



National Competitions Review

Consultation Briefing Document

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1.0 Introduction

National competition structures are central to a national sports potential to connect its communities and support the achievement of development and high performance outcomes. In the Shaping Football in New Zealand Strategic Plan 2016 – 2025, New Zealand Football has identified National Competitions as a strategic priority over the next three years (2016 – 2019).

During this period New Zealand aims to fulfil the recommendations in the 2015 National Competitions Review. This includes moving towards an integrated single season national competitions structure by 2019.

2.0 Key Reference Documents

- Strategic Plan 2016 – 2025 - Shaping Football in New Zealand
- Whole of Football Plan (2011)
- Beyond Football (2015) Winning at FIFA World Cups, High Performance Plan
- National Competitions Review (2015)
- Talent Development Plan (2016)
- New Zealand Football Club Licensing Regulations (2015)

3.0 New Zealand Football's Vision

New Zealand Football want

- 'More New Zealanders playing and loving football'
- To use aspirational competitions as a vehicle to build on the success of the Whole of Football Plan and create stronger, more vibrant football entities that engage their community
- To use FIFA Club Licensing and its own Quality Club Mark as a development tool to support the evolution of the beautiful game in Aotearoa
- To see playing standards in New Zealand increase and more New Zealand eligible players playing domestically and professionally so that 'our elite teams win at global pinnacle events'



4.0 Request for Feedback

To support New Zealand Football with structural and operational planning of an integrated single season national competitions structure, New Zealand Football seeks feedback on a proposal for its Men's and Women's pinnacle senior competitions, the Premiership and the National Women's League.

It should be noted that a separate consultation process is underway with the Federations regarding a proposal for aligning the development of our most talent youth players to Clubs that compete at the highest level and that any transition of the Futsal National League away from a Federation model will not be considered until 2020.

Stakeholders

- The request for feedback is open to all Federations, National League Clubs as well as Clubs that participate in the Northern Regional Football Leagues, Central Leagues, Mainland Premier Leagues and Football South Premier Leagues
- Each entity is limited to one submission and therefore we seek views that are representative of the entity

Process

New Zealand Football seek your entities views on the proposed men's and women's National competition structures.

Specifically New Zealand Football request feedback on:

- 1) The two suggested Premiership expansion models
- 2) The viability of the proposed Premiership expansion
- 3) The proposed Premiership entry (promotion) and exit (relegation) mechanisms
- 4) The proposed National Competitions calendar
- 5) Should NZF not be able to expand the Premiership as proposed which alternate option should be used - the status quo (option 2) or retrench (option 3) position?
- 6) The proposed structure of the National Women's League – mixed model

Feedback will be provided via survey monkey with a cap of 1000 characters per question.

Timeframes

This consultation opens on Monday 14 November and closes on Friday 9 December 2016.

New Zealand Football will review the feedback received and communicate the 2018 / 19 competitions structure for the men's and women's national leagues by 31 March 2017.

5.0 2015 National Competitions Review

The 2015 National Competitions Review confirmed that the existing competitions structures could be enhanced to provide better outcomes for the participating Clubs and the football community.

The review identified that there are inherent challenges in designing and successfully delivering national league competitions in New Zealand. The difficult aspect to understand is the extent to which

these challenges are a function of the competition structure and associated costs, a function of poor execution, market characteristics or all of the above.

However, the review also confirmed that the current competition is the highest standard of competition we have ever had and is producing teams that are competitive on the world stage. Despite the financial challenges it is the most stable competition since the inaugural National Soccer League.

We also know that our four regional leagues are viable. The Clubs that participate within them have facilities, youth structures, generally provide women's football and would meet basic FIFA Club Licensing criteria requirements.

