



## COUNTIES MANUKAU RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

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June 21, 2021

To the Counties Manukau Rugby Family,

We are seeking to overhaul the CMRFU's strategy and would like your feedback on what needs to be done to ensure our community game is flourishing while our representative teams are competitive whenever they take the field.

Our current strategy is due for a refresh. The world has changed on the back of a global pandemic and evolving attitudes within society. Rugby must adapt or face the real prospect of losing relevance within our community. Within Counties Manukau we have both opportunities and our own challenges to deal with.

The Counties Manukau region has many advantages with a strong rugby tradition, and one of the best rugby talent pools in the country underpinned by high population growth. We believe this points to the potential for Counties Manukau to become one of New Zealand's strongest provincial unions on and off the field. But if this is our aspiration, and we truly mean to take advantage of these strengths, then we still have a lot of work to do.

In the community game, our playing stocks are dwindling year-by-year and our volunteers have declined.

- In 2019, we had 8,208 players within the region and this figure has dropped below 6,000 for 2021. In particular, our female participant numbers have dropped significantly from 1,923 just two years go.
- Referee numbers have dropped from 72 to 64 this year
- Coaching numbers have dropped from 525 to just over 400 this year

Some of this can be chalked up to COVID-19, no question. But we can't just blame the pandemic. The participation trend across our grassroots game has been inching downward for some time.

I have also heard from members that we are not currently helping ourselves. Our governance structures for the community game are in need of review and the sense is we are sometimes not nimble enough to make the tough but necessary decisions needed in our club game. The issue of transition of junior players into secondary schools remains a major issue with most never returning to the club game when they leave school. This is affecting the club space, where we have just a handful of clubs that are prospering but also some who are really struggling for numbers in the senior grades. Also, many within the rugby community feel there is an unhealthy focus on 'high performance' rugby at the expense of broader participation, including here at the CMRFU. Somehow, we have to find a better balance.

So, what are we going to do about it?

This proud Union has a history of innovation and our people have always met challenges head-on. We are confident this time won't be any different. We have engaged a strategic consultant who is

providing his services pro-bono to help us collectively put together a new plan for rugby in this region. Right now we are calling on you to share your voice on how to meet the challenges we face.

If you would like to be part of the process, please contact me directly. We would welcome written submissions from what you, as a member, would like to see the CMRFU focus on going forward. But we are also available to meet in person, attend club committee meetings or hold workshops with you and your people if the appetite is there. We have set ourselves the goal of completing the feedback process by the start of July to give us time to give it due consideration.

Please don't let this opportunity to help shape the future of rugby in this proud region go to waste.

We look forward to hearing from you in the coming weeks and thank you for your commitment to our great game.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. Lawton', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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