



The Future of Metropolitan Open Gender Pennant Discussion Paper

To begin discussion on the future of Open Gender Metropolitan Pennant in the 2024-2025 Metropolitan Pennant Season and Beyond, the following Information will be included in this paper:

1. Legal Requirements for Sport in Australia
3. Comparable Pennant Competitions across Australia
4. General Selection Criteria for WA Open Gender
5. Men's Saturday Pennant Information and Selection Criteria
6. Men's Thursday Pennant Information and Selection Criteria
7. Women's Tuesday Pennant Information and Selection Criteria
8. Women's Saturday Pennant Information and Selection Criteria
9. Women's Saturday Pennant Discussion Points
10. Men's Thursday Pennant Discussion Points
11. Women's Tuesday Pennant Discussion Points
12. What Clubs Need to Do
13. Form to be Completed and Returned to Bowls WA

Legal Requirements for Sport in Australia

All States have their own State Legislated Equal Opportunities Act that they must consider when providing sporting competitions.

While there are some differences, they are all aligned to the fact that Bowls cannot discriminate between males and females, because strength, stamina and physique are not “relevant” to the sport of bowling, as described in the Victorian and South Australian court cases described later in this discussion paper

The four-year plan put in place by Bowls WA in 2021-2022 for Men’s Saturday Pennant to become fully Open Gender in 2024-2025, brings Bowls WA in line with every other State and Territories Pennant Competitions as well the WA Equal Opportunities Act 1984, by ensuring the designated Primary Saturday Pennant Competition is Fully Open Gender.

It is also the case that other states have been able, if they choose to, to run Single Gender Midweek Competitions with Restrictions. While these States still call the competitions Open Gender, restrictions are in place for the opposite gender players to be eligible, much like our current Cross Gender Rules.

The interpretation of the Western Australian Equal Opportunities Act 1984 also allows Bowls WA to run Single Gender Pennant Competitions with an element of Open Gender or Cross Gender.

This Discussion Paper will concentrate on Tuesday and Thursday Pennant Competitions and the fine line between not enough restrictions and too many restrictions to ensure Metropolitan Pennant Competitions are viable in the near and far future.

Comparable Pennant Competitions across Australia

VICTORIA

In 2000, 17-year-old Emily South, from St Kilda Bowling Club, wanted to play bowls at the highest level of competition. This was a Saturday men's competition, and the Bowls Club agreed that she was sufficiently skilled to play. Bowls Victoria, however, refused to register her. Emily took her case further and won. This is because it was decided that within the context of her sport (bowling), the level of her strength, stamina and physique was not relevant when competing against men. Bowls Victoria was then ordered to amend its rules so as not to prohibit women. It was found that she was discriminated against for her sex, because strength, stamina and physique were not "relevant" to the sport of bowling.

Victorian Metropolitan Pennant in 2023-2024

Saturday – Completely Open Gender

Midweek – Completely Open Gender

There is no Single Gender Pennant In Metropolitan Victoria

Comparable Pennant Competitions across Australia

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In 2008 Bowls SA lost a court case along the same lines as Victoria when it was found that females were being discriminated against based on sex, because strength, stamina and physique were not “relevant” to the sport of bowling.

South Australia Metropolitan Pennant 2023-2024

Saturday – Completely Open Gender

Wednesday (Men) – Open Gender with restrictions

Thursday (Women) – Open Gender with restrictions

Wednesday and Thursday Opposite Gender Player Rules (continued next page)

The spirit of these rules is to reduce forfeits and so ensure that as many players as possible get a game but also to discourage the selection of Opposite Gender Players to gain an unfair advantage.

No Opposite Gender Player shall be selected for a game if the Member Club has sufficient eligible same gender players available.

If a Member Club has insufficient eligible same gender players available to complete their sides at any time, then any member of that Member Club may be used in the Member Club’s lowest ranked side, provided that the player has been judged eligible as follows:

Comparable Pennant Competitions across Australia

South Australia Metropolitan Pennant 2023-2024

- ❑ For Wednesday competition, Opposite Gender Players may be selected from eligible Pennant playing members of that club who play at Division Six level or below on Saturday, or from Division Five if that is the club's lowest ranked side. Members that do not play Saturday pennants may be selected if they play at Division Two level or below on Thursday. Non-Pennant playing members who are assessed at that level may also be selected.
- ❑ For Thursday competition, Opposite Gender Players may be selected from eligible Pennant playing members of that club who play at Division Six level or below on Saturday, or from Division Five if that is the club's lowest ranked side. Members that do not play Saturday pennants may be selected if they play at Division Four level on Wednesday. Non-Pennant playing members who are assessed at that level may also be selected.
- ❑ Clubs can apply in writing to Match & Program Committee for permission to play other nominated members, supplying evidence to support their application.
- ❑ The maximum number of Opposite Gender players permitted in the Wednesday competition is 4 in a 16-a-side and 3 in a 12-a-side. Only one OG player can play in each team, may only play as Lead or Second in a team of Fours or Lead in a Triple.
- ❑ The maximum number of Opposite Gender players permitted in the Thursday competition is 3 in a 12-a-side and 2 in an 8-a-side. Only one OG player can play in each team and may only play as Lead or Second.

Comparable Pennant Competitions across Australia

TASMANIA

In October 2012, Bowls Tasmania ruled that pennant would be non-gender specific from the 2013-14 bowls season, but it allowed the State's regional bowls associations and clubs to still determine their own rules.

Tasmanian Pennant 2023-2024

Saturday – Completely Open Gender

Midweek Pennant (Men) – Open Gender with restrictions

- ❑ Opposite gender players may be used in a club's lowest pennant side.
- ❑ The opposite gender players can only be used when no eligible same gender player is available.
- ❑ Only one opposite gender player is allowed per team (rink).
- ❑ The opposite gender player may only play in the "second" position.
- ❑ To be eligible for selection opposite gender players must be regular players participating in Division 3 or below.

Thursday Pennant (Women) – Open Gender with restrictions

- ❑ The opposite gender players can only be used when no eligible same gender player is available.
- ❑ Only one opposite gender player is allowed per team (rink).
- ❑ The opposite gender player may only play in the "second" position.
- ❑ To be eligible for selection opposite gender players must be regular players participating in Division 3 or below.

Comparable Pennant Competitions across Australia

Although both New South Wales and Queensland have a different style of Pennant with less games and more Controlling Bodies running Pennant competitions, they do have the following similarities

New South Wales

Open State Pennant is Open Gender

Queensland

Main State Pennant is Open Gender

General Selection Criteria for WA Open Gender

Each year since the introduction of Open Gender Pennant, a review of the selection criteria of players playing in the opposite gender competitions has taken place.

2021-2022 Season

There were no specific rules around which players of the opposite gender were eligible to play in the Open Gender Pennant competitions. Instead, clubs made selection decisions by using the integrity rule.

2022-2023 Season

There were still no specific rules around eligibility of players with the integrity rule still the main focus, but the following statement was added to the Metropolitan Pennant General Conditions

All players should be considered on an equal basis when selecting Open Gender Pennant Sides and chosen on a skill level basis and not on gender. However, players coming from a higher division in their own gender competitions need to be at an appropriate skill level to play in the available Open Gender Divisions. If a player is considered to be at a significantly higher skill level than Open Gender Division selection allows, they should not be selected.

Bowls WA Men's Saturday Pennant Information



Saturday Open Gender Pennant was introduced into the Metropolitan Pennant Competition in the 2021-2022 Season, while still keeping previous Cross Gender Substitution Rules for clubs whose lowest Pennant Division did not qualify.

The initial introduction included implementing a four-year plan for Men's Saturday Pennant to become fully Open Gender in the 2024-2025 season by increasing the number of Open Gender Divisions by one in each of the subsequent three seasons.