The review outlined the following non-negotiables:

- We must have an open competition that provides entry from (promotion) regional leagues to create an aspirational pathway and connection from the National League to regional football
- We must raise standards and hold participating Clubs accountable to FIFA Club Licensing criteria
- We need a season long competition that provides players with one training and playing environment and prevents player burn out (One football season, not separate summer and winter seasons)
- We must create a financially viable model
- We must embrace youth development through an alignment system

A phased approach was recommended to gradually move towards a more optimal competition structure. This approach provides key check points that enable the strategy to be reviewed and a stop go decision made. The recommend phases are as follows.

Stage 1, 2016/17 and 2017/18

As per the recommendations from the National Competitions Review, the below actions have been achieved:

- ✓ Consolidate what we have and prepare others for involvement
 - Men's Competition expanded from eight to ten Clubs from 2016/17 with all Clubs issued a two year participation agreement
 - Work with the all Clubs that applied to participate in the Premiership (Eight applications were received with an additional six entities expressing an interest)
- ✓ Introduce FIFA Club Licensing regulations to raise operational standards
- ✓ Secure a national funding partner to reduce the equalized entry fees that cover travel
- ✓ Secure a broadcast partner to raise the profile of the Premiership and to enhance the commercial viability of the competing entities
- ✓ Maintain the current Federation format for the National Women's League

Stage 2, 2018 and beyond

- Option 1) Expand (Preferred)
 - Increase the Premiership to three full rounds with a finals series and provide entry / exit (Promotion / relegation) from the four existing regional leagues.
- Option 2) Status quo
 - Retain current competition in current format with entry opportunities only provided if an existing participant withdraws

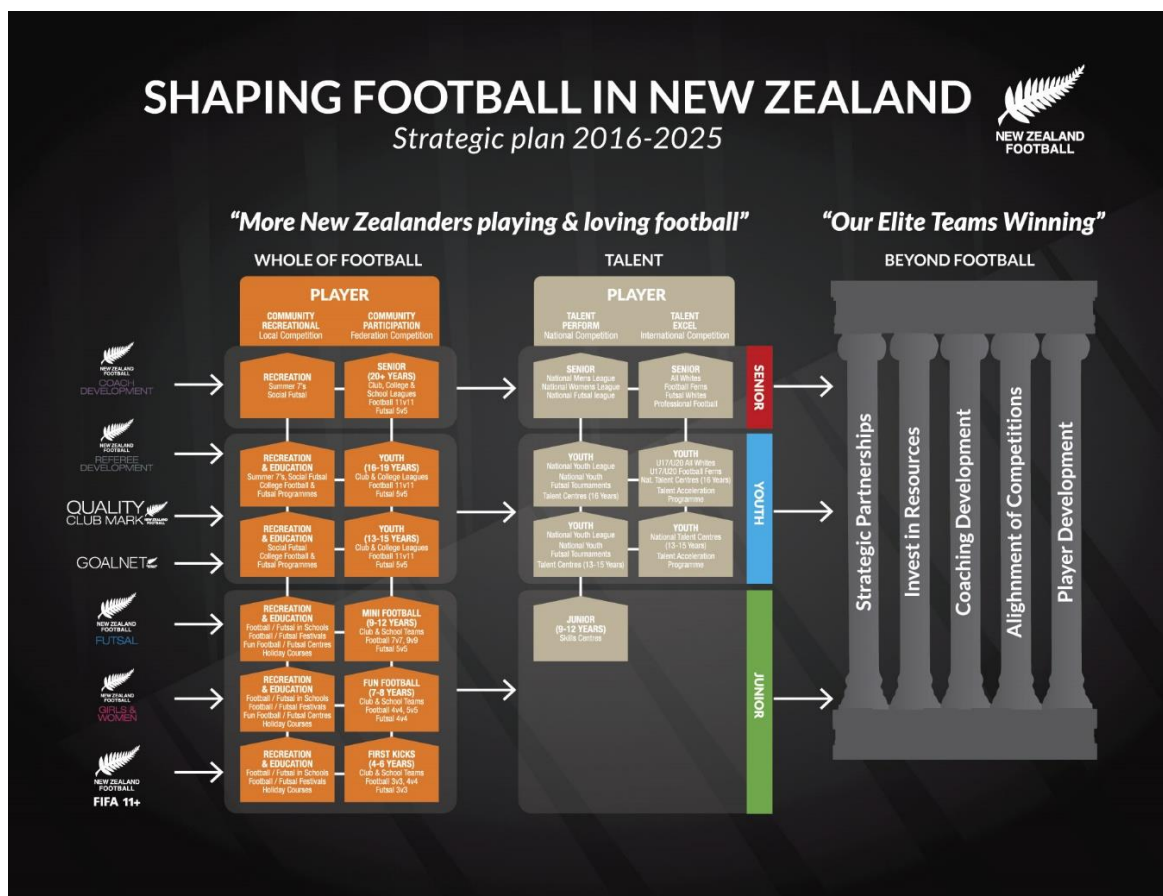
- Option 3) Retrench
 - Revert back to National Finals series featuring the top placed Clubs from the four existing regional leagues (reference Super Club League 1993 – 1995)

