

NEW ZEALAND WOMEN AND GIRLS IN RUGBY SYSTEM STRATEGY 2023-2033 NZR ACTION PLAN 2025



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NEW ZEALAND
RUGBY

2025 NZR ACTION PLAN SUMMARY

Planned investment across women and girls' rugby is \$26.9m for 2025

2025 marks the third annual Action Plan developed by New Zealand Rugby (NZR) to progress the whole-of-system 'New Zealand Women and Girls in Rugby System Strategy 2023-2033' (the Strategy).

2025 is another key milestone year for women's rugby, and for New Zealand in particular with the Black Ferns preparing to defend their Rugby World Cup (RWC) title in September. The Black Ferns' RWC campaign will provide a global platform for the team and brand, and we'll look to continue building the profile of Sky Super Rugby Aupiki (SRA) with initiatives like the inaugural Champion's Final against the Super W winner to enable further growth of this competition.

Through our **Commercial** and Marketing plans, our fans will enjoy inspiration and connection with the Black Ferns with premium digital content featuring new players, the stars of the team and the people behind the scenes of their RWC campaign. NZR is actively looking for both domestic and international opportunities to add to the exciting playing calendar of the Black Ferns and we will continue to broaden the range of replica and fan wear available to fans of our women's teams, with adidas, Fanatics and other licensing partners.

A range of initiatives focused on enhancing opportunities and experiences for women and girls will be delivered within **Community Rugby**, including:

- Establishing a Participation Framework for Women and Girls (W&G) in Community Rugby to guide Provincial Unions (PUs), clubs, and schools in delivering sustainable, participant-centred programmes and competition structures that are nationally aligned and locally led.
- Piloting Contact Ready, NZR's first national program specifically designed with and for teenage girls, with 14 PUs and over 400 participants.
- Development of a Women's Health Insights Hub to support understanding of key women's health topics, beginning with puberty, menstrual health, pelvic health, and breast health.

- Trialling a tailored Women's Warm-Up Programme, designed to support injury prevention based on the unique anatomical needs of female players and common injury trends.
- Investing in coach and referee development through a range of initiatives, including Ako Wāhine, delivered in partnership with 14 PUs to grow the number of foundation-level women coaches.
- A dedicated Women's Coach Development Plan will also be introduced to increase the number of women in coaching and strengthen the capability of those working with female athletes.
- Rugby 101 training and the Referee Scholarship Programme will support the growth and retention of women in referee roles.
- Development of a Top 5 Tips for Clubs resource, designed to help clubs reflect on key factors in the experience of W&G and how they support women and girls, as well as support for them to implement changes.
- Partnering with PUs and the wider rugby system on providing a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone, looking at safeguarding, club standards, improved technology, advances in injury prevention, and mental health and wellbeing support.

The women's **High Performance** (HP) environment will build in strength as NZR's Women's High Performance Strategy rolls out. Along with the Black Ferns at the RWC, and the Black Ferns Sevens looking to continue their winning record in the HSBC SVNS World Series, the Black Ferns XV will assemble for a trial game against the Black Ferns in Whangarei then play two matches against the Springbok Women this year in South Africa, giving a wider group of players valuable international experience.

2025 will see a major development in the teenage girls' performance pathway, with the first national under-18 high performance camp. The six-day camp will equip our top junior players with the skills, knowledge, and experience to take the next step on their rugby journey, as well as provide valuable development opportunities for coaches and management.

