

## PARTICIPATION POLICY

### BACKGROUND

Our vision is to **inspire all Australians** to enjoy our great **global game**. One of the four key pillars of our strategy is to make Rugby **a game for all**. This policy is aimed at ensuring that as many people as possible can participate in Rugby; however, it must be safe and fair for all participants. When participants with broadly compatible attributes compete with one another, this environment can be created.

Dispensations from the below starting policy positions are therefore available to players (and their parents/guardians) and competition managers to ensure that the intention of this policy is met.

### POLICY

**Rugby should be safe, inclusive and fair.**

**All endeavours must be made for Rugby participants with broadly compatible physical development in conjunction with ability and/or experience to play with and against each other.**

### STARTING POLICY POSITIONS

- **Eligible Age Grades:** Subject to available dispensations, between the Under 8 and the Under 18 age group, a player may play in the age group he/she is turning in the playing year and in the age group one year above. For example, a player turning 15 in the calendar year (1 January – 31 December) is eligible to play in the Under 15 age group and the Under 16 age group.
- **Senior Rugby:** Subject to available dispensations, a player can participate in Senior Rugby when he/she has turned 18 years of age.
- **Mixed Gender:** Subject to available dispensations, males and females can participate in mixed gender Rugby up to and including the calendar year (1 January - 31 December) in which they turn 12 years of age.
- **Gender Identification:** Rugby Australia support a player's participation in a gender competition with which they identify.

## DISPENSATION TO ENABLE SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND FAIR PARTICIPATION

- **Age Grade Dispensation:** A player's physical development in conjunction with their ability and/or experience may be such that he or she may be allowed to participate in an age grade competition that is one year above or one year below their eligible age grades.

For example, the player turning 15 in the calendar year (1 January – 31 December) who is already eligible to play in the Under 15 age group and the Under 16 age group, may receive dispensation to be able to participate in the Under 14 age group or Under 17 age group.

Players who turn 19 in the relevant calendar year and are therefore considered senior rugby players, may receive dispensation to play in the under 18 age grade.

Please see [Junior Age Grade / Senior Rugby Guidelines Table](#) for further information.

To receive dispensation, the 'Age Grade Dispensation Procedure' must be followed.

Note: In exceptional circumstances, the Union may, with State Union sign off, and following consultation with the player and parent/guardian, mandate that a player play in a particular age group in order to ensure the safety of both the player and/or other participants.

- **Senior Rugby Dispensation:** A player's physical development in conjunction with their ability and/or experience may be such that:
  - Players who turn 18 in the relevant calendar year, who have not yet turned 18 at the start of /during the competition, may be eligible to participate in Senior Rugby with parental / guardian approval.
  - Only in exceptional circumstances, players turning 17 in the relevant calendar year may be eligible to participate in Senior Rugby with parental / guardian approval and coach / competition manager assessment;
  - Only in exceptional circumstances, players turning 16 in the relevant calendar year may be eligible to participate in Senior Rugby with parental / guardian and Rugby Australia Union approval;

To receive dispensation, the 'Senior Rugby Dispensation Procedure' must be followed. Please see [Junior Age Grade / Senior Rugby Guidelines Table](#) for further information.

- **Mixed Gender Dispensation:** A player over 12 years of age may play on a mixed gender team in the Under 13, Under 14 and Under 15 age groups where no other option to play regular Rugby exists. In such circumstances, a player can participate in appropriate mixed gender teams in the calendar year up to and including the year in which they turn 15 (1 January to 31 December). To receive dispensation, the 'Mixed Gender Dispensation Procedure' must be followed.

- **Gender Identification:** Australian Rugby supports a player's participation in a gender competition with which they identify provided that is safe for them and all other participants. To apply to participate in a gender competition that differs from the gender identified on their birth certificate, the 'Gender Identification Procedure' must be followed.
- **Disability Inclusion Dispensation:** Players with a physical and/or intellectual disability can participate in age grade competitions below their eligible age groups. This may include a senior rugby player receiving dispensation to play in an age grade competition. To receive dispensation, the 'Disability Inclusion Dispensation Procedure' must be followed.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

This policy applies to all participants associated with Rugby in all positions whether paid, unpaid / voluntary.

It is the responsibility of all participants to use the starting policy parameters and the options for dispensation to achieve inclusion in the safest and fairest manner for each individual.

For example, utilising the options for flexibility to 'fill' teams may be deemed a breach of this Policy and the Rugby Australia Safety Policy. Likewise, negating to apply the intent of this policy for reasons that are motivated by a 'win' mentality may also be deemed a breach of this Policy and the Rugby Australia Safety Policy.

## **EXCEPTIONS**

This policy does not apply to any form of Non-Contact Rugby, including but not limited to Touch7s

## **SANCTION(S)**

It is an obligation under the Rugby Australia Code of Conduct for all participants to comply with this Policy and its related policies and guidelines. Intentional or reckless disregard for this Policy **may result in disciplinary action pursuant to the Rugby Australia Code of Conduct or the Australian Rugby Member Protection Policy.**

## **RELATED POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

Rugby Australia Safety Policy  
 Rugby Australia Code of Conduct  
 Rugby Australia Member Protection Policy  
 Age Dispensation Procedure  
 Junior Age Grade/Senior Rugby Guidelines Table  
 Mixed Gender Dispensation Procedure  
 Gender Identification Dispensation Procedure  
 Senior Rugby Dispensation Procedure  
 Disability Dispensation Procedure