Since publishing the National Competitions Review in September 2015, New Zealand Football have developed an additional expansion model. We also seek feedback on this model via this consultation process.

New Zealand Football also seeks feedback on a proposal to evolve the National Women’s League.

6.0 Aligned Youth Development

Following the successful implementation of the Whole of Football Plan (2011) the game in Aotearoa has grown to unprecedented levels. To build on this success and support the achievement of New Zealand Footballs Beyond Football High Performance Plan outcomes New Zealand Football want to enhance its national talent perform pathways for our youth.



New Zealand Football has identified that the current Federation Talent Centres programme operates with over 20 hubs throughout the country. In addition a number of Clubs, schools and private providers also support the development of our most promising youth footballers.

To concentrate and align the existing resources that are invested into the youth talent perform space, New Zealand Football are considering the implementation of a National Youth Development League. The vision for a National Youth Development League includes 30 – 40 licensed entities participating in a consistent, regular training and games programme for male and female players aged 13 – 19. The geographical boundaries for the proposed competition format align to the four existing regional

Premier Leagues - Northern Regional Football League (Northern Football, Auckland Football and WaiBOP Football), Central League (Central and Capital Football), Mainland Premier League and Football South Premier League.

Following consultation with the seven regional Federations, it has been agreed that stage one of this plan will include the introduction of New Zealand Football Youth Club Licensing. Clubs that are granted a Youth Club License would need to achieve a set criteria that would demonstrate that they meet the standards required to run a New Zealand Football Talent Centre within their Club.

Depending on the outcome of stage two of the National Competitions Review it is anticipated that the existing ten Premiership Clubs will be provided with an opportunity to apply for a New Zealand Football Youth Club License and be eligible to participate in Federation run youth leagues. All other Clubs in New Zealand that hold a New Zealand Football Club License (A, B or C) would also be eligible to apply for a New Zealand Youth Club License.

7.0 Stage 2 Competition Structures – Men

The format of the men's National League competitions options are highlighted in the table below

| | OPTION 1 – A Expansion Single season | OPTION 1 – B Expansion Conference | OPTION 2 – A Status Quo | OPTION 3 – A Retrench Regional Leagues + National Finals |
|----------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| Number of Clubs | 10 | 12 (2 pools of 6) | 10 | 8 |
| Number of rounds | 3 | 5 (2 vs opposite conference & 3 within conference) | 2 | 1 |
| Number of games | 27 + finals + Cup | 27 + finals + Cup | 18 + finals | 7 + finals + regional leagues + Cup |
| Finals format | Semi-finals and final | Semi-finals and final | Semi-finals and final | Semi-finals and final |
| *Entry | Performance | Performance | On application if vacancy arises | Qualification from regional leagues |
| Time of year | Nov - June | Nov – June | Oct - March | Oct – Dec |
| Inclusion in Chatham Cup | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| *Cost of entry per entity | \$90,000 | \$90,000 | \$60,000 | \$20,000 |

**Assumes all participating Clubs meet the relevant Club Licensing criteria*

**Entry fee assumes no national funding partner – for the 2016/17 season Trillian Trust current fund 100% (\$60,000 per Club) of the Premiership entry fee*

Option 1 – A, Expansion Single Season

Competition format

The expanded single season national league will feature ten Clubs playing three rounds. Each round will feature nine games with the top four teams progressing to a home and away semi-finals series with the competition winner determined by a grand final.

