

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 9:30AM AEDT,
THURSDAY 22 OCTOBER 2026**

STATEMENT

AFL Barwon statement regarding Lara Football & Netball Club

The AFL Barwon Board has confirmed that it does not support Lara's return to senior and reserves men's football in the Geelong Football Netball League (GFNL) in 2027.

AFL Barwon will now plan for an 11-team GFNL competition in 2027, providing certainty for the GFNL clubs and community.

The Board's decision follows a detailed assessment of Lara's readiness to return, including consideration of the information provided by the club, meetings with Lara representatives and the associated risks.

The Board recognises the significant work undertaken by Lara and its volunteers to consider the club's future and develop a pathway back to senior football. We appreciate the commitment of those who have worked to rebuild the club's leadership and put plans in place for the future.

However, a return to senior football requires more than an intention to compete. It requires a sufficiently strong and sustainable playing group, appropriate coaching appointments, effective governance and the operational capacity to support teams throughout a season.

Lara's own Future Planning Group (FPG) report set specific criteria to guide a potential return in 2027, with 1 October 2026 as the key decision point. AFL Barwon provided an extension until 6 October for Lara to supply supporting information, and has held several meetings with club representatives since that date to discuss its readiness for the proposed return.

Despite recent announcements from the Lara Football & Netball Club, the Board concluded that Lara had not met the player and coaching criteria outlined in the FPG report. Significant gaps remain, including an insufficient senior playing list, both in numbers and demonstrated playing experience, and the absence of appointed senior football and netball coaching staff. While Lara has made recent progress in filling committee positions, its governance arrangements are still developing, with an interim president in place and no subcommittees established.

These are not minor administrative matters. They go directly to whether Lara can field senior and reserves teams and sustain a safe, well-supported and viable program over a full season.

Whilst the FPG report provided important milestones on a pathway to a potential return, the Board was not limited to the FPG criteria. It also considered the integrity and effective planning of the competition, including the impact on other participating clubs and the need to make responsible and timely decisions about the 2027 fixture and resources.

Having considered all of this, the Board determined that the material nature of the outstanding requirements, and the associated risks, mean that a return to senior and reserves men's football in 2027 will not be possible.



AFL BARWON

This decision does not close the door on a future return to senior football. Any return will need to be supported by demonstrable progress in player numbers and capability, coaching, governance and the long-term sustainability of the program.

AFL Barwon supports Lara's continued participation in female football, junior football and junior netball in 2027, and Lara remains eligible to take part in the new Thirds competition as a pathway for rebuilding its senior football program. We have attempted to engage with Lara around potential exemptions to allow senior netball to continue, however the club is yet to apply for any exemptions for netball.

We understand this is a disappointing outcome for members, players, families and volunteers who want to see senior football return to Lara. The Board has not taken the decision lightly. Our responsibility is to support sustainable community football and netball, protect the integrity of our competitions and make decisions that give clubs the best possible chance of long-term success.

Kate Patterson
Chief Executive Officer
AFL Barwon

Ashley West
Chair
AFL Barwon Board

