

Ensure your club's policies and procedures are consistent with the AHRC Guidelines

ROYAL FREMANTLE GOLF CLUB, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Achieving substantive equality for women at our club

The Club:

The Royal Fremantle Golf Club (GC) is a private championship course situated 20km south-west of Perth city. There are six PGA Professionals and a General Manager on site. The membership base comprises 1013 members, with 17% female.

Local Demographic:

- Population: 8,211
- Median age: 41 (national average 38)
- Children aged 0-14 years: 10.5% of the population (average 18.7%)
- People aged 65+ years: 17.7% (average 15.8%)
- People born in Australia: 56% (average 66.7%)
- Full-time workers: 55.3% of the population (average 57.7%)
- Part-time workers: 32.1% (average 30.4%)
- Median household weekly income: \$1,548 (average \$1,438)

Background:

As a part of the Vision 2025 Strategy, Golf Australia engaged the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop Guidelines for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity for Women and Girls in Golf (AHRC Guidelines). These have been endorsed by the R&A.

They have been developed to ensure golf clubs are informed about the equal opportunity rights of members, and that they're not held liable under the Sex Discrimination Act.

In accordance with these Guidelines, a club may proactively discriminate in favour of the group

with which it seeks to address an imbalance. The club may also act to provide a "special measure" for women under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 by means such as "offering reduced fees for new women members or waiving introductory fees and charges" (*Refer to AHRC Guidelines. (2019). p. 18*).

The AHRC Guidelines also acknowledge that there has been historical gender discrimination in golf. This has limited women's access to the game in different ways, including women's access to 7-day play.

The Story:

"Given we were dealing with 114 years of history, last night was incredibly important to achieving substantive equality for women at our club."

These were words sent to Golf Australia from Gavin Burt, General Manager at Royal Fremantle GC following the club's extraordinary general meeting in July 2019.



All of these committees had individual agendas, and, because of this, the club was very disconnected.

"We could just sit here and do nothing, but we want to be the leaders in this space (gender equality) and lead by good example," Gavin said.

Upon starting his role at the club in mid-2018, Gavin identified several inefficiencies and challenges. "We were basically operating as three clubs within the one entity," he said.

“We had a strong men’s club, but we also had a women’s and junior committee that weren’t integrated within the operations of the club.

“All of these committees had individual agendas, and, because of this, the club was very disconnected.

“It was also evident that our club membership was aging and our constitution, in my view, was out of date and prejudiced against women.

“We needed to change and move forward. We, the board and I, wanted to become one club with a one-club philosophy.”

So, the club persisted with two main aims:

1. To disband all existing committees and improve the governance model of its board
2. To create new member categories available to all members with equal voting rights

This case study demonstrates how the club successfully implemented this change.

Challenges and Solutions:

“Fortunately, the board was very open to change,” Gavin said. “However, the challenge for us was navigating how we do this and how we alter our constitution.

“We wanted our members to choose a membership category based on suitability to their lifestyle, not their gender.”

“There were some robust discussions among the board initially, but as we progressed, we moved forward as one shared voice.

“The changes we wanted to make to our membership structure was to take out gender and open up our 4, 5, 6 and 7-day membership to both male and females with equal voting rights.



Allison Adams who is a new 7-day member wins the Geoff Smith perpetual trophy on a Saturday

“We wanted our members to choose a membership category based on suitability to their lifestyle, not their gender.

“Traditionally our main competition days had been men’s competition on a Thursday and Saturday and women played on a Wednesday and Friday. So that competition play matched our proposed membership categories, we also needed to open our weekly club events to both male and females.

“We assumed that if we were to have any backlash it would be from some of our male members, but surprisingly it also came from women who were resistant to change.

“It seemed that they somewhat felt they did not want to rock the boat. They were happy to remain in their familiar and comfortable all-female environment and keep their four-day (associate) membership.”

The club implemented a special measure so that Wednesday and Friday mornings remained as women’s competition days.

“We wanted to ensure our current female members still had an opportunity to play in an all-female environment where they felt comfortable, but holistically we wanted to create an inclusive environment throughout the week,” Gavin said.

"Once our board had an agreed approach, our second step was to engage our members. We did this by holding numerous information sessions that were coupled with a memorandum outlining information about the changes that we were wanting to make. We provided details of the revised constitution including mark-ups so people could easily identify these changes.

FF *It was very heartening to know that the majority of our members supported this change"*

"While most of the time, it seemed we were making progress, there were a few people who were quite vocal about their disapproval. It was easy to get caught up with their opinions and this made us nervous leading up to the vote. We were also concerned that we may not meet our quorum - which is at least 50 members to vote.

"However, on the night of the extraordinary general meeting we had 165 members attend, which was fantastic! We presented once again on the proposed changes to the constitution and gave members time for 'question and answer' to ensure people felt fully informed to vote.

"In the end, 92% of members voted in favour of the revised constitution.

"It was very heartening to know that the majority of our members supported this change.

"Our new membership structure took effect just two months ago. In this short time, we have already seen many benefits to the club both financially and culturally.

"A significant number of women have broken away from their previously restrictive 4-day associate membership and have taken up 5,6 or 7-day membership. This has not only increased club revenue through larger memberships but is bringing in additional revenue on other days of the week.

FF *We are really excited about the direction we are now heading and recommend that other clubs look at doing the same."*

"Our shared competition experiences are also creating a wonderful atmosphere in the clubhouse and it was fantastic to see a new 7-day female member win a perpetual trophy on a Saturday recently.

"Our club members recently voted in an additional female director to the board. She joins a team of six others including one other female who was instrumental in getting the constitution passed among our female members.

"We are really excited about the direction we are now heading and recommend that other clubs look at doing the same."

Learning:

- Be as transparent as you possibly can and bring your members on the journey.
- You are not going to satisfy or please everyone. Trust that you are doing the right thing and don't let the minority who are often most vocal jeopardise your decision making.
- Your female board members may be a good catalyst for change among your female membership base.
- Golf Australia can assist with your club's Vision 2025 strategy and now has templates to help clubs modernise their constitutions.

For further assistance or to request templates and resources, contact your Regional Development or Club Support Officer via www.golf.org.au/clubsupport or email clubsupport@golf.org.au

Download the AHRC Guidelines- www.humanrights.gov.au