All participating Clubs would be required to hold a minimum of the National B Club License.

Timing (November – July)

This format will commence in November with the Grand Final to be played in July.

A November start provides adequate time for field regeneration to occur in spring and also ensures any OFC representative at the FIFA Club World Cup would be provided with match preparation before the December competition.

A July finish overlaps the 30 June player registration period that exists for Regional Premier Leagues. This would prevent players from transferring to clubs participating in Regional Premier Leagues at the conclusion on the Premiership season.

Chatham Cup

Under this proposal the Chatham Cup would be played from March to June and align to the dates of the OFC Champions League. The eight Clubs that are not involved in the OFC Champions League would enter the Chatham Cup at a predetermined point (likely in round two) with the two New Zealand OFC Champions League participants entering in round four (the last 16).

To ensure that Premiership catch up games were minimised, Chatham Cup rounds would be scheduled on dates that overlapped with the OFC Champions League and no Premiership games would be scheduled during any Chatham Cup rounds including the Cup finals.

Duration

The competition would be played over a 38 week period and includes 30 game weeks of the Premiership (27 round robin games plus three games in finals series), six rounds of the Chatham Cup (Round two to the Final) and a two week break at Christmas.

Exit (Relegation)

The last placed Premiership Club will be automatically relegated to their respective Regional Premier League Competition and replaced by the winner of the National Playoff.

Should there be no Club eligible to participate in the National Playoff (refer below – entry) no Club will be relegated from the Premiership.

Relegation from the Premiership will occur annually and will commence at the conclusion of the 2017/18 season.

Entry (Promotion)

To gain entry to the Premiership, interested Clubs participating in the Northern Regional Football League Premier League, Central League, Mainland Premier League and the Football South Premier League must;

- By 1 April each year confirm in writing to New Zealand Football their desire to participate in the Premiership for the upcoming season
- By 20 May each year submit a National B Criteria Club License application (including supporting documentation) to the New Zealand Football Club Licensing Manager
- By 1 June New Zealand Football will notify all Clubs that have submitted an National B Criteria Club License application if their application has been successful
- Win their respective Regional Premier League Competition (All Regional Premier Leagues will be completed no later than the third weekend of August)
- Win the National Playoff (to be played the last weekend of August and first weekend of September).

The National Playoff will involve no more than four Clubs – the winners from each of the four Regional Premier League Competitions. Clubs that have not confirmed their interest to compete in the Premiership and have not been granted a National B Club License will not be eligible to compete in the National Playoff.

All games will be knockout games with fixtures randomly drawn. Should only one Club be eligible to participate the eligible Club will gain entry to the Premiership and no playoff game(s) will take place.

Promotion to the Premiership will occur annually. The first National Playoff will be held in August / September 2018 with the winner gaining entry to the 2018/19 Premiership season.

Cost

Considering New Zealand Football investment and not including centralised funding from a national funding partner, each participating Club would be required to pay an equalised entry fee of \$90,000 per season.

To support the promoted Club New Zealand Football will provide financial assistance towards the Premiership participation fees for the winner of the National Playoff.

Option 1 – B, Expansion Conference model

Competition format

The conference model will feature 12 Clubs with six teams divided into two conferences, the conferences will be geographically split as follows;

- Northern Conference – will consist of entities from Northern Football, Auckland Football and WaibOP Football which represents just over 50% of New Zealand Football affiliated player base
- Southern Conference – will consist of entities from Central Football, Capital Football, Mainland Football and Football South which represents just under 50% of New Zealand Football affiliated player base

Five rounds will be played in total. The winners of each conference as well as the two highest placed Clubs in the league (outside of the conference winners) will progress to a home and away semi-finals series with the competition winner determined by a grand final.

