

Sports Facility User Guide and Allocation Policy

Summary of Community Engagement Stage 1

March 2026

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1. Background

The Sporting Facilities User Guide and Allocation Policy (SFUG) establish the general terms and conditions that seasonal sporting clubs (AFL, Soccer, Cricket and Baseball) must abide by and provides the basis for allocating sporting facilities to clubs seasonally.

The SFUG guides how Council makes decisions about which clubs are granted access to facilities and under what conditions.

Definition of roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both Council and clubs, once access is granted, is also stipulated making it a very important framework to support transparent, equitable, and inclusive seasonal allocation and use of Council-managed sporting pavilions and grounds.

The consultation for the SFUG is in two stages:

1. Feedback from clubs and community on the existing SFUG to help inform what might be considered, included or excluded from the revised SFUG.
2. Clubs and Community to provide further feedback on revisions and inclusions to finalise a draft for Council's endorsement.

2. Consultation overview - who we heard from

Consultation included the following:

- Online survey via Shaping Banyule - 102 responses
- Workshop with Sports Clubs - 20 attendances

The aim of the consultation was to seek feedback on the SFUG in terms of:

- Rating of effectiveness, fairness and equity
- What is working and what isn't
- How processes and outcomes could be improved
- Getting an assessment of barriers and identification of new opportunities
- Seek views on current incentives and conditions – what is valued

It was important to seek input from both clubs and community as Banyule sporting fields and pavilions are important community facilities utilised by community when not being used for seasonal sports.

Online Survey Demographic overview:

- 75% members of community
- 25% members of a sporting club
- 75% being committee members
- 53% women
- 45% were aged between 35-49 years (highest number of respondents were in this age group)
- 90% live in Banyule

- Major Sport represented is football followed by soccer.
- 9% identify as a person living with a disability
- 7% identify as LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual)
- Suburbs with highest number of respondents
 - o Ivanhoe (14%)
 - o Greensborough (11%)
 - o Heidelberg West (75%)
 - o Bellfield (7%)

3. Overview Key themes – Executive Summary

Allocation Process -

- 29% felt it is “fair or very fair”, while roughly the same share (25%) perceived it as unfair; the rest were neutral. Comments from clubs included the traditional seasonal allocation model is biased toward sports like AFL and cricket, rapidly growing year-round sports, notably soccer and struggle under the six-month seasonal split.
- 81% of club respondents deemed Council’s communication about the application process “good” or “very good.
- From the community perspective, many simply weren’t aware of how the allocation system works. A number of local residents confessed they “have no idea what the guide is” or what times they are allowed to use the ovals outside of club activities.
- Both club and community stakeholders strongly endorse inclusion as a priority: when asked about allocation criteria, respondents gave the highest importance to clubs’ commitment to gender equity, disability inclusion, and community well-being programs.
- Club and community support allocation decisions grounded in good governance, gender equity, inclusion and community health and well-being. Clubs would like to see the fee discount increased from 5% to 10% for meeting requirements.
- Several club-aligned respondents urged Council to assess club needs annually based on membership size and growth, instead of sticking strictly to historical tenure or “traditional” uses of a reserve. Some soccer clubs are calling for 12-month access which is near impossible to facilitate on shared use grounds, of which most of Banyule’s grounds are.

Community Access & Shared-Use Conflicts

- Of the 76 community respondents (who use local ovals for personal activities like dog walking or family recreation), a majority (59%) said they could “usually or always” find an oval at a convenient time, but a sizeable minority (37%) reported that access is sometimes or often limited by club activities.
- Some community members feel that lack of scheduling information causes frustration and deters casual recreation.
- Community respondents want Council to publish an up-to-date schedule of oval use so they can plan their visits.
- Support for more multipurpose use of facilities (e.g. opening pavilions to other community groups when not used by clubs) to maximise public value.

- The tensions between clubs and other users are exemplified by dog access issues: clubs raised safety and hygiene concerns (e.g. dogs on playing fields and waste left behind), while community members (dog walkers) felt unwelcome, citing hostile signage and club officials “claiming” public ovals even when only a portion is in use.

Facility Quality & Maintenance

- About two-thirds of respondents rated Banyule’s sporting reserves as good to excellent, while one-third see them as only “fair” or “poor,” indicating room for improvement. Feedback emphasised that quality is inconsistent across the municipality as well as sporting codes.
- Drainage, turf quality, dog related field damage, dogs, mowing, storage, and facility upkeep were repeatedly flagged as challenging.
- Clubs also calling for greater clarity on Council and club maintenance responsibilities. 60% of club respondents agreed that the division of responsibilities between Council and clubs is clear, and a quarter felt that maintenance requests aren’t responded to in a timely way.

Inclusivity and Welcoming Environments

- The survey revealed a mixed picture on how inclusive and welcoming Banyule’s sports clubs are. Just over half of respondents (approximately 55%) agreed that local clubs create welcoming, inclusive environments, but nearly 1 in 3 answered “somewhat” and about 15% said “no, not at all”. This suggests strong inclusive foundations in many clubs but also notable gaps.
- Community members pointed out that inclusivity is not consistent across all clubs. A dominant concern was gender equity: women and girls are still often treated as second-class participants in certain traditionally male clubs. Examples were given of female teams being scheduled on inferior fields or at inconvenient times, and of clubrooms described as “man caves” that feel unsafe or unwelcoming to women.
- Some respondents also noted a lack of opportunities for people with disabilities in local sports, in their view, few clubs actively promote All Abilities programs or adaptive sports, indicating a need for more support for disability inclusion.

