

# CIRCULAR



No: C1/2025  
Date: 7/2/2025  
To: All Members  
Re: Grading Changes for the 2025/26 Open Pennant Competition

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Dear Bowlers,

As we prepare for the upcoming 2025/26 season, set to commence from 1 July, 2025, the State Match Committee has been diligently working on the updated Conditions of Play (CoP). The finalised document will be published online next week, accompanied by a summary of all key changes.

One significant change to be introduced next season involves player selection and grading within the Open Pennant competition. Under the new rules, players will have greater flexibility in their selection across different grades, with a few key conditions:

- During the sectional rounds of the 2025/26 Open Pennant competition, players may be selected in any grade in which their Club participates, with the exception of those who have won a Region or State Pennant in the current 2024/25 season.
- Players who compete in more than 50% of total available sectional matches (across all grades) will be graded at the end of sectional play based on the grade in which they played the most matches.
- Players who do not meet the 50% threshold will retain their previous season's grading.
- Bowls NSW will continue updating individual player gradings on Bowlslink at the conclusion of the season to determine eligibility for Open Reserve Championships.

The below video provides an overview of the changes to Open Pennant gradings as well as the process that clubs will undertake to nominate and select pennant sides for the 2025/26 Open Pennant competition:

[Please click here to watch the video](#)

## Rationale Behind the Change

We acknowledge that this is a significant shift in the Conditions of Play and want to clarify the reasoning behind this decision:

1. **Competition Integrity** – There is currently approximately 15,000 players who participate in Open Pennant each round of the season. This means that our 16 Region Match Committees are required to check the eligibility of every player, in every grade, of every Club, in every round of the competition to ensure they are graded appropriately and compliant with the Conditions of Play. This process is then duplicated by Bowls NSW when squads are submitted to compete in the State Pennant Finals. This change will provide a huge relief to our Region committees in the administration of their competitions each week.
2. **Empowering Selectors** – Club selectors are often restricted in selecting players into a grade which they feel is appropriate to the players skill level. This at times restricts the promotion of players who are on their way up the grades, and also the opposite where a player who is not the player they have been in previous seasons is unable to be lowered to a more appropriate grade. In addition, our volunteer selectors should welcome this change as they are consistently nervous about causing any grading infringements which will see their Club deducted points.
3. **Reduced Administrative Burden** – There will no longer be a requirement for Clubs to complete Player Regrade applications and await the outcome of decisions made by the Region & State Match Committees.

**BOWLS NEW SOUTH WALES LIMITED**

PO BOX A2186, SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1235 | PH: (02) 9283 4555

EMAIL: ENQUIRIES@BOWLSNSW.COM.AU | [WWW.BOWLSNSW.COM.AU](http://WWW.BOWLSNSW.COM.AU)

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4. **Successful Trial** – This exact change to the Conditions of Play was trialled during the 2024/25 Women's Pennant Competition and has proven to achieve the above outcomes in an effective way.

To maintain the integrity of the new grading framework, there have been restrictions put in place for an individual's eligibility to participate in post-sectional matches so players cannot drop back in grades late in the season for Region or State Finals.

### Implementation Timeline and Support

It is important to emphasize that these changes do not apply to the current 2024/25 Open Pennant competition. They will take effect beginning July 1, 2025, at the commencement of the 2025/26 season.

We understand that clubs and members may have questions regarding this update. To address concerns, we encourage members to submit their inquiries via the online Jotform linked to this announcement. The link can also be found on the Bowls NSW website, or members can contact our Head Office for assistance.

[Please click here to submit your question](#)

We appreciate your support in implementing these changes and look forward to another successful Open Pennant season in 2025/26.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lee Stinson".

**Lee Stinson**  
Executive Manager – Bowls  
On behalf of the State Match Committee