Two rounds (Rounds two and three) will be played against teams from the opposing conferences and three rounds (Rounds one, four and five) will be played within the respective team's conference.

All participating Clubs would be required to hold a minimum of the National B Club License.

Timing (November – July)

This format will commence in November with the Grand Final to be played in July.

A November start provides adequate time for field regeneration to occur in spring and also ensures any OFC representative at the FIFA Club World Cup would be provided with match preparation before the December competition.

A July finish overlaps the 30 June player registration period that exists for Regional Premier Leagues. This would prevent players transferring to Clubs participating in Regional Premier Leagues at the conclusion on the Premiership season.

The first round of games will feature games within conference to enable a New Zealand FIFA Club World Cup participant to play catch up games locally midweek in the pre-Christmas period. Rounds two and three will feature games against the opposing conferences enabling the largest volume of travel to occur in summer, minimising the potential travel disruptions resulting from inclement weather in winter.

Chatham Cup

Under this proposal the Chatham Cup would be played from March to June and align to the dates of the OFC Champions League. The eight Clubs that are not involved in the OFC Champions League would enter the Chatham Cup at a predetermined point (likely in round two) with the two New Zealand OFC Champions League participants entering in round four (the last 16).

To ensure that Premiership catch up games were minimised, Chatham Cup rounds would be scheduled on dates that overlapped with the OFC Champions League and no Premiership games would be scheduled during any Chatham Cup rounds including the Cup finals.

Duration

The competition would be played over a 38 week period and includes 30 game weeks of the Premiership (27 round robin games plus three games in finals series), six rounds of the Chatham Cup (Round 2 to the Final) and a two week break at Christmas.

Exit (Relegation)

The last placed Premiership Club will be automatically relegated to their respective Regional Premier League Competition. The relegated Club will be replaced by either the winner of the Northern Regional Football League Premier League or the winner of the Southern Conference Playoff (refer below - entry) depending on which Conference the last placed Premiership Club represents. (e.g. Should a Club from the Northern Conference finish last and be relegated they would be replaced by the winner of the Northern Regional Football League Premier League).

Should the lowest finishing Club from the opposite Conference (i.e the Conference which did not have a team finish in last place) finish tenth or 11th (i.e in the bottom three) then they will also be relegated. They will be replaced by either the winner of the Northern Regional Football League Premier League or the winner of the Southern Conference Playoff depending on which Conference this relegated Premiership Club represents.

Relegation from the Premiership will occur annually and will commence under this format at the conclusion of the 2018/19 season.

Entry (Promotion)

To gain entry to the Premiership, interested Clubs participating in the Northern Regional Football League Premier League, Central League, Mainland Premier League and the Football South Premier League must;

- By 1 April each year confirm in writing to New Zealand Football their desire to participate in the Premiership for the upcoming season
- By 20 May each year submit a National B Criteria Club License application (including supporting documentation) to the New Zealand Football Club Licensing Manager
- By 1 June New Zealand Football will notify all Clubs that have submitted an National B Criteria Club License application if their application has been successful
- Win their respective Regional Premier League Competition (All Regional Premier Leagues will be completed no later than the third weekend of August)
- Win either the Northern Regional Football League Premier League (for entry into the Northern Conference) or a Southern Conference Playoff involving the winners of the Central League, Mainland Premier League and the Football South Premier League (to be played the last weekend of August and first weekend of September).

Promotion is only available to each conference based on the scenarios outlined above (exit). Clubs that have not confirmed their interest to compete in the Premiership and have not been granted a National B Club License will not be eligible to be promoted to the Premiership.

The Southern Conference Playoff will involve no more than three Clubs – the winners from the Central League, Mainland Premier League and the Football South Premier League. All games will be knockout games with fixtures randomly drawn.