Club Sustainability

- Strong support for measures that ease club financial/volunteer pressures. Notably, an overwhelming 88% of respondents (primarily club-affiliated) agreed that the current 5% discount incentive for clubs demonstrating good governance and inclusion should continue and consideration be given to increasing it to 10%. This near-unanimous endorsement indicates that clubs value Council’s support in keeping participant costs down and rewarding positive management practices.
- Clubs signalled strong dissatisfaction with existing restrictions on sponsorship signage, only 1 in 4 clubs seeing it as effective. Clubs emphasise that keeping some sponsorship signs visible all season is crucial for their survival, and they are requesting more flexibility to allow these signs to remain up throughout the season.

4. What we asked and heard - Detailed responses

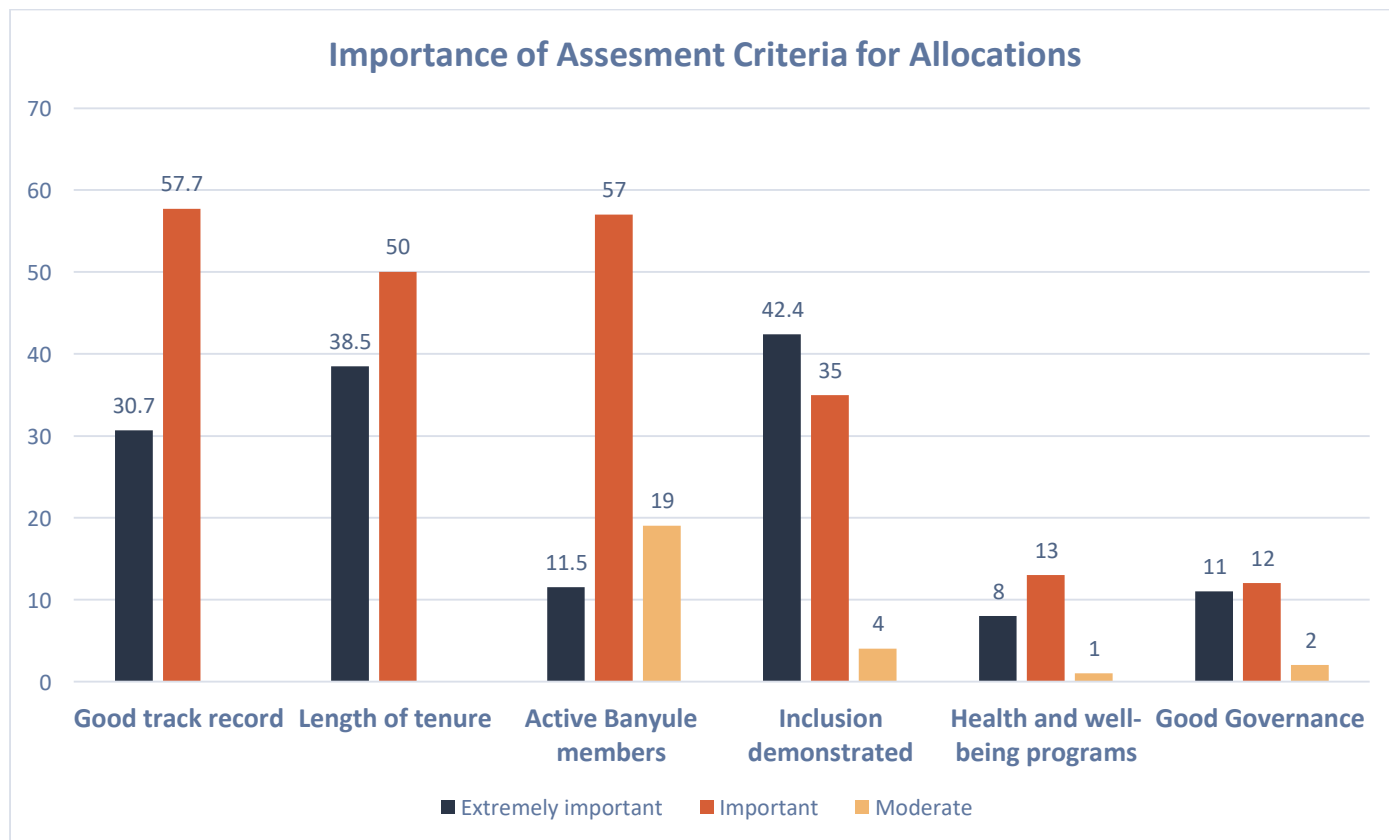
The following provides a snapshot of the responses to questions presented in the survey.

How do you rate the following aspects of the Seasonal application process?

