

## NTRU - DARWIN CLUB PRESIDENTS MEETING

**WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2026**

**FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION**

<b>Attendees</b>	
<b>Darwin Clubs</b>	<p>Jordan Lewis – Darwin Dragons President            Steve Rossow – Casuarina Cougars President            Tamie Devine – South Darwin President            Hayden Summers – South Darwin Vice President            Mark Gillam – Swampdogs Vice President            Jacob Brant – Palmerston Crocs President            Jess Burke – Palmerston Crocs Junior Coordinator            Lee Frape – Palmerston Crocs Youth Coordinator            Amy Drahm – Palmerston Crocs Women’s Team Manager            Sharon Jennings – University Pirates President            Mark Tweedie – University Pirates Junior Coordinator</p> <p>Non-attendance:            Palmerston Raiders Rugby Union Club            Katherine Rugby Union</p>
<b>NTRRA</b>	Robbie Taylor – NTRRA President
<b>NTRU</b>	Danila Lochrin – General Manager Junior Po-Ching Pathways Manager
<b>Rugby AU</b>	Fraser Brydon, Competition Manager
<b>Invited Guests</b>	NIL

- Note: Following on from the planning day Sunday 15 March 2026, NTRU provided more detail around what the schedule could look like and the impacts if junior rugby was to commence later than 5pm and be finished earlier in the evening on a Friday.  
Discussions included:
  - When and potentially where the Get into Rugby Program (Walla and Tri-Time) could be delivered.
  - Additional lighting hours and cost uplift.
  - The ability to appoint referees across 5 fields and possibility of Club to Appoint (CTA) fixtures.
  - Friday night Vs. Saturday game allocations. Potentially needing moving under 16 boys to a Saturday morning to accommodate requests to change of playing hours on a Friday evening.

- Workforce and volunteer capacity and fatigue.
2. **Action:** Clubs to review the information provided, assess impacts, and table their preferred position at the next meeting.
  3. **Note:** At the planning session on Sunday 15 March, the option to cross-share players in the women's and reserve grade competitions was raised. NTRU outlined considerations regarding the integrity of player statistics if players were swapped on game day, along with the practical implications for match day managers, coaches, and players.
  4. **Action:** It was agreed that player sharing will not be included in the 2026 competition rules for women's and reserve grade. Clubs must notify the opposition by 10:00am on game day if they have fewer than 15 players, but no fewer than 12. In this scenario:
    - Teams will match numbers on the field, with squads capped at 23 players.
    - The women's competition will adopt a maximum of 12 substitutions (aligned with A Grade).
    - Reserve grade will retain unlimited substitutions.
  5. **Action:** The Competition Manager will draft the updated competition rules in line with these outcomes. Clubs will be invited to review and provide feedback on the draft.
  6. **Note:** Feedback from the Darwin Competition and Participation Survey (March 2026) indicated a clear preference for a 10–15 week competition plus finals, which was reinforced during the planning session.

In response to the number of forfeits in the 2024/25 and 2025 season, NTRU asked clubs to realistically assess their capacity to sustain a reserve grade and women's side over a 15-week period. University Pirates confirmed strong capacity to do so for both grades. Clubs aligned on the women's competition, however outside of University Pirates other clubs identified challenges either pre- or post-Christmas, with no consistent trend across the reserve grade competition.

A poll was subsequently conducted to determine whether clubs preferred to support a condensed 10-week pre-Christmas competition or a 15-week competition spanning pre- and post-Christmas.

Poll results:

10 weeks prior to Christmas	15 weeks Pre & Post Christmas
Palmerston Crocs	University Pirates
Swampdogs	South Darwin
Darwin Dragons	Casuarina Cougars

7. **Action:** Further discussion led to the agreement that the reserve grade competition will commence as a 15-week competition spanning pre and post-Christmas in line with the women's and A grade competitions. It was further agreed that club presidents will convene post round 5 (7 November 2026) to consider the viability of the 15-week competition.

**NB:** NTRU confirmed with club presidents that if the competition was reduced (or other reduction), NTRU would not refund registration fees due to reduced playing weeks. This was acknowledged by the club presidents.

8. Note: NTRU tabled an opportunity to support and increase greater female participation & pathways, based on the concepts of:
- Female-only training environments and introductory programs
  - Modified or tiered competitions based on skill level
  - Clear development pathways into senior women's rugby

The club presidents support this as an opportunity to increase female participation.

9. **