic Plan.
- Publish an annual summary showing investment into the sport.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 9

Establish a System-Wide Behaviour, Conduct and Culture Framework

Objective

Create safer, more respectful and more enjoyable environments across water polo.

Recommended approach

Implement a formal sport-wide framework covering players, coaches, officials, parents, spectators, volunteers, clubs and WPWA personnel.

Key actions

- Implement a single sport-wide Code of Conduct, aligned where appropriate with WPA.
- Establish consistent sanctions and escalation processes.
- Strengthen club accountability for repeated poor behaviour.
- Improve protections and support for referees, officials and WPWA staff.
- Provide behaviour and conduct education for parents, coaches and players.
- Consider stronger incentives and consequences to reinforce positive culture.

Recommendation 10

Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Objective

Rebuild trust through structured, transparent and consistent engagement.

Recommended approach

Establish a stakeholder engagement framework that provides predictable and meaningful engagement with clubs, participants and key partners.

Key actions

- Establish regular club president forums and an annual Whole-of-Sport Forum.
- Provide quarterly stakeholder updates.
- Introduce clear consultation processes for significant decisions.
- Explain decision rationales where appropriate.
- Close feedback loops by communicating what WPWA heard and what changed.
- Tailor engagement to clubs, athletes, parents, officials, schools, Masters and regional stakeholders.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 11

Define and Activate a Clear Statewide Brand Narrative and Value Proposition

Objective

Position water polo as a compelling, accessible and modern sport.

Recommended approach

Develop a clear statewide narrative explaining why families, schools, participants and commercial partners should choose and support water polo.

Key actions

- Develop shared messaging and promotional assets for clubs.
- Better showcase competitions and athletes.
- Support clubs to promote entry-level programs.
- Align the narrative with participation, pathway, schools and commercial strategies.

Recommendation 12

Strengthen Strategic Alignment with WPA

Objective

Ensure Western Australia is better connected to national strategy, systems and opportunities.

Recommended approach

Establish a more structured strategic relationship between WPWA and Water Polo Australia.

Key actions

- Establish regular leadership meetings between WPWA and WPA.
- Clarify national and state roles across participation, pathways and high performance.
- Improve alignment of registration processes, data and reporting.
- Collaborate on coaching, officiating and integrity frameworks.
- Ensure WA priorities are represented in national planning.
- Explore shared services, funding, technology and resourcing opportunities.
- Align with WPA's 2032+ direction while retaining a WA-specific approach.

Resourcing Requirements

Key Recommendation	Implementation Resourcing Requirements
1. Establish a Whole-of-Sport Operating Model	Refine operating model, clarify WPWA/club/WPA/WAIS roles, define what WPWA leads, designs, enables and regulates.
2. Implement a connected Club Participation and Pathway Model	Support club framework, pathway obligations, club recognition, athlete movement principles and club consultation.
3. Redesign the Competition and Pathway Framework	Assist with options paper for PWL, development competitions, community competitions and Masters/social competition models.
4. Deliver a Coordinated Participation Growth Strategy	Support entry-level product design, school engagement model, retention priorities and club participation toolkits.
5. Develop a Statewide Facilities Strategy	Support facility access audit, pool allocation mapping, facility access principles and stakeholder engagement with venues, schools and government 18, 12:30pm – 1pm.
6. Reset Governance, Leadership and Accountability	Provide governance advisory, committee ToR support, conflict protocols, Board decision papers and alignment with the independent governance review.
7. Introduce Club Affiliation Agreements and Minimum Standards	Draft affiliation agreement, minimum standards framework, compliance model and club support resources.
8. Build a Transparent and Sustainable Financial Model	Support financial transparency explainer, competition cost/value review, commercial strategy and annual investment summary.
9. Establish a System-Wide Behaviour, Conduct and Culture Framework	Develop Code of Conduct, sanctions framework, club accountability model and conduct education tools.
10. Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement and Communication	Design engagement framework, consultation protocols, club forums, stakeholder updates and feedback loops.
11. Define and Activate a Clear Statewide Brand Narrative and Value Proposition	Develop statewide brand narrative, participation messaging, promotional framework and commercial partner proposition.
12. Strengthen Strategic Alignment with WPA	Support structured WPA engagement, role clarity, registration/data alignment and shared priority planning.

Implementation Roadmap

Short Term - 0-12 Months

Reset, Prioritise and Establish the Foundations

Governance review, operating model, strategic plan, club standards, conduct framework, stakeholder engagement and priority reviews.

Medium Term: 1-3 Years

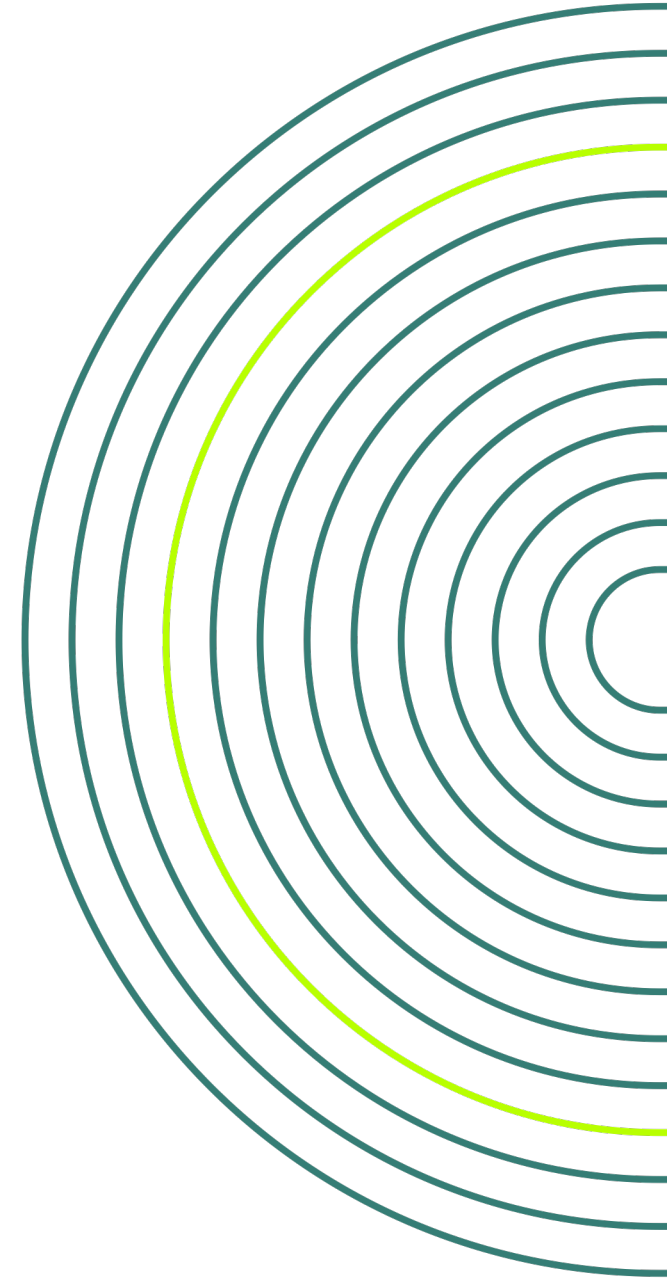
Implement, Build Capability and Demonstrate Progress

Implement club model, competition reform, pathway maps, participation initiatives, facilities strategy and financial transparency.

Long Term: 3-5+ Years

Sustain, Grow and Mature

Measure growth, strengthen retention, improve facilities access, grow revenue and maintain annual review cycles.



Appendix A: Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholder Consultation Schedule

Who	When
Tim Welsford – CEO WPA	February 13, 11am - 11:45am & May 11, 1pm - 2pm
Victoria Vykpoo – WPWA Staff	March 18, 8:15-8:45am
Sue Thompson - CITS	March 18, 10:15am - 11:15am & May 26, 4pm – 5pm
Rod Lillis – Financial Consultant	March 18, 11:30am – 12pm
Carolyn Morrison - WAIS	March 18, 12:30pm – 1pm
Colin Wedd – Masters Water Polo	March 18, 1:15pm - 1:45pm
Kate Colthart – WPWA Staff	March 18, 2pm – 2:30pm
VenuesWest	March 18, 2:30pm - 3:00pm
Sue Gliddon – WPWA Board Member	March 18, 3:15pm - 4:00pm
WPWA Board	March 18, 4pm – 5pm & May 26, 6:30 – 7:30
Mark Balenzuela – WPWA	March 19, 8:15am - 8:45am
WPWA Committees	March 19, 9am - 10am
Troy Kirkham - SportWest	March 19, 10:15am - 10:45am
Lisa Lilleyman – WPA Board Member	March 19, 11am - 11:30am
Clare Barber – WPWA Staff	March 19, 11:45am - 12:15pm
Billy Gaunt & Liam Steward, revSPORT	May 8, 3pm – 4pm
Glen Townsend, Triton Water Polo Club	May 6, 3pm-3:30pm
Rob Neesham, Melville Water Polo Club	May 6, 3:30pm – 4pm & May 26, 12:30pm – 1:30pm
Peter Hughes & Frank Di Costa, UWA	May 5, 1pm – 2pm & May 26, 2:30pm – 3:30pm
Phil Scales, Dolphins	June 2, 11am-12pm

Working Committee Schedule

Who	When
In Person	March 19, 11am - 11:30am
Online	April 1, 11am – 12pm
Online	April 9, 9:30am – 10:30am
Online	May 12, 11am – 12pm

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