Promotion to the Premiership will occur annually.

2018 Entry / Exit

Under this format the Club that finishes last in the 2017/18 Premiership will be automatically relegated. Entry to the league will be determined as follows

| Northern Conference | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Number of Clubs | Six |
| Existing Clubs | Four - Waitakere United, Auckland City, Eastern Suburbs, Hamilton Wanderers |
| Number of promoted Clubs | Three or two (from Northern Regional Football League Premier League) |
| Promotion mechanism | *Final position in the Northern Regional Football League Premier League <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Top 3 from the 2018 Northern Regional Football League Premier League should a Northern Conference Club finish last in the 2017/18 Premiership - Top 2 from the 2018 Northern Regional Football League Premier League should a Northern Conference Club not finish last in the 2017/18 Premiership |

**Assumes all Clubs have expressed interested and met National B Criteria Club License within the required timeframes*

| Southern Conference | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Number of Clubs | Six |
| Existing Clubs | Six – Hawkes Bay United, Team Wellington, Wellington Phoenix, Tasman United, Canterbury United, Southern United |
| Number of promoted Clubs | One or zero (from Southern Conference Playoff) |
| Promotion mechanism | *Winner of a Southern Conference Playoff involving the winners of the Central League, Mainland Premier League and the Football South Premier League Promotion only available if one of the six Clubs listed above finishes last in the 2017/18 Premiership |

**Assumes all Clubs have expressed interested and met National B Criteria Club License within the required timeframes*

Cost

Considering New Zealand Football investment and not including centralised funding from a national funding partner, each participating Club would be required to pay an equalised entry fee of \$90,000 per season.

To support the promoted Club New Zealand Football will provide financial assistance towards the Premiership participation fees for the winner of the National Playoff.

Option 2 – Status Quo

Competition format

The existing Premiership features ten Clubs playing two rounds. Each round features nine games with the top four teams progressing to a semi-finals (1v4 and 2v3) series with the competition winner determined by a grand final.

All participating entities are required to hold a minimum of the National B Club License.

Timing (October - March)

This format commences in late October with the Grand Final played in mid-March.

This creates two seasons, a winter's season and a summer season with our elite domestic players playing year round with minimal rest. The current competitions clashes with the OFC Champions League which makes it difficult to schedule catch up games involving New Zealand's FIFA Club World Cup and OFC Champions League representative.

Chatham Cup

Clubs that participate in the current Premiership are not eligible to play in the Chatham Cup and the timing of the two competitions does not align.

Duration

The competition is played over a 22 week period and includes 20 game weeks (18 round robin games plus two games in finals series) and a two week break at Christmas.

Entry (Promotion) / Exit (Relegation)

Entry is only available if a team voluntary withdraws or fails to meet Club Licensing criteria or is removed at the end of their participation agreement.

Selection of a replacement teams is on application and at the discretion of New Zealand Football.

Cost

Considering New Zealand Football investment and not including centralised funding from a national funding partner, each participating Club would be required to pay an equalised entry fee of \$60,000 per season.

Option 3 – Retrench

Competition format

The retrench option involves the existing ten Premiership Clubs playing within the existing four Regional Premier Leagues. It would be recommend that the Regional Premier Leagues contained ten Clubs with two rounds of nine games per round played.

The top three Clubs from the Northern Regional Football League Premier League, the top two Clubs from the Central League and Mainland Premier League as well as the winners of the Football South Premier League would play in an eight team end of season finals. The National finals would involve one round with each Club playing each other once (seven games). The top four Clubs would progress to a semi-final (1v4 and 2v3) series with the competition winner determined by a grand final.

All participating Clubs are required to hold a minimum of the National C Club License.

Timing (March - October)

The Regional Premier Leagues will be played from March to August with the National final series played from September - October.

This would result in New Zealand's FIFA Club World Cup and OFC Champions League representative(s) not playing domestic competition games directly prior to the respective FIFA and Confederation competitions.

Chatham Cup

The Chatham Cup would remain in its existing competition window enabling all Clubs to participate.

It is likely that all Clubs would enter the competition in round two.

Duration

The competition will be played over a 31 week period and includes 18 Regional Premier League's game weeks, six Chatham Cup rounds and nine National final series game weeks.

Entry (Promotion)

Qualification from the existing Regional Premier Leagues

Cost

Considering New Zealand Football investment and not including centralised funding from a national funding partner, each participating Club would be required to pay an equalised entry fee of \$20,000 for participating in the National finals.

8.0 Stage 2 Competition Structures – Women

New Zealand Football would like to move towards a Club based National Women's League.

To achieve this objective New Zealand Football and its Federations must first develop stronger local and regional competitions. As the Women's game continues to experience positive growth in junior and youth players we aim to have six – eight competitive women's teams within each of the four Regional Competitions that exist - Northern Regional Football League Women's Premier League, Central Women's League, Mainland Women's Premier League and the Football South Women's Premier League by 2020.

To achieve this the integrity of all Women's Competitions must be maintained in the short to medium term. Where possible the competitions structures and regulations should aim to provide an equal distribution of the regions available talent.

It is feared that moving directly to a Club based model in some regions would lead to the establishment of super teams that would significantly impact on the overall standard of the local competition. To overcome this potential issue as well as start phasing towards the end goal of a Club based National Women's League the competition from 2018 – 2020 will feature a mixed model involving Clubs from the Northern Regional Football League Women's League as well as regional (Federation) representative teams from the other four Federations - Central Football, Capital Football, Mainland Football and Football South. These regional teams would be encouraged to train together in a talent programme one day a week during the regional Club season.

It is anticipated that a mixed model will support the evolution of the Women's game. It will enable New Zealand Football to capitalise on the strength of the Club based Northern Regional Football League Women's League by increasing the volume of games for the best teams. It will also ensure that the local and regional Women's Competitions that the Clubs teams from Central Football, Capital Football, Mainland Football and Football South participate in can continue to develop.

Competition format

The National Women's League will feature eight teams playing each other once in a round robin format. The top four teams would progress to a semi-finals (1v4 and 2v3) series with the competition winner determined by a grand final.

All participating Northern Regional Football League Clubs are required to hold a minimum of the National C Club License.

Timing (March - November)

The Regional Premier Leagues will be played from March to August with the National Women's League played from September - November.

Women's Knockout Cup

The Women's Knockout Cup would align to the Chatham Cup.

Duration

The competition will be played over a 36 week period and include 21 Regional Premier League's game weeks (ideally eight team leagues with three rounds), four Women's Knockout Cup rounds, nine National Women's League game weeks with two weeks between the Regional Premier League's and the National Women's League.

Entry

The top four from the Northern Regional Football League Women's League would qualify to participate in the National Women's League alongside Federation teams from Central Football, Capital Football, Mainland Football and Football South.

Cost

Considering New Zealand Football investment and not including centralised funding from a national funding partner, each participating entity would be required to pay an equalised entry fee of \$20,000.

9.0 National Competitions Calendar

The table below provides an indicative overview of the proposed National Competitions Calendar for the two expansion options.

| Competitions | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|
| A-League | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | | | | | | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| FIFA Club World Cup | | | | | | | | | | | | Orange |
| OFC Champions League | | | Red | Red | Red | | | | | | | |
| Premiership | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | | | | Blue | Blue |
| National Playoff | | | | | | | | Grey | | | | |
| Men's Regional Leagues | | | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | Blue | | | | |
| Chatham Cup | | | Red | Red | Red | Red | | | | | | |
| National Women's League | | | | | | | | | Pink | Pink | Pink | |
| Women's Regional Leagues | | | Purple | Purple | Purple | Purple | Purple | Purple | | | | |
| Women's Knockout Cup | | | Red | Red | Red | Red | | | | | | |
| Community football season | | | | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | | | | |