



MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

The AFL today wrote to all clubs to advise the AFL Commission had approved a change to the 22-match fixture structure whereby each club would now have two byes through the season comprising 22 matches across 25 weeks, starting from next year's 2014 Toyota AFL Premiership Season. As part of the introduction of a second bye to better manage the workload on players and clubs throughout the year, the premiership season will now commence with a split round across the weekends of March 14-16 and March 21-23 (five matches and four matches respectively on those two weekends).

The pre-season period will be revitalised to feature two matches per Club scheduled nationally, with a continued focus on regional areas that don't normally host premiership matches, as well as matches in metropolitan areas and managing the travel load across all teams. In place of the NAB Cup Grand Final, the AFL is currently considering options for a representative-style game in the final week of the pre-season, together with intra-club matches for all teams, before round one gets underway.

AFL General Manager - Broadcasting, Scheduling and Major Projects Simon Lethlean said the first group of club byes were likely to be across rounds 8-10 (three weeks of six matches per round) with the second group of club byes to be placed in the run to the finals in the region of rounds 18-19 (one week of five matches and one week of four matches). All up, clubs would each play 22 games across 25 weeks through March 14-16 (week one of round one) to August 29-31.

The structure for the Toyota AFL Finals Series remains unchanged from the current top-eight format. Separately, Mr Lethlean said the AFL Commission had also approved a more formalised 'weighted' rule to govern the five double match-ups for each club as part of the premiership season.

In the construction of each year's fixture, the final ladder will be grouped into the top six teams, middle six teams and bottom six teams with regard to better managing the equality of double match-ups for all clubs the following season.

- Sides ranked 1-6 on the ladder will have a minimum of two double-meetings with other top six sides and a maximum of three meetings with sides ranked 1-6. They will have a minimum of one double-meeting of sides ranked 7-12 and a maximum of two double-meetings of sides in the 7-12 range. They will have either no double meetings or a maximum of one double meeting with a side ranked 13-18.
- Sides ranked 7-12 on the ladder will have a minimum of one double-meeting with sides ranked 1-6 on the ladder and a maximum of two meetings with sides ranked 1-6. They will have a minimum of two double-meetings of sides ranked 7-12 and a maximum of three double-meetings of sides 7-12. They will have a minimum of one double-meeting of sides ranked 13-18 and a maximum of two double-meetings of sides ranked 13-18.
- Sides ranked 13-18 on the ladder will have either no double meeting or a maximum of one double meeting with a side ranked 1-6. They will have a minimum of one double-meeting with sides ranked 7-12 and a maximum of two double-meetings of sides ranked 7-12. They will have a minimum of two double-meetings of sides ranked 13-18 and a maximum of three double-meetings of sides 13-18.

The weighting of second-time match ups for clubs enables the AFL to better deal with the key requirement of equality, as well as continuing to ensure that our venue obligations and our broadcast obligations can be met," Mr Lethlean said. "Retaining a pre-set fixture for each season ahead, rather than re-fixturing the final rounds of the season after all clubs have played each other once across 17 rounds, better enables the AFL to manage travel loads of the non-Victorian clubs in particular, and ensure that key games such as Derbies, Showdowns, Q Clashes and major blockbusters can be accommodated twice in a season," he said.

Mr Lethlean said there was no determination to increase the season-length beyond 22 matches at this stage, and nor was there any appetite to altering the structure of the finals at this stage. "The introduction in recent seasons of the new teams in the Gold Coast Suns and the GWS Giants, combined with the creation of a new match schedule for the broadcasting of games within the current five-year television contract, has introduced significant new complexities into the fixture process.

"It was therefore recommended there be no change to the existing 22-round home and away season, but the Commission did require an increased focus on fixture optimisation, and on and off-field equalisation across all of the 18 clubs, as well as approving the incorporation of the second bye and endorsing an earlier commencement for the Premiership Season" he said. The AFL is still in the process of considering a representative match in the final week of the pre-season in lieu of a pre-season grand final before round one, and it is expected this will be determined over the coming weeks.

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Patrick Keane
AFL Media Manager