NZR COMMITMENTS FOR 2025

STRATEGY FOCUS AREA & BUILDING BLOCKS

2025 COMMITMENT

A: CULTURE An open-minded and inclusive culture across rugby	
A1.2 Enforce baseline member protection standards to keep W&G safe in all rugby environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a safeguarding framework for the rugby system and formalise safeguarding best practice, policies and actions already in place across rugby environments. <u>Safer Communities</u> – Support actions within the club environment responsive to W&G. All PUs have Safeguarding Children policies and guidance, and Safe Kids Advisors (Child Protection Advisors) in place. Hikina: Develop and implement a bespoke safeguarding policy and processes for Māori Rugby Development programmes, adaptable for local programmes and initiatives.
A1.3 Use quotas throughout the rugby system to drive significant increase in numbers and inclusion of diverse women in governance.	Review existing all-of-system governance diversity targets and refresh the current NZR Board Diversity Action Plan.
	Meet NZR's commitment as a member of Global Women's ' <u>Champions for Change</u> ' to a ratio of 40% female: 40% male: 20% any gender, at each level of the organisation.
	Maintain at least 40% female representation on the NZR board in line with our commitments in the NZR Board Diversity Action Plan, NZR's partnership with Global Women, the <u>Sport NZ Gender Equity</u> policy, and the <u>NZ Rugby Constitution</u> .
A1.7 Support development and pathways for diverse female leaders across rugby.	Implement the NZR Pay Equity Action Plan within NZR to measure, track and change gender and/or ethnicity-based pay gaps.
	Deliver a 'Women in Rugby' conference open to women across the rugby system in operational, leadership, and governance roles, and men working in women's rugby.
A2.1 Collaborate on a shift and alignment of W&G branding that engages and connects W&G in rugby.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build support for the Black Ferns in the lead up to the RWC, engaging at a community level in NZ and activating on the ground in England, to build the profile of players, increase contactable fans, and generate positive sentiment. Leverage the RWC momentum at home by showcasing Black Ferns x Contact Ready videography to promote the programme, with a clear call to action for newly-interested girls getting started in rugby. Align with the Black Ferns on game-day and community activations, in support of W&G community rugby. Review community rugby's overarching 'Love Every Minute' brand to ensure it remains strong and fit for purpose.

STRATEGY FOCUS AREA & BUILDING BLOCKS	2025 COMMITMENT
A2.2 Use storytelling to raise visibility around diverse W&G journeys in rugby	<p>Profile women working in rugby and promote women's teams via authentic storytelling on our digital channels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of Ako Wāhine, we will share a number of coach stories and profiles on our channels throughout the year. Two pieces of premium long-form content will follow the Black Ferns' RWC campaign, and highlight key off-field management and support roles for women in rugby. A NZ On Air-funded series commissioned by NZR+, <i>Triple Threat</i>, focuses on RWC debutants, and <i>Behind the Fern: BLACK FERNS</i> will take the viewer behind the scenes weekly across the RWC.
A2.3 Facilitate governance training and resources that lift the quality of rugby governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First cohort of PU CEOs and senior leaders complete their new professional development programme (24/25), and the second cohort underway (25/26). A new induction programme for Chairs, Board members and CEOs finalised with the first cohort underway during 2025.
A3.1 Improve training and support for Chairs to better facilitate diverse Boards and Committees.	<p>The content for both programmes include how to support women in non-playing roles, and the development of women in senior leadership.</p>
A2.5 Understand and enhance the positive impacts of Māori and Pacific Peoples' cultural practices on inclusion and engagement of W&G in rugby.	<p>Lead the introduction of a framework to build volunteer capability and capacity within E Tū Rangatahi, to address gaps, mitigate risks, and enhance long-term sustainability.</p> <p>Continue to implement the NZR Pasifika Strategy 2024-2029, by piloting a Pasifika cultural competency programme and focussing on non-playing pathways.</p>
A1.1 Share W&G data & information across the rugby system.	<p>Complete the implementation of Rugby Xplorer to improve capability in data capture and analysis.</p>
A1.4 Support male champions to advocate and enable improved engagement of W&G.	<p>Include male champions in the programme for, and invitations to, the Accelerate Women in Rugby Conference.</p> <p>Provide collaborative opportunities for male teams and players to engage with women's teams, games and competitions through joint commercial windows, events and social content.</p>

**STRATEGY FOCUS AREA
& BUILDING BLOCKS**

2025 COMMITMENT

B: SYSTEM | Focused rugby system collaboration, investment, roles, resourcing and accountability

B1.1 Demonstrate intentional leadership of W&G rugby nationally and regionally.	Partner with PUs on their self-assessment, planning and activity for W&G, and on NZR projects that impact W&G in rugby.
	Maintain a Women and Girls' Programme Group within NZR to oversee delivery of the Strategy and work relevant to W&G, prepare the 2025 NZR Action Plan, and plan for 2026 onwards.
B1.3 Collaboratively market W&G Community Rugby opportunities.	Market Contact Ready as a shared brand with joint ownership and aligned collateral to provide a consistent experience for girls coming into rugby.
B1.4 Identify W&G local community rugby needs and minimum standards (i.e. Club Review).	Work with PUs on rolling out the actions from the Future of Rugby Clubs review .
B2.2 Enhance rugby system partnering, investment & accountability for mutually beneficial W&G outcomes.	Continue to work with our partners to deliver targeted, effective training and education to the wider rugby community.
	Deliver a mental health and wellbeing session alongside others on injury prevention, concussion and female health, as part of a CLM Community Sport hui for kōhine secondary school rugby teams in Counties Manukau.
	Consult with PU representatives, NZR management and staff on wider PU investment model for 2026+.
	Maintain transparency by continuing to monitor and report total annual investment in W&G rugby.
B2.4 Upskill and empower community rugby people to deliver inclusive and engaging community rugby.	Implement a new Learning Management System (LMS) in 2025 for easy access to learning opportunities across the rugby community.
B2.5 Review progress against W&G strategy and implementation outcomes and update priorities and targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on W&G activity at NZR as part of the 2024 NZR Annual Report. • Report on female participation in community rugby in the 2024 Statement of Service Performance. • Publish a review of activity completed against the 2024 NZR Action Plan.
B3.3 Review progress against W&G strategy and implementation outcomes and update priorities and targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the 2025 NZR Action Plan. • Define measures of overall Strategy progress and impact.

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B3.1 Enable community rugby through technology resources and support.	Integrate the LMS with other rugby systems (for example, Rugby Xplorer) and consolidate all content, resources and learning for a seamless, nationally consistent user experience.
B3.2 Attract, recruit, retain and develop high quality women into roles across the rugby system.	<p><u>Ako Wāhine</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile six coaches from across the network to raise the visibility of diverse coaching journeys, celebrate their contributions, and inspire more women to get involved in coaching. • Co-deliver a revised programme in partnership with an initial 11 PUs with the aim of recruiting and retaining over 250 coaches nationwide. • Establish a Women's Coach Network to retain, connect, and further develop coaches.
C: PARTICIPATION An open-minded and inclusive culture across rugby	
C1.1 Shift to PU-led model and regional and local delivery roles and responsibilities agreed to drive high quality experiences.	Design a participation and competition framework that guides PUs, clubs and schools on sustainable best practice offerings for W&G within their local context and informs national and regional competitions supported by NZR. The framework aims to meet the needs of W&G based on their age, stage, and skill level, to ensure they can seamlessly learn, play, compete, and achieve their aspirations in the game.
C1.2 Delivery of athlete skill-build and injury prevention programmes for safe and confident entry or transition into tackle rugby for 11-18+ year olds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot Contact Ready with 14 PUs, engaging over 400 girls who are either new to rugby or transitioning to contact formats of the game. The regional leads will be trained centrally for consistency. The pilot will also encompass coach development and an impact review conducted by AUT. • Use insights from the 2025 pilot to finalise the content and delivery model for a wider rollout from 2026.
C2.1 Increase girls-only tackle offerings for 13-18 year olds using formats (e.g. 7s, 10s, 15s) appropriate to player numbers and to building pathways, consolidated delivery as needed for safe quality experiences, and scheduling to avoid other sport clashes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All referees and new coaches of under-14 level rugby and above to be <u>RugbySmart</u>-accredited.
E1.2 Collaboratively develop and deliver training on skill coaching to support safe and confident W&G transitions into tackle rugby (i.e. starting into tackle rugby or transitioning from non-contact into tackle).	

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<p>C1.3 Increase girls-only non-contact offerings (e.g. Rip) for 11-12 year olds that fit player numbers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce T1 as a non-contact game variant based on <u>World Rugby's T1 format</u>, with guidelines for girls' rugby. • Consider a variety of potential mixed and girls-only, contact and non-contact offerings for players aged up to 18.
<p>C1.5 Increase girls-only non-contact offerings (i.e. Rip) for 13-15 year olds to lengthen non-contact pathway and provide entry option for new players.</p>	
<p>C3.1 Extend the non-contact offerings pathway (i.e. Rip) for 16-18 year olds using girls-only and/ or mixed for a quality experience that supports retention.</p>	
<p>C2.3 Increase girls-only festivals or camps for 15-18+ year olds to connect and engage females of different cultures and/ or capabilities to support retention and pathway transitions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to offer expanded opportunities for up to 250 Māori girls aged 15-17 including the under-18 Māori Rugby Development Programme, E Tū Toa Ngā Māreikura, in Q4. • Hold a six-day camp and 'North v South' match for 16- and 17-year-olds who have played in the FPC, represented their province, or been a member of a PU academy, as part of an expanded girls' high performance pathway programme.

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D: PERFORMANCE | Balanced and sustainable performance outcomes for women and girls' rugby – high performance, fan and commercial

D1.1 Review and develop a planned approach to W&G competitions, performance and high-performance pathways (e.g. Women's HP Plan).	Recommendations arising from the review completed in 2024 will be prioritised for implementation across 2025 and 2026 to ensure an effective transition.
D1.2 Review and develop a planned approach to W&G talent identification, development and support for players, coaches, referees, and managers (e.g. Women's Talent ID Plan).	Build a new platform to capture and manage player data and support formal talent identification and development, and use this data to review and update the Talent Identification Plan.
D1.4 Source and share W&G commercial insights.	Review the effectiveness of the RWC Campaign once complete and build lessons into future planning.
D1.5 Source and share W&G fan engagement & brand insights.	Develop a consolidated research programme encompassing brand, digital, fan and commercial insights, for a single holistic view of W&G rugby that supports effective decision-making and strategic development.
D3.1 Implement more strategically balanced W&G competitions, and performance and high-performance pathways (i.e. HP, commercial and fan).	Review 2025 Super Rugby Aupiki competition and align 2026 competition model with the latest women's global calendar.
	Successfully deliver three domestic Black Ferns test matches in 2025 and use lessons learned in review to inform planning for future games.
D3.2 Further develop W&G high performance opportunities and environments to enhance W&G ability to win with mana.	Continue implementation of recommendations of the <u>2022 Black Ferns Cultural and Environmental Review</u> , conduct player and campaign surveys, and monitor and report to the Cultural and Environmental Review Panel on our progress. Assemble the Black Ferns XV for international matches.
D2.1 Implement seamless pathway connections and transitions from community to performance (e.g. Women's HP & Talent ID Plan implementation).	Launch the <u>Next Ferns</u> talent identification programme, including regional and national combines inviting new talent from outside rugby. Introduce a women's under-18 development camp to build out the women's performance pathway.
D3.3 Optimise the W&G playing calendar.	Align domestic competitions with the global women's match calendar, including Super Rugby Aupiki with Rugby Australia's Super W competition.

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E: Transitions | Women and girls' entry and retention in rugby through safe, supported and confident transitions

E1.1 Source and facilitate training on the key differences around coaching and managing W&G (i.e. Hauora, psychosocial, physiological, cultural).	Pilot tailored Warm Up programmes both as part of Contact Ready, and in teams across women's rugby.
	Build Women's Health Insights Hub to provide foundational knowledge on key aspects of women's health, including puberty, menstrual health, pelvic health, and menopause.
E1.4 Collaboratively develop and deliver training on how to run high quality inclusive rugby experiences for diverse W&G (safety, environment, culture, training).	Develop, trial, and begin to introduce training and ongoing support resources for coaches of teenagers.
E2.1 Develop and deliver officials training on the art of refereeing women and girls, and rules and safety for refereeing W&G mixed capability and age games.	Support PU staff to deliver the <u>Introduction to Refereeing course</u> themselves with local women referees.
	Adapt and digitise the existing 'Art of Refereeing Women and Girls' training module for re-launch on the new LMS in 2026.
E3.3 Develop and support talented W&G coaches and referees to transition from community to high performance.	Finalise a framework for referees, and assess and address gaps in capability, ahead of implementation from 2026.
	Complete the Women's Coach Development Plan for community rugby.
E2.2 Collaboratively develop and deliver advanced coach training to support the W&G talent transition from community rugby to performance rugby.	Provide targeted support for high-potential coaches.