

FAIR ACCESS POLICY

Report Author: Recreation Development & Liaison Officer
Responsible Officer: Director Built Environment & Infrastructure
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

This report seeks to inform Council of the Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Fair Access Policy for endorsement and implementation by the Recreation and Sport Team.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Fair Access Policy.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

There are no related Council decisions relevant to this item.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

The Fair Access Policy Roadmap aims to develop a statewide foundation to improve the access to, and use of, community sports infrastructure for women and girls. From 1 July 2024, all Victorian Councils need to have gender equitable access and use policies in place to be considered eligible to receive infrastructure funding from the State Government. These policies will ensure that women and girls can fully participate in and enjoy the benefits of community sport, with fair opportunity and access to their local facilities.

To provide consistency in how the policy is applied across Melbourne East, seven Local Government Authorities that comprise the Melbourne East Region have developed an overarching Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Fair Access Policy.

The Policy documents include:

- Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Fair Access Policy (Appendix 1)
- Fair Access Policy and Evaluation Framework / Action Plan (Appendix 2)
- Fair Access Policy Background Report (Appendix 3)

The Melbourne East Regional Sports and Recreation Strategy 2022-2032 (MERSRS) was endorsed in 2022. The Strategy continues to guide a regional approach to key issues and opportunities for delivering sport and active recreation facilities and services in the Melbourne East Region. The update found a need to “improve participation for all genders and abilities”. The MERSRS Fair Access Policy responds to this finding.

The MERSRS Fair Access Policy has been guided by the Fair Access Policy Roadmap provided by the State Government and responds to Local Governments obligations to gender equality under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (C’wth), Equality Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic), Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) and the Victoria Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic).

Specifically, Local Governments are required from 31 March 2021 to conduct Gender Impact Assessments on all new policies, programs, communications, and services, including those up for review, which directly and significantly impact the public (Gender Equality Act 2020).

Key Issues

The key reasons for the Policy:

- There is a substantial gap in both the participation of women and girls, trans and gender diverse people in sport and recreation and an identified gender imbalance in leadership positions across all levels of the sporting and active recreation sector.
- Overall participation trends show a significant increase in women and girls, trans and gender diverse people’s participation across sport and active recreation activities, including improved development pathways and competition structures. However, participation outcomes for women and girls, particularly in traditionally male dominated sports such as Australian Rules Football, Soccer and Cricket still indicate low levels of women and girls, trans and gender diverse peoples participation, and support is needed to reverse this trend.

- Women and girls, trans and gender diverse people continue to face barriers to accessing or participating in sport and active recreation.
- MERSRS has identified a need to improve participation for all genders and abilities. To do this a Fair Access Policy is needed that focuses on, infrastructure, programs, and governance.
- State Government policy mandates that all local government authorities and peak sporting bodies require a fair access policy to access state government funding opportunities.
- A partnership approach with State Sporting Associations, local sports associations and leagues, and local sport and active recreation clubs is important to improve gender equality in sport and active recreation.
- Recognition of the impact of initiatives within Melbourne East Region and associated campaigns like “This Girl Can” has increased visibility of participation opportunities and encouraged women and girls’, trans and gender diverse people to be active in various sports and active recreation activities.

The Fair Access Policy includes principles and a range of approaches to address known barriers experienced by women and girls, trans and gender-diverse people in accessing and using community sports and active recreation facilities, services and programs.

An intersectional approach underpins the delivery of the Fair Access Policy.

Next Steps

The next steps are:

- Council officers will implement proposed approaches to be delivered locally, once Council has endorsed the policy.
- Council officers work with the MERSRS Group to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the Fair Access Policy.

Options considered

The State Government have not been prescriptive in what the content of the Fair Access Policy needs to be, however, have suggested that Councils undertake what is locally relevant to the organisation. This could be the development of a stand-alone Fair Access Policy or a Gender Impact Assessment on an existing policy.

When the Fair Access Policy Roadmap was announced, the Eastern Region Councils were in the process of updating the Melbourne Eastern Region Sport and Recreation Strategy. The working group for this Strategy, made up of leaders from each of the seven Councils, sparked the idea of creating a regionally based policy to inform policies made at a local level.

Recommended option and justification

A regional approach to Fair Access was chosen for the following reasons:

- Many sporting leagues and associations cross Local Government boundaries in the eastern region. Therefore, the overarching policy for all clubs competing in the Ringwood & District Cricket Association, Football Victoria or the Eastern Football Netball League, for example, will be consistent.
- Efficiency in use of resources. e.g. The cost of developing the policy has been shared between the seven councils.
- Collaborative approach with the seven Eastern Regional Councils to progress Gender Equitable sporting environments as a region rather than individual LGAs.
- Continued collaboration and strengthening of relationships across the Eastern Region Councils, provides united and clear messaging to Clubs.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

No additional financial considerations are associated with this report, with ongoing policy development activities funded from Council's Recreation and Sport team operational budget.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

1. Connected and Healthy Communities.
2. Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places.

These two key strategic pillars of the Council Plan relate to ensuring community services and the infrastructure that they are delivered from are accessible, gender equitable and inclusive of all.

Sporting clubs that are reflective of the community they represent, family friendly, safe, and welcoming to all create environments where everyone has the opportunity to participate, connect and contribute to their local community. Sporting clubs play a large part in providing social connectedness for their communities and with support in creating gender equitable environments, the social, physical, and mental health outcomes these organizations contribute for their participants and members will continue to improve.

Furthermore, this policy will respond to and assist Council in achieving Health and Wellbeing outcomes, as outlined in the Health and Wellbeing Plan. Specifically:

Priority 4 – Increase active living. Supporting gender equity in sport and recreation provides more opportunities for more people to be more active more often.

Priority 5 – Improve mental wellbeing and social connection. As outlined above, the social impact of sporting clubs cannot be denied. They play an integral role in connecting and supporting their communities via participation as a player, volunteer, official or supporter.

Priority 6 – Prevent violence against women and children. Sporting clubs have a unique position to impact social change and when we breakdown social norms, gender stereotypes and challenge ingrained beliefs and assumptions in sporting clubs we breakdown these structures in the broader society.

Local Government strategic and policy alignment with State Government legislation and policy on gender equality in sport and active recreation is critical to deliver outcomes locally and regionally.

As detailed in the State Government Fair Access Policy Roadmap, the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic) requires all Local Government Authorities to prepare and adopt Gender Equality Action Plans consistent with Council Plans (every four years).

The following graphic shows the relationships between the MERSRS Fair Access Policy with the Federal Government and State Government gender equality legislation and policy and Local Government strategies.

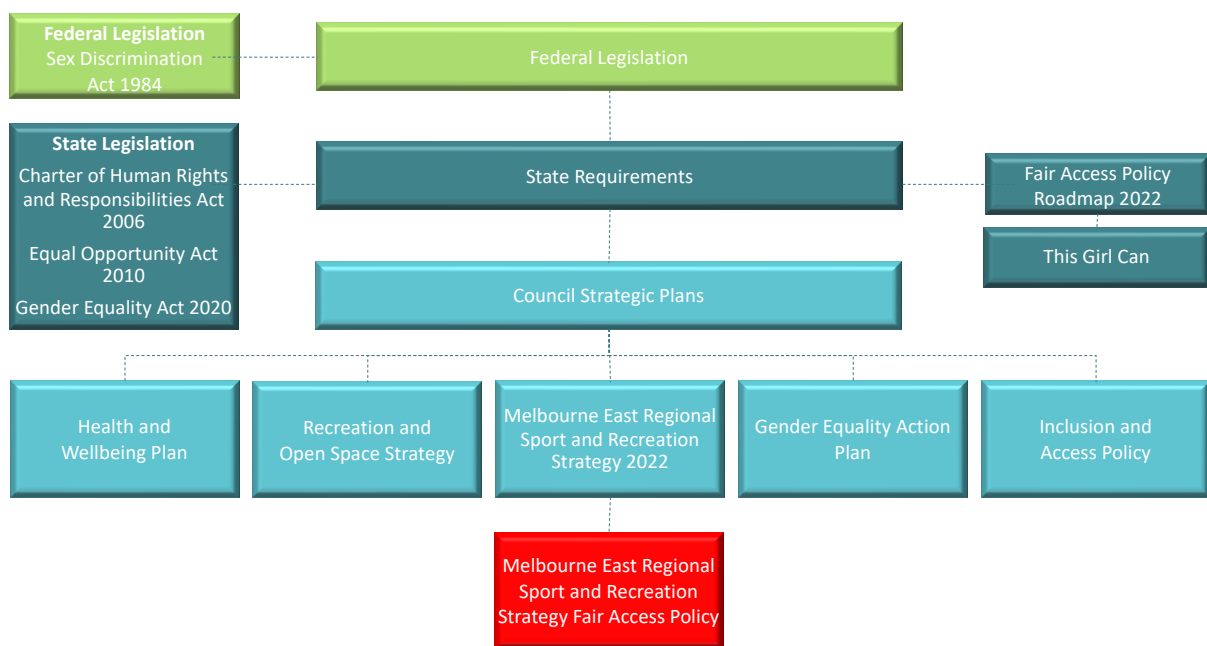


Figure 1: Relationships between legislation, policies and strategies

The Fair Access Policy requires Council to conduct a Gender Impact Assessment when reviewing future strategies and plans.

RELEVANT LAW

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 sets out all people's basic rights, freedoms, and responsibilities in Victoria. The Charter requires public authorities, including local government, to act consistently with the human rights in the Charter.

The Fair Access Policy responds to Section 8 of the Charter, that protects the right to enjoy other human rights free from discrimination. It states that laws, policies and programs should not be discriminatory.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Fair Access aims to improve and increase the sustainability of sporting clubs by guiding them to be more genuinely safe and welcoming to all members of the community. This will have important flow on effects for the longevity of clubs, their continued service to the community and opportunities for economic impact.

Social Implications

The Fair Access Policy will support Council and Clubs to create participation opportunities that are available to all. Improving access to and sustained participation in sport and recreation pursuits with important social, mental and physical health and wellbeing outcomes.

Environmental Implications

The commitment to gender equity by Council and sporting clubs across Council will contribute to the continued sustainability of sporting clubs and outcomes they deliver for their communities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The following stakeholders will be engaged in the implementation of the Fair Access Policy:

- Local Sports and Active Recreation Clubs will be consulted, including at two Sport Club Forums to be held in 2024.
- Local Sports Association and Leagues will be consulted to discuss their role in delivering the Action Plan.
- State Sports Association will be consulted to discuss their role in delivering the Action Plan.
- Sport and Recreation Victoria have been consulted during the development of the Melbourne East Region Fair Access Policy. They will continue to work with the MERSRS Group to report on progress against the Action Plan.

The Sport Team have been working with Clubs over several years to improve Gender Equity outcomes. The following actions have already been implemented that meet the requirements of the Fair Access Policy:

- Creating a “*Place for Women in Sport Tool-kit*” -and updates
- Club workshops to complete the tool-kit;
- Active Bystander Training Sessions;
- Gender Equity presentations at Seasonal and Leased Sports Forums; and
- Development of a Respectful Relationships Program to be delivered directly into sporting clubs throughout the Winter 2024 Season.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The regional approach to Fair Access facilitates continued collaboration, innovation and continuous improvement. This work will further strengthen the relationship of the Eastern Region Councils and the work for greater sport and recreation outcomes regionally.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Gender equity in sport and recreation and in the broader community can be a divisive topic, it can also trigger responses for many with lived experiences stemming from domestic violence/violence against women and children. Therefore, resistance from some is likely to be encountered.

The State Government has provided training in various areas of gender equity for sport and recreation officers across the state to assist with how to deal with resistance.

The actions that Council commit to under the Fair Access Policy could be seen as contentious to local sporting clubs and thus, education and expectations will need to be managed through thorough community consultation processes.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Fair Access Policy (Appendix 1)
2. Fair Access Policy and Evaluation Framework / Action Plan (Appendix 2).
3. Fair Access Policy Background Report (Appendix 3)