- Only a quarter of respondents (club representatives) reviewed these questions.
- General sentiment: *mild satisfaction* but with significant neutrality.
 - Communication rated largely *Good* or *Very Good*.
 - Allocation outcomes meeting the clubs needs scored lower (average around mid-scale).
 - Access and ease of use of IMS online booking system rated *Good* or *Very Good*.
- Free text response themes:
 - **Fair & consistent access:** Concerns about some clubs gaining access while others feeling that they miss out; requests for consistent enforcement and penalties for unauthorised use.
 - **Transparency & communication:** Need clarity on why decisions are made; slow processing at times; misalignment with league fixture timelines.
 - **Resourcing:** Requests for more Council staff support to support quicker responses.
 - **Preseason needs:** More flexibility for pre-season access being sought by clubs.

How important is the SFUG criteria when accessing seasonal allocations?

Respondents strongly value commitments to gender equity and disability inclusion, as highlighted by table below:



Level of agreement with club classifications, grading of facilities, fees and discounts.

- Mixed to neutral views on fee fairness and tiering (largely mid-scale responses).
- Strong support (88%) for continuing the 5% discount for clubs meeting governance and inclusion criteria. Many suggesting it should increase to 10%.
- Awareness of the points-based discount system is reasonably high (68%).
- Free text response themes - Why you chose this response:
 - **Affordability:** *Discounts help reduce costs for families and small clubs.*
 - **Incentive for good governance:** Scheme encourages clubs to adopt better behaviours and culture.
 - **Volunteer burden:** Caution against adding further admin tasks for volunteers.
 - **Scaled model:** Larger clubs may need bigger discounts; tenure and compliance *should be recognised.*
- Many respondents highlighted the importance of financial incentives, explaining that every saving is valuable, particularly for smaller clubs operating on tight budgets. There is a strong sentiment that clubs should be rewarded for prompt fee payments, good governance, and their positive role within the community.
- Several comments stressed that reward systems motivate clubs to improve their culture and encourage ongoing development. Accreditation and participation in Council events, such as information nights, were seen as significant for both club growth and fostering a better environment for members and the wider community.

How effective is the approach to match day signage and permanent signage?

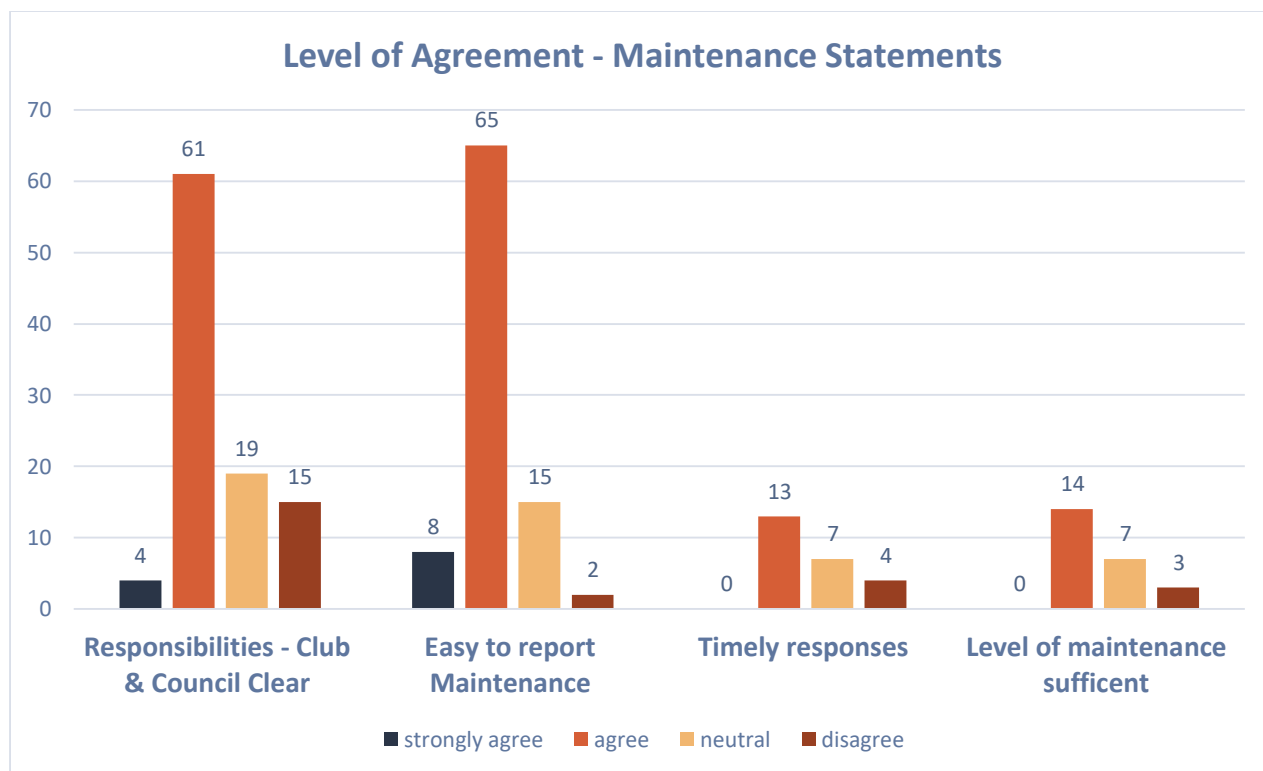
This question was specifically raised in response to prior consultation feedback and advocacy related to this issue. Clubs have expressed dissatisfaction with this aspect of the process, and Council have experienced compliance challenges. Therefore, seeking clarification on how we might address this concern was an important component of the consultation.

Key themes in free text response:

- **Critical for sponsorship:** Signage is a major revenue source; highly important to club survival, helping to keep participation affordable and supporting club operations.
- **Burden on volunteers:** Weekly sign removal is tiring and often impractical. Requiring volunteers to frequently install and remove match-day signage imposes a significant burden, diverting time and energy away from core club activities and reducing volunteer retention.
- **Requests for flexibility:**
 - Allow seasonal or permanent signage
 - Remove strict size/number caps
 - Accept professionally uniform signage
- **Alternative ideas:**
 - Council-funded digital scoreboards
 - New funding models if signage restrictions remain
- **Community connection:** Local businesses rely on visibility. Permanent signage not only benefits clubs but also promotes local businesses, strengthening the connection between the club and the broader community and contributing to local economic growth

Level of Agreement Statement – Maintenance

These questions relate to both pavilions and the sports fields.



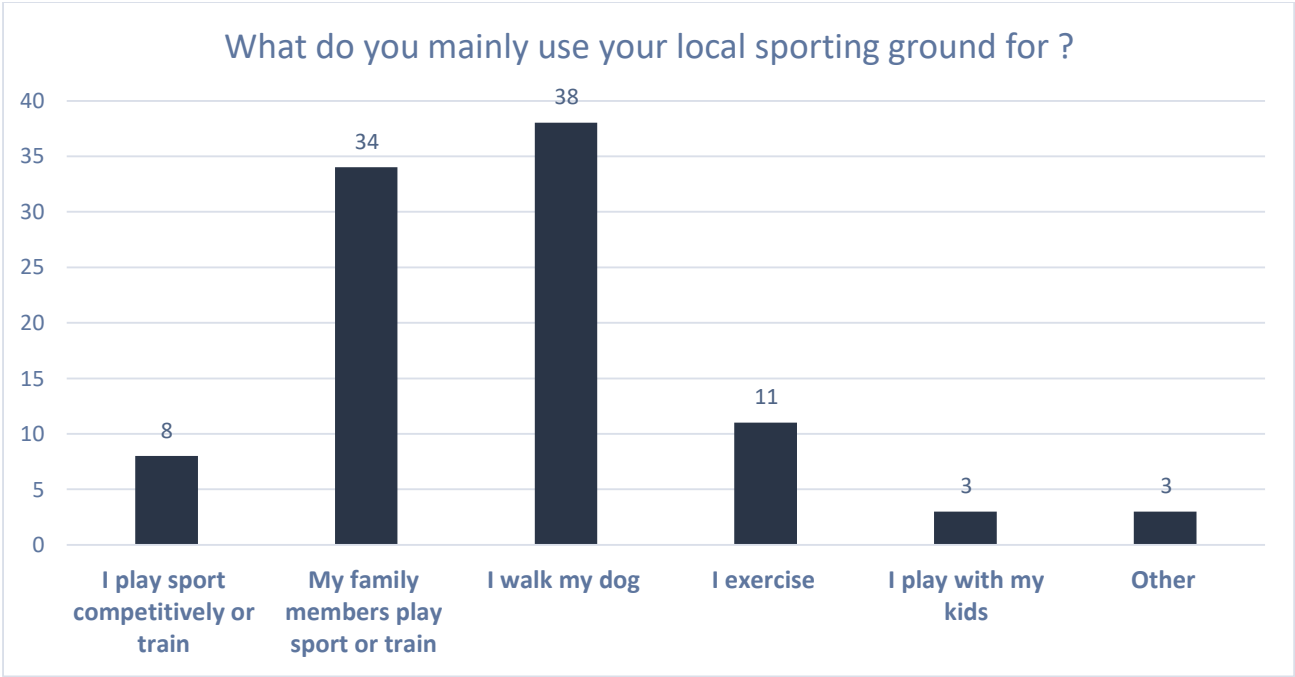
While 60% of club respondents felt maintenance responsibilities were clear, a quarter reported that maintenance requests are not always addressed in a timely manner.

Free text response themes:

- **Transparency:** Clubs want published schedules of when maintenance will occur and acknowledgement of requests.
- **Dog-related field damage:** Frequent issue for clubs that they feel is often unaddressed.
- **Clubs willing to help:** Seeking clarity on which tasks clubs could take on.
- **Perimeter areas:** importance of these areas, need mowing, repair, and upkeep.

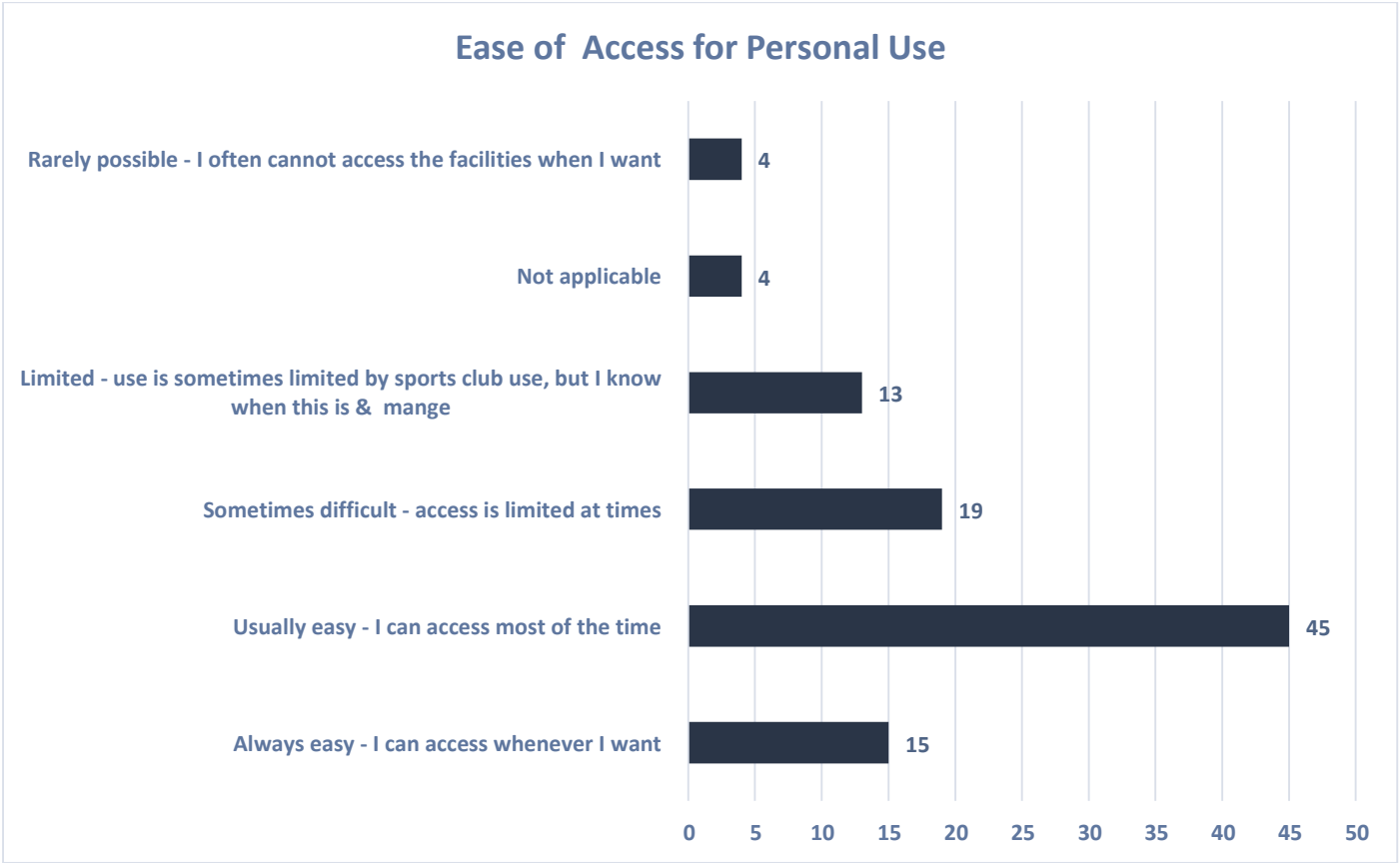
Use and Access of Ovals

Community members not involved in clubs were asked, "What do you mainly use your local sporting ground for?" The top responses were dog walking (35%) and family members playing or training (34%).



Ease of Access for Personal use

- Personal access is largely achievable: almost 60% say they can “always” or “usually” find suitable times.
- Around 20% find access sometimes difficult, and a small proportion report rare access.



Respondents were asked to provide commentary of why they chose this response.

Overall, respondents recognise that sporting ovals and facilities are shared community spaces, with most expressing acceptance that organised sport takes priority at certain times. Many people plan their use around known training and match schedules and report that, outside peak sporting times, access is generally good. Early mornings and weekdays are commonly identified as the most accessible times.

However, a recurring issue is **the** lack of visibility and clarity around bookings and availability. Several respondents described arriving at ovals unaware they were in use and expressed a desire for better signage or an online way to check usage in advance. This uncertainty makes it difficult for casual users to plan visits confidently.

Concerns were also raised about fairness and consistency in allocations. Some respondents feel clubs occasionally use facilities outside agreed times or treat ovals as if they are exclusively theirs, discouraging broader community use. Others noted that allocations sometimes favour schools or specific organisations, limiting Council's ability to manage access equitably.

How Fair and equitable is the SFUG allocation process for pavilions and grounds?

Fairness ratings were mixed:

- 29% say fair or very fair
- 45% neutral
- 25% say unfair or very unfair

The feedback reveals concerns regarding sport bias and allocation equity in the Sporting Facilities User Guide (SFUG), with some respondents perceiving that AFL and cricket receive preferential treatment over rapidly growing sports such as soccer and hockey.

The current six-month seasonal scheduling is seen as insufficient for year-round football (soccer) participation.

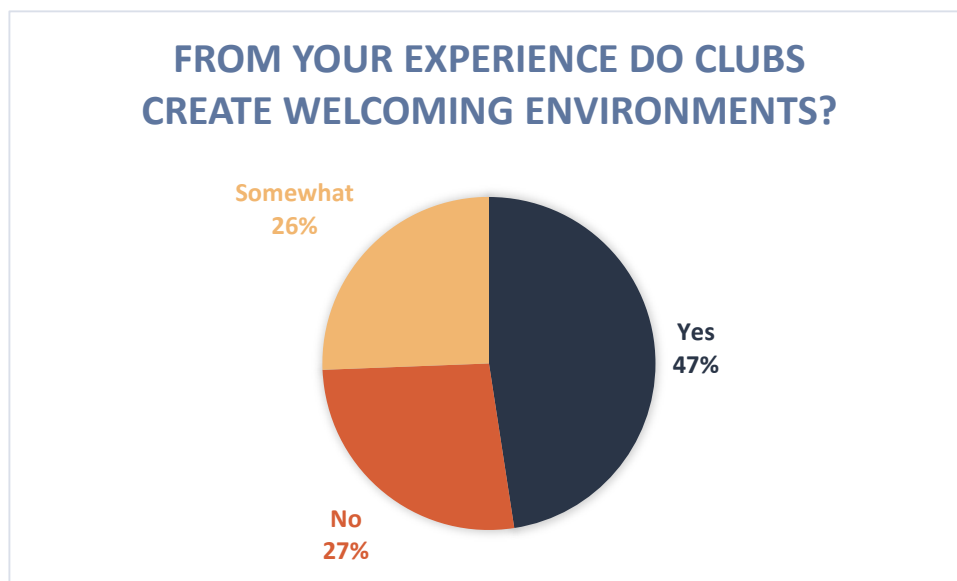
Issues of inclusion and gender equity are prominent, with several respondents describing club environments and pavilions as male-dominated, unwelcoming, or unsafe for women due to inadequate amenities and facilities.

There is also a noted lack of awareness and understanding of the SFUG, with residents and informal user groups expressing frustration over unclear allocation processes, oval availability, and community access rules.

Broader community impacts include concerns about noise, lighting, parking, and disruptions during events, signalling tension between organised sport and neighbourhood amenity.

While some respondents are satisfied with the current system, most express ongoing worries about facility quality, transparency, and equitable access.

From your experience do clubs create welcoming environments?



Many respondents describe clubs as welcoming, family-friendly and inclusive:

- Soccer and athletics are frequently cited as open to all genders, ages and abilities
- Junior sport is seen as particularly inclusive and supportive
- Some clubs are praised for strong culture, friendly volunteers, and “open door” approaches
- Alignment with initiatives such as Good Sports is viewed positively, especially reduced alcohol focus and healthier environments.

The commentary highlighted several significant themes regarding the inequitable treatment of women and girls. For example, while women's teams may receive funding, they do not always have equal access to facilities or prime ovals during peak times. Additionally, some club rooms are still viewed as predominantly male spaces.

Concerns were also raised about certain clubs' interactions with non-club users of open spaces. There is a perception that some clubs monopolise ovals and buildings, and there have been isolated reports of unwelcoming or aggressive behaviour towards casual users, dog walkers, and residents.

In summary, the feedback indicates that practices promoting inclusivity and a welcoming environment vary among sporting clubs. Although there are strong examples of inclusive clubs, systemic issues persist in the following areas:

- Gender equity
- Disability inclusion
- Community access to shared spaces
- Power dynamics between clubs and non-club users

Suggestions to make Clubs more Inclusive – Reduce Barriers

50% of people responded to this question and provided a range of responses.

Many responses identify costs to families as a key participation barrier, including:

- High club fees (particularly for soccer)
- Rising operational costs passed on to players (utilities, equipment, ground hire)

- Cost-of-living pressures exacerbating inequity
- There is a strong view that keeping Council charges low for clubs enables lower participant fees and greater inclusion.

Inclusion emerges as a multi layered priority There is strong support for:

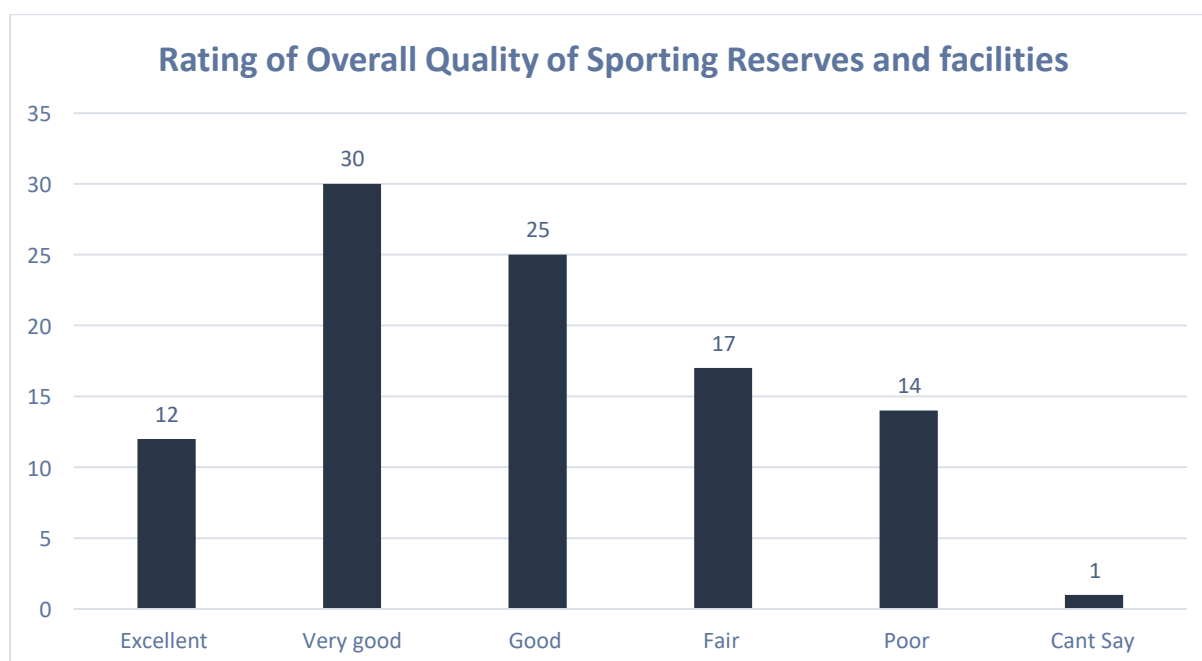
- Mandated inclusion policies and accountability
- Conditions on grants tied to demonstrated diversity outcomes

Collectively, the responses point to a community desire for:

- Fairer access
- Lower cost barriers
- Safer, more inclusive cultures
- Clearer Council leadership on shared use
- Facilities that reflect diverse, modern participation patterns
- Greater flexibility and shared use, reinforcing that Council-owned facilities are seen as *community assets*, not exclusive club spaces
- Better communication about club activities and facility timetable
- Visible signals that diverse people are welcome
- Social initiatives for new families
- Open days and community events
- Reduced alcohol-centric cultures in some club spaces
- Multi-purpose use of clubrooms and ovals
- Supporting alternative sports and activities
- Clear complaints processes and consequences for inappropriate behaviour
- Clear messaging that facilities are shared community spaces

Rating of Overall Quality of Sporting Reserves and Facilities

Overall positive ratings were received with a majority of respondents rating very good and good. There are some pockets of dissatisfaction relating to Willinda Park athletic track and Elder Street Reserve.



Clubs were asked to elaborate on their ratings, with most comments focusing on concerns about facility conditions at specific venues. For example, some members are pushing for a Willinda Park track replacement, while Watsonia Heights Football Club is requesting year-round use of Greensborough College and highlighting the inadequacy of Elder Street for their expanding needs.

Several respondents feel investment is unevenly distributed, with certain sports and locations prioritised over others.

Dog waste and Amenity.

Strong concern about:

- o Dog poo on playing surfaces
 - o Dogs off-lead on sports ovals
 - o Damage to turf from dogs digging
- Several respondents call for:
 - o More bins and poo bag dispensers
 - o Clearer dog restrictions on sports ovals
 - o Athletics facilities (e.g. Willinda Park track)
 - o Wet weather regularly disrupts training and competition.
 - o Some surfaces are described as ***dangerous***, especially for cricket and football.

Supporting Infrastructure Gaps

- Repeated mentions of inadequate or poor-quality:
 - o Public toilets (availability, cleanliness, safety)
 - o Seating and shade
 - o Lighting (notably hockey and athletics facilities)
 - o Changerooms that are not female-friendly or child-safe

Perceived Sport Prioritisation

- Some respondents feel Aussie Rules and cricket receive disproportionate investment compared to:
 - o Soccer
 - o Athletics
 - o Basketball
 - o Netball
- Long-standing unmet commitments (e.g. athletics club facilities) are noted and contributing to dissatisfaction.

Positive Community Value of Reserves

- Despite criticisms, many respondents acknowledge that:
 - o Reserves are generally well used and valued
 - o They support community connection, informal recreation, and family activities
 - o Some express concern that formal sport dominates decision-making, limiting broader community use and inclusivity.

What future improvements or programs would enhance access and use of Banyule's sporting facilities?

61% of respondents answered this question.

The responses highlight strong community interest in equitable access, improved facility quality, inclusive design, and clearer shared-use arrangements across Banyule's sporting infrastructure. Key themes are outlined below.

1. Facility Access, Capacity and Consolidation

- Strong support for greater access to high-demand sports, particularly soccer and basketball, with concerns that existing infrastructure does not meet participation demand.
- Repeated endorsement of Watsonia Heights Football Club (WHFC) consolidating operations at Greensborough Community Sports Precinct (GCSP). Respondents believe consolidation would:
 - o Improve program coordination and club sustainability
 - o Enable growth in inclusive programs (e.g. All Abilities)
 - o Reduce operational costs
 - o Free up Elder Street Reserve for use by other clubs
 - o * Noting that this is in progress.
- Requests for early confirmation and transparency around oval availability to support planning, team registrations and fixture scheduling.

2. Asset Condition, Maintenance and Amenity

- Significant concern about oval quality and drainage, particularly at Elder Street Reserve, with unsafe conditions leading to cancelled or relocated training and games.
- Calls for:
 - o End-of-season investment in turf renewal
 - o Improved drainage for winter use
 - o Seating, shelter and all-weather facilities for players and spectators
- Broader feedback that maintenance standards are inconsistent, undermining participation and community confidence.

3. Inclusion, Equity and Gender-Sensitive Design

- Strong emphasis on inclusive and welcoming facilities, particularly for:
 - o Women and girls
 - o People with disability
 - o Older adults
 - o Beginners and social participants
- Specific issues raised include:
 - o Inadequate or unwelcoming female change rooms and club environments
 - o Lack of wheelchair access, ramps and accessible toilets
 - o Poor accessibility at playgrounds and shared facilities (e.g. Petrie Park)
- Requests for inclusive programs, such as women's cricket, All Abilities sport, social sport, and non-competitive physical activity options.

4. Multi-Use and Broader Community Access

- Strong sentiment that sporting facilities should be **multi-purpose community assets**, not limited to traditional club-based sport.
- Suggested uses include:
 - Dance, yoga and fitness programs
 - Arts and creative groups
 - Social and informal recreation
- Calls for Council to actively engage non-traditional user groups, such as runners and dog walkers, in facility planning and access decisions.

5. Dogs, Shared Use and Environmental Management

- Highly mixed views on dogs in and around sporting facilities, with calls for:
 - Clear rules during games and training
 - Better fencing, signage and mesh to improve safety
 - Improved waste management (bins, dog bag dispensers, regular servicing)
- Concerns raised about:
 - Litter and environmental impacts on adjacent waterways and reserves
 - Lack of enforcement and shared-use etiquette
- Some respondents also advocated for dog sports and dog-friendly infrastructure.

6. Information, Transparency and Scheduling

- Repeated requests for a clear, publicly available and up-to-date timetable showing when ovals and facilities are booked by clubs.
- Respondents indicated that lack of visibility:
 - Discourages casual and community use
 - Creates frustration when facilities appear unavailable without notice
- Suggestions included a centralised Council webpage for facility scheduling.

7. Location-Specific Suggestions

- Upgrade Wilinda Park track
- Upgrade irrigation at Elder Street Reserve
- Improve parking and traffic management at Chelsworth Park
- Consider pickleball courts and outdoor fitness infrastructure, particularly in Heidelberg West
- Improve Ford Park's community feel
- Enhance fencing and safety at specific reserves (e.g. Anthony Beale Reserve)

5. Sporting Club Workshop

A workshop with Clubs was conducted in November 2025 to review the current SFUG, focusing on strengths, areas for improvement, and desired future changes. These discussions reflected survey findings. With discussions around the following:

- Clubs emphasised the importance of a clear allocation process and policy to guide committees about expectations. Participants expressed interest in additional training and support regarding the online booking process particularly to assist new members. While the system is considered user-friendly, ongoing training for committee members remains essential.
- The most significant issue identified was signage requirements. Many clubs expressed dissatisfaction due to the burden placed on volunteers and limitations affecting financial sustainability. They are seeking changes to the current approach with the ability to display both permanent and match day (with conditions).
- Most participants regarded fees and charges as reasonable, though there was a desire for greater transparency concerning how funds are allocated and spent.
- Clubs indicated the need for more clarity around maintenance schedules and details of completed maintenance, and noted timely updates would aid in planning and preparation.
- Issues relating to dog poo and damage caused by dogs were highlighted as ongoing health and safety concerns often managed by volunteers.
- Clubs are strongly committed to fostering inclusion and cultivating welcoming cultures, recognising progress made while acknowledging opportunities for further development. Compliance with policy requirements and incentives such as discounts for good governance, culture, and inclusion were well received, with suggestions to extend these rewards to 10% to further reduce club costs.
- There were mixed views regarding the introduction of demerit points or fines; some clubs felt this approach does not promote goodwill and stressed the need for collaboration between Council and clubs. While there was an understanding of the necessity for consequences when guidelines are not followed, clearer communication around the process was requested.
- Clubs highlighted their contributions to community health and wellbeing, supporting Council initiatives, and hoped these efforts would be more widely recognised. They valued the partnership approach with Council and feel they are doing a lot to deliver on the community values of community connection, inclusion, physical activity, and wellbeing.
- There was considerable discussion about increasing access to ovals for training, pre-season competitions, tournaments, and camps. Clubs understood the need for resting ovals for maintenance and support seasonal allocations aligned with traditional winter and summer sports.
- Clubs undertake a lot of maintenance and do a lot of caretaking of the facilities which is sometimes not recognised as maintenance upkeep is critical.
- Discussion around volunteer burnout, sustaining volunteers and their incredible value to local community clubs.
- The clubs at the session recognise these facilities are important community assets. Generally, they happily coexist well with residents, and there is mutual understanding and respect regarding their use. Clubs understand that some residents would benefit from clearer communication about these available times, and they are willing to assist in any way they can.