

MEMO 03 - 26

To: Queensland Clubs
From: Football Queensland
Subject: Clarification regarding 2026 Statewide Rules of Competition & Junior to Senior Permanent Dispensation Process
Date: March 13, 2026

Dear Clubs

We write to provide additional clarification regarding the 2026 Statewide Rules of Competition and the Junior to Senior Permanent Dispensation process.

Football Queensland has maintained a long-standing policy that all players must play, by default, in their own age groups. The strength of individual age competitions is and must continue to be prioritised in the interests of ensuring league stability, connectivity of competitions between age groups, and ultimately and very importantly, youth player retention and eventual progression into senior football. The previous formats of dispensation undermined and destabilised these policy outcomes with the clear result being the absence or fragmentation of youth competitions across a number of regions.

In line with this, in 2026 the dispensation process was enhanced to a more formal process, already used extensively across the state, to reflect Football Queensland's longstanding commitment to ensuring junior players only participate in senior football where there is clear evidence they meet strict physical, psychological and developmental suitability criteria consistent with elite or high-performance squads.

This has also enabled the focus to be on building new youth age competitions within regions that connect age groups to senior football, instead of bypassing the youth category and damaging youth participation rates in some regions. Almost immediately, this has led to the creation of new female leagues in Wide Bay, Central and Whitsunday Coast regions, bridging the gaps and correcting years of challenges.

Football Queensland would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Queensland Government in implementing the new Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 to ensure sport is a safe and positive space for every child, which Football Queensland is supportive of.

The strengthening of the dispensation process is not a direct response to the new Queensland Government child protection legislation, however this has been considered alongside the primary strategic elements stated above. Attempts to divert blame on the Queensland Government are misguided and without foundation. The Queensland Government should be commended for its efforts to take meaningful action on Child Safety standards.

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In line with clause 3.4.2.1 (below), we have commenced processing formal dispensations and considering approvals which are in line with the intent and spirit of the regulations, which is to build and stabilise youth football leagues across the state and ensure risks are being mitigated for all participants.

2026 Statewide Rules of Competition (Section 3.4.2.1):

3.4.2.1 FQPL 3-6 Senior & Masters | Grading of Players

In addition to competition rules 3.4.1.1 the following Senior Specific player grading rules apply.

- a) Players must be turning 16 years of age (male), or 15 years of age (female), during the calendar year to be eligible to play in senior men and women competitions, subject to clause c) below.
- b) Where an eligible junior player (15 Girls/16 Boys – 18 Girls/Boys) is participating in the Senior competition only, they must be registered as a Senior player. Junior players registered in seniors only cannot be borrowed back to junior competitions even if they are age eligible.
- c) Boys turning 16 years of age in 2026, or girls turning 15 years of age in 2026 will be required to complete a Permanent Dispensation Request Form and gain approval from

Football Queensland before participating in the senior competition. Football Queensland's ordinary position is that no male player turning 16 in 2026 or no female player turning 15 in 2026 will be approved to play up into a senior competition. A small number of athletes across Queensland who are categorised by the AIS or QAS, are National or Queensland squad representatives, are participating in a recognised and monitored elite program or being performance tracked by Football Queensland may apply for dispensation and be formally assessed for suitability within an adult football environment. Athletes participating within recognised high-performance frameworks are subject to stringent safeguarding governance and continually monitored.

Notwithstanding the above, Football Queensland may approve a player in these age brackets to participate in a senior competition if it is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist at its sole and absolute discretion.

There is no appeal of a dispensation determination by Football Queensland.

Clubs are reminded that the submission of a Permanent Dispensation Request Form and subsequent approval from Football Queensland is the **only way a male player turning 16 in 2026 or a female player turning 15 in 2026 will be permitted to participate in a senior competition.**

Football Queensland will continue to work closely with clubs in each region to progress through any points of concern, and as a direct consequence of players now being retained in the correct age cohorts, we are establishing new leagues in formats that prioritise the long-term stability and participation of youth players across the regions.

End.