

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



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THE NEW ZEALAND WOMEN AND GIRLS IN RUGBY SYSTEM STRATEGY 2023–2033

The Women and Girls in Rugby System Strategy was launched in April 2023 as a roadmap for rugby organisations across the system, setting out structured pathways to ensure women and girls are supported to achieve their potential in all aspects of the game into the next decade and beyond. The vision of the strategy is that ‘rugby is a game for all’ – creating environments where women and girls feel comfortable, supported and enabled to be fully involved in the game.

The strategy was co-designed with stakeholders across the system and provides direction both from and for those who live and love rugby. It challenges every rugby organisation to assess their own progress towards equity in the delivery and support of women and girls. Prioritised building blocks and strategic objectives across the five 5 focus areas guide investment towards sustainable, impactful change for all.

THE 2023 NZR ACTION PLAN

Background

As one such rugby organisation, and a kaitiaki of the game, NZR developed its own initial Action Plan for 2023 setting out our first steps in implementing the strategy. The plan included a set of commitments to lead and enable progress against each of the Strategy’s five focus areas, addressing the highest priority building blocks first. It brings together work already in progress from across the organisation, proposed a new internal delivery structure, and identified new strategic initiatives.

New Zealand Rugby’s total
Women and Girls
investment in 2023
\$21,781,000

Progress against the strategy in 2023

Strategy Focus Area	Activity Workstream	Completed in 2023
CULTURE An open-minded and inclusive culture across rugby	Safety and protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A large-scale injury prevention programme in community rugby addressed the most critical health and safety risks in women and girls’ participation and environment.
	Diversity in governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The NZR Board met Sport NZ’s board gender diversity of 40% female members at the 2023 AGM, and by June 2023 10 of 31 rugby organisations nationwide had at least 33% women on their boards. All Provincial Unions (PUs) have plans and funding in place towards meeting governance diversity targets. – NZR arranged training in Inclusive Leadership for 22 PU Chairs and CEOs, and on Unconscious Bias for 23 leaders and governors across rugby. – In collaboration with the Institute of Directors, NZR developed a governance skills and mentoring programme for women in rugby governance, following current state analysis and consultation with PU CEOs, Oceania Rugby, and women already in governance roles. 25 women were selected to join the new programme for 2024 with 11 highly-skilled women from within rugby as their mentors. – NZR also facilitated a ‘Women in Rugby Governance’ online connect series, delivered quarterly to improve connections and information sharing.
	Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An independent analysis of gender pay equity was conducted within NZR. – New resources developed specifically supporting female coaches, players and referees, and on coaching women and girls.

Strategy Focus Area	Activity Workstream	Completed in 2023
SYSTEM Focused rugby system collaboration, investment, roles, resourcing and accountability	Intentional leadership of women and girls rugby	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A Women and Girls' Programme Group was established within NZR to oversee delivery of the strategy and action plans. – 12 NZR staff attended the 2023 Women in Leadership Summit. – Targeted W&G roles and responsibilities were appointed to or assigned across community and high performance within NZR. A dedicated W&G Community Rugby team was created where the 'Head of Women and Girls – Community' leads four regional Women & Girls Rugby Managers that work directly with clubs, schools and PUs.
	Redefine rugby system relationships, roles and responsibilities for women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NZR worked with PUs to map roles, relationships and responsibilities within the rugby system as a basis for building consistent pathways for women.
	Minimum standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Future of Rugby Clubs review completed in 2023 looked at how the rugby club network can survive and thrive beyond the next 25 years. Recommendations for implementation included a strong need for facilities that are all-inclusive and fit-for-purpose. – Projects backed by SSI (Strategic Stakeholder) funding and through the Bunnings Assist programme upgraded several club facilities to be more welcoming.
	Review progress and update priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A report on progress against the 2023 NZR W&G Action Plan was included in the NZR 2023 Annual Report, as a strategic priority for the organisation. A 2024 Action Plan will summarise activity planned for this year.
PARTICIPATION Women and girls participation growth and pathways fostered through innovation and flexibility	Shift to PU-led regional and local delivery roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All 26 provincial unions underwent an initial self-assessment of their delivery against the W&G strategy, with priorities highlighted for action. All included W&G initiatives in their Strategic Alignment Funding plans for 2024, with a total of \$1.8m invested. – Over 150,000 girls and young women were engaged in rugby sampling programmes through the Girls Activator Programme, run locally by Provincial Unions and supported by NZR. A case study was also developed to support further investment by PUs in continuing the approach themselves.
	Increase opportunities for participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participation by women strengthened with 29,448 registered players this year, an increase of 20% on 2022.
	Referees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Following a targeted recruitment and retention programme for female referees, a new high of 105 female referees registered nationwide in 2023, up 28%.

Strategy Focus Area	Activity Workstream	Completed in 2023
PERFORMANCE Balanced and sustainable performance outcomes for women and girls' rugby – high performance, fan and commercial	High performance, competitions and pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The inaugural international WXV1 tournament was hosted by New Zealand. – Four women's domestic Test matches were delivered in 2023, three of which were part of the inaugural WXV tournament hosted by New Zealand. A total of 7 Black Ferns (and 6 non-Black Ferns) Test matches were delivered in 2023 to a high standard under World Rugby guidelines. – A new extended format for Super Rugby Aupiki developed and implemented for 2024.
	Strengthen community-performance pathways, talent identification, development and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A new Women's High Performance plan defined pathways and structures for talent identification and management. and support for players, coaches, referees and managers. – A new Black Ferns XV team established to foster the professional growth of players, coaches and management on the international stage and provide a high-performance pathway to the Black Ferns. – NZR continued its investment of \$500,000 into Regional Councils to deliver age-grade programmes, as well as girls' talent identification and development programmes. – NZR delivered the NZ Māori Girls U18 Ngā Māreikura programme to capacity with regional camps, a national camp of 44 players and a Ngā Māreikura selection to play a NZ Barbarians Selection.
	Player welfare and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A focus on player safety, wellbeing and injury prevention in high performance players included the rollout of Femmi women's health modules to Teams in Black management, implementation of a modified version of the Head Impact Assessment protocols across Super Rugby Aupiki (SRA), and continued research into brain health and concussion in partnership with World Rugby (including instrumented mouthguard trials). – Recommendations were implemented to Black Ferns training environments, management and support processes, in response to the Black Ferns Cultural and Environmental Review released in 2021.
	Commercial and Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ryman Healthcare was appointed as the naming rights partner of the O'Reilly Cup competition, as well as being the first dedicated partner of the Black Ferns and Black Ferns Sevens since the RWC2021 (played in 2022). – The NZR Events team supported 12 women's matchday, tournament or media launch events through 2023.
	Fan engagement, Brand and Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The marketing campaigns 'Love Every Minute' (for Community, Farah Palmer Cup (FPC) and SRA) and 'Like a Black Fern' (for Black Ferns and Black Ferns Sevens) continued in 2023. – A wide range of marketing activity was delivered in support of women's rugby matches and competitions, with SRA strongly featuring at-ground activations run by a dedicated support team. The Black Ferns' Hamilton Test match sold more than 11,000 tickets.
TRANSITIONS Women and girls entry and retention in rugby through safe, supported and confident transitions	Development and support of female coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Ako Wāhine World Rugby-accredited learning programme continued to build a network of confident capable women in rugby. Those successfully completing the new Level 3 educator course are awarded World Rugby's Coach Educator status, allowing them to lead learning programmes and assess others.