2021-2022 Season - Men's Saturday Open Gender 4th Division Pennant and Below

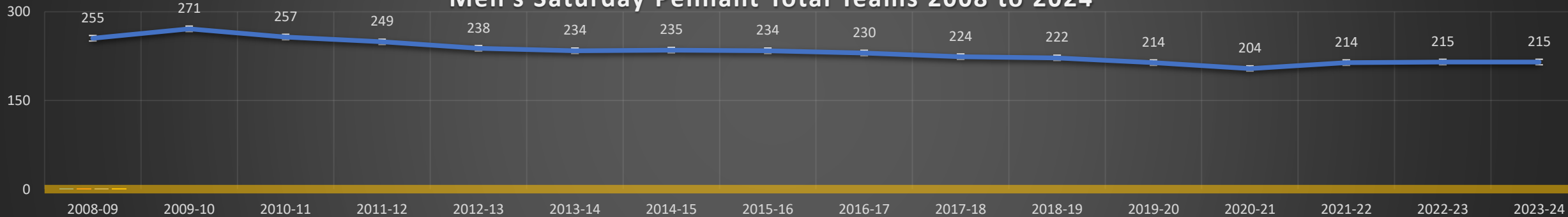
2022-2023 Season – Men's Saturday Open Gender 3rd Division Pennant and Below

2023-2024 Season – Men's Saturday Open Gender 2nd Division Pennant and Below

2024-2025 Season – Open Gender Saturday Pennant Premier and Below

The below Graph shows a consistent decline in the number of Men's Saturday Pennant Teams from 2008-2009 until 2019-2020. However, since Open Gender was introduced in 2021-2022, the number of entered teams initially went up slightly and has been stable the last two seasons.

Men's Saturday Pennant Total Teams 2008 to 2024



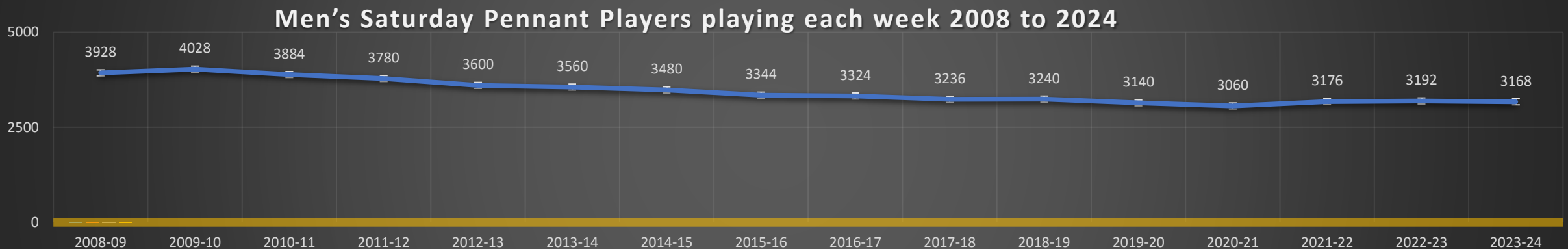
2023-2024 Selection Criteria for Women to Play Open Gender Men's Saturday Pennant Divisions

A host of rules were introduced after clubs wanted more defined eligibility criteria as there was confusion on who could and could not play. The following criteria was put in place for Open Gender Saturday Pennant

- ❑ Women playing 1st Division White or Premier League in Tuesday Pennant are not permitted to play Men's Saturday 2nd Division and below Open Gender Pennant
- ❑ Women playing 1st Division Green and below in Tuesday Pennant may play Men's Saturday 2nd and 3rd Division Open Gender Pennant
- ❑ Women playing 2nd Division and below in Tuesday Pennant may play Men's Saturday 2nd Division and below in Open Gender Pennant

All selection Criteria will be dropped in the 2024-2025 Pennant Season and all Women will be selected on merit

As per the number of teams entered into Men's Saturday Pennant, the graph shows a slow decline since the 2009-2010 Season and then an increase in the 2021-2022 Season when Open Gender was introduced before again declining in the 2023-2024 Season but still above pre Open Gender Seasons.



Bowls WA Men's Thursday Pennant Information

Men's Thursday Open Gender Pennant was introduced in the 2021-2022 Season, while still keeping previous Cross Gender Substitution Rules for clubs whose lowest Pennant Divisions did not qualify.

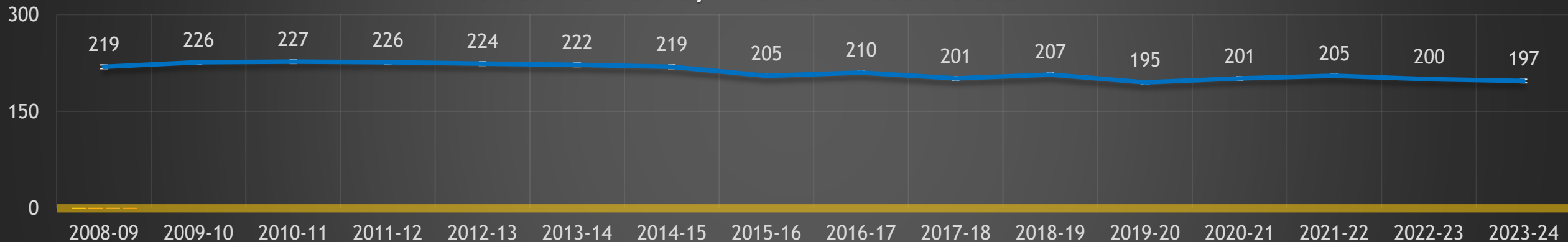
There is currently no plan to increase the number of Open Gender Pennant Divisions

2021-2024 Season – Men's Thursday Open Gender 4th Division Pennant and Below

The graph shows a gradual decline of teams since 2010-2011.

There has been a considerable increase of Country Players playing Metropolitan Thursday Pennant over the last 10 years which may be helping many clubs keep the same number of teams.

Midweek Pennant by Total Teams 2008 to 2024



2023-2024 Selection Criteria for Women to Play Open Gender Men's Thursday Pennant



A host of rules were introduced after clubs wanted more defined eligibility criteria as there was confusion on who could and could not play. The following criteria was put in place for Open Gender Thursday Pennant

- ❑ Women playing 2nd Division or Above in Tuesday Pennant may not play Open Gender Thursday Pennant
- ❑ Women playing 3rd Division or Below in Tuesday Pennant may play Open Gender Thursday Pennant

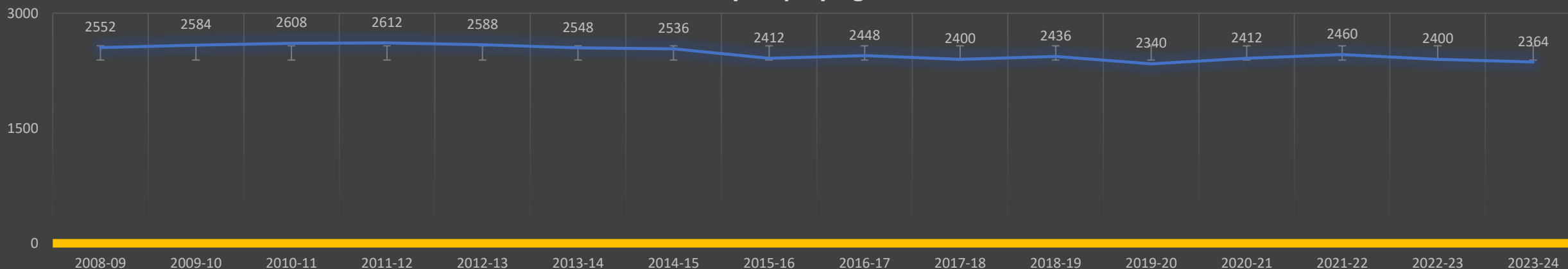
Previous Cross Gender Rules has continued to be in place for clubs whose lowest division does not qualify as an Open Gender Division

WOMEN PLAYING THURSDAY PENNANT

In the 2023-2024 Season up to round 15, 201 Women have played a total of 895 games in Midweek Open Gender Pennant Divisions

The player decline in the graph has mainly come from 6th Division having fewer teams and is on the verge of not being viable.

Midweek Pennant Players playing each week 2008 to 2024



Bowls WA Women's Tuesday Pennant Information



Tuesday Open Gender Pennant was introduced in the 2021-2022 Season, while still keeping previous Cross Gender Substitution Rules for clubs whose lowest Pennant Divisions did not qualify.

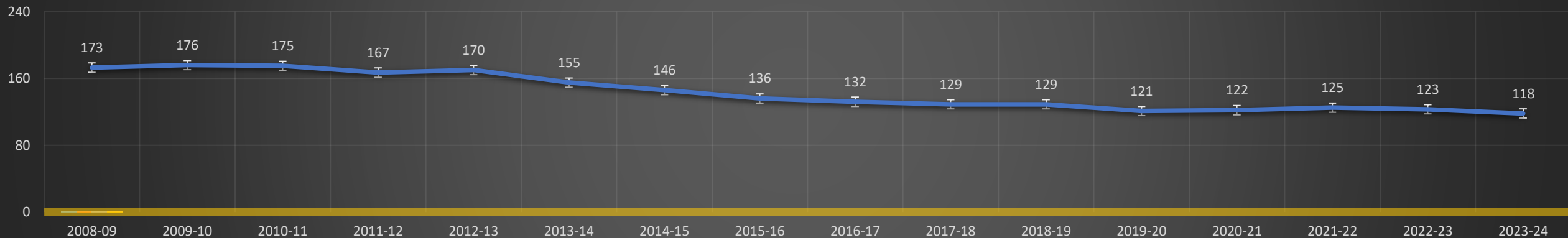
There was no initial plan to increase the number of Open Gender Pennant Divisions

2021-2024 Season - Women's Tuesday Open Gender 3rd Division Pennant and Below

Women's Tuesday Pennant has been in considerable decline since the 2012-2013 season when the competition had 170 teams but now sits at 118 teams in the 2023-2024 season, a loss of 52 Pennant Teams in 11 Seasons.

The graph does not show much of an increase in teams when Open Gender was introduced but that is because teams upgraded their two rink teams from 4th Division to three rink teams in 3rd Division rather than entering new teams.

Tuesday Pennant Total Teams 2008 to 2024



2023-2024 Selection Criteria for Men to Play Open Gender Women's Tuesday Pennant



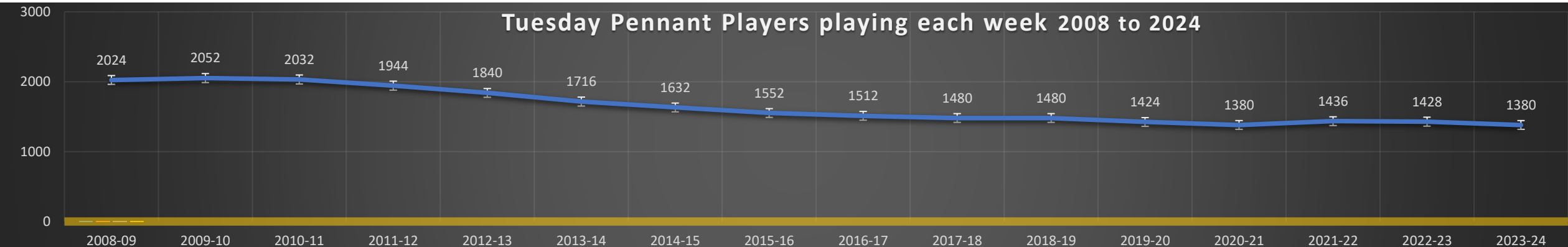
A host of rules were introduced after clubs wanted more defined eligibility criteria as there was confusion on who could and could not play. The following criteria was put in place

- Men playing 2nd Division or higher in Men's Saturday Pennant are not permitted to play Tuesday 3rd Division or 4th Division Open Gender Pennant
- Men playing 3rd Division and below in Men's Saturday Pennant may only play Tuesday 3rd Division Open Gender Pennant
- Men playing 4th Division and below in Men's Saturday Pennant may play Tuesday 3rd Division and below Open Gender Pennant
- Previous Cross Gender Rules have continued to be in place for clubs whose lowest division does not qualify as an Open Gender Division

MEN PLAYING TUESDAY PENNANT

In the 2023-2024 Season, up to round 15, 405 Men have played a total of 2023 games in Tuesday Open Gender Pennant

The below graph shows from the 2009-2010 season from to the 2020-2021 season, there were 672 less players on the green on Tuesday. There was an increase of 56 players with the introduction of Open Gender Pennants but that has slipped back to 2020-2021 levels this season.



Bowls WA Women's Saturday Pennant Information

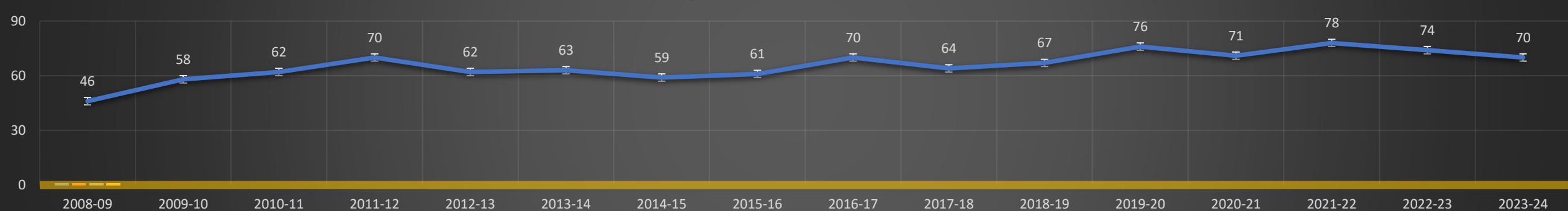
Women's Saturday Open Gender Pennant was introduced in the 2021-2022 Season, while still keeping previous Cross Gender Substitution Rules for clubs whose lowest Pennant Divisions did not qualify.

There was no plan to increase the number of Open Gender Pennant Divisions

2021-2024 Season – Women's Saturday Open Gender 3rd Division Pennant Only

In terms of teams entered, the Women's Saturday Pennant has clearly been the growing Pennant Competition going from 46 teams in 2008-2009 to a high of 78 teams in 2021-2022. This season some clubs dropped their Saturday teams in preparation for Open Gender in 2024-2025

Women's Saturday Pennant Total Teams 2008 to 2024

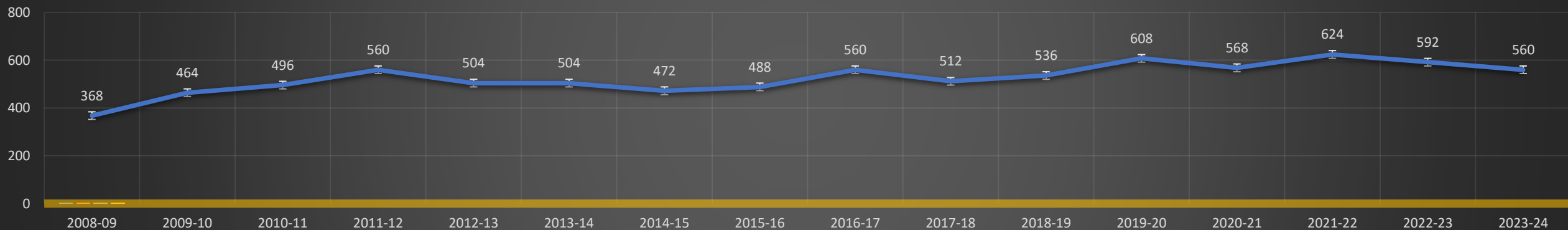


2023-2024 Selection Criteria for Men to Play Open Gender Women's Saturday Pennant

There were no specific criteria put on selection in the Women's Saturday Pennant competition instead continuing to rely on the integrity rule
Previous Cross Gender Rules have continued to be in place for clubs whose lowest division does not qualify as an Open Gender Division

In the 2023-2024 Season 50 Men have played a total of 133 games in Women's Saturday Open Gender 3rd Division Pennant

Women's Saturday Pennant Players playing each week 2008 to 2024



Women's Saturday Pennant Discussion Points

37 Clubs currently enter teams in Women's Saturday Pennant, and the following points have been put forward

1. With the introduction of a complete Open Gender Pennant Competition, the Women's Competition should not continue and there should only be one Saturday Competition

BWA Comment – How many of the 560 women would play Open Gender Pennant and how many would stop playing?

2. Under the interpretation of the Equal Opportunities Act, this competition is allowed to continue and as one of the few Pennant Competitions that has grown over the last 15 years, Clubs should continue to have the choice to enter or not enter and should continue until not enough clubs enter teams

BWA Comment – If clubs choose to not enter teams, as some clubs did this season in preparation for Open Gender Saturday Pennant next season, we start getting byes and more travel as clubs in a division get further apart

Midweek Pennant Discussion Points

The following points have been put forward

1. Open Gender Midweek Pennant Divisions stay as 4th , 5th and 6th Divisions with the same current restrictions

BWA Comment – Smaller clubs currently have trouble using women because their Women’s Tuesday Divisions are too high, and they do not qualify

2. Open Gender Midweek Pennant Divisions stay as 4th , 5th and 6th Divisions with less restrictions and allow women in higher Tuesday Divisions to play

BWA Comment – Integrity Rule comes into question the higher the Tuesday Divisions you allow to play Midweek 4th Division and below.

3. Open Gender Midweek Pennant Divisions are along the lines to South Australia, which is similar to Bowls WA’s current Cross Gender Substitution Rules. Only a club's lowest division is eligible, and the opposite gender comes from lowest divisions.

BWA Comment – Clubs do not have the same divisions. While it adds clarity that every club knows which opposite gender players they can use, some clubs will be using Opposite Gender players from high divisions and other clubs have to use them from lower divisions.

Tuesday Pennant Discussion Points

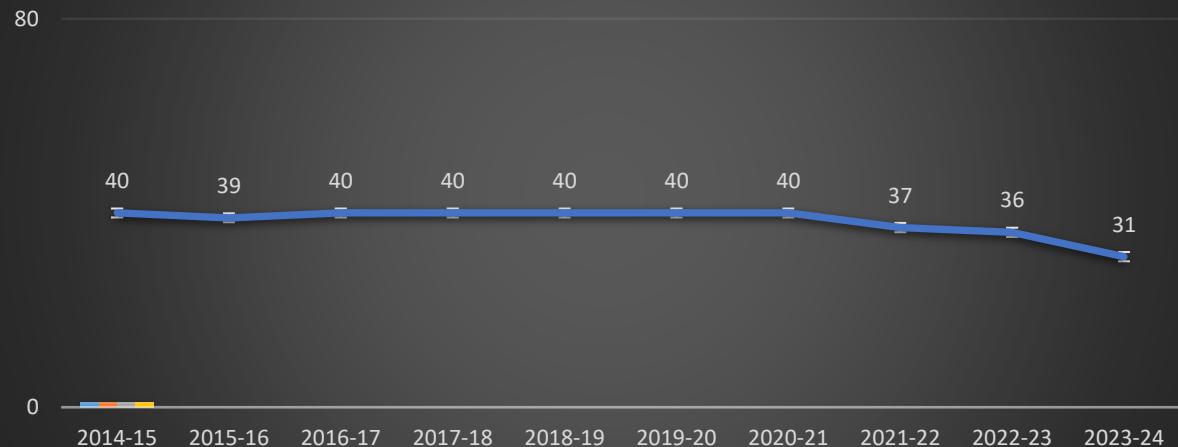
1. Open Gender is abandoned in Women's Tuesday Pennant, and we return to previous Cross Gender Rules

BWA Comment – In 2020-2021 there were only 21 teams in 3rd Division (2 colors only), when Open Gender was introduced in 2021-2022, the number rose to 32 teams and is now 39 teams. How many clubs will drop their 3rd Division team because they can use less men or will the use of one man per rink be enough to keep them in the competition.

2. Open Gender is expanded to include Women's Tuesday 2nd Division

BWA Comment – The 2023-2024 Season saw a number of clubs drop out of 2nd Division or not take their 3rd Division promotion leaving only 31 teams in 2nd Division. The main reason given for the last three seasons for the dropping of teams out of 2nd Division was “without the use of men, the club would not be able to fill their team”.

Tuesday Pennant 2nd Division Total Teams



Tuesday Pennant 3rd Division Total Teams



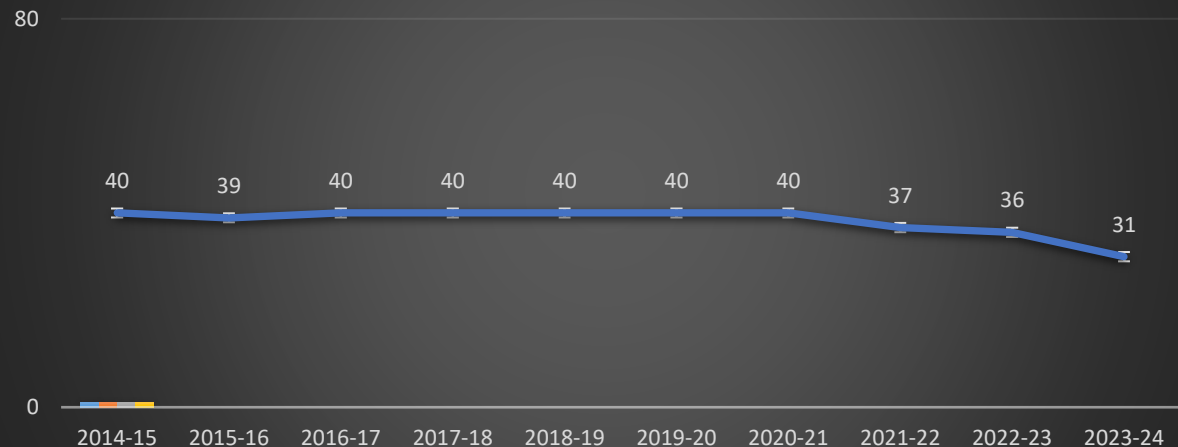
Tuesday Pennant Discussion Points

3. Open Gender continues in Tuesday Pennant 3rd and 4th Division with more restrictions. These restrictions include limiting the number of men that can play and the position they can play.

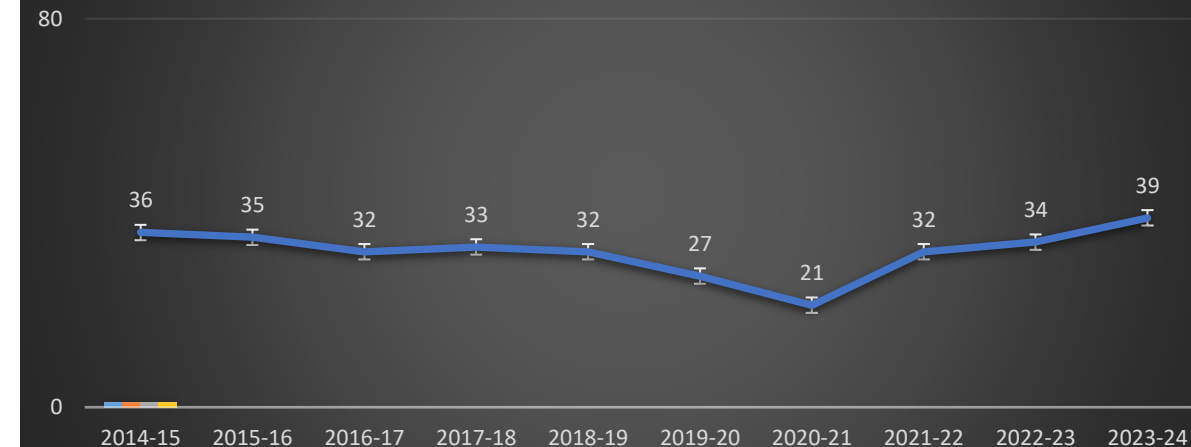
BWA Comment – Is this the compromise to allow more than one man per rink but having enough men to allow clubs to keep their current teams.

Can these restrictions be expanded to 2nd Division as well to help clubs take promotions and fill 2nd Division back up to 40 teams.

Tuesday Pennant 2nd Division Total Teams



Tuesday Pennant 3rd Division Total Teams



What Clubs Need To Do

Bowls WA is asking all Metropolitan Clubs to take the time to consider the information presented in this document on the future direction of Open Gender in the Metropolitan Pennant Competitions.

Please consider not only what is best for your club now but also what is best for the continuation of Metropolitan Pennant in the future.

The graphs provided are a very good guide of the direction of the Pennant Competitions in the last 16 years and must be considered when Bowls WA, in conjunction with Metropolitan Clubs, make the final decisions for Pennant bowls in the 2024-2025 season and beyond

All Metropolitan Clubs have a vested interest in the direction of Metropolitan Pennant, please take the time to complete the form at the end of this document and have your club's voice heard.

Bowls WA will collate all the forms received and based on the results, provide an agenda for discussion at the next Presidents Forum.

Only the club version of this document includes the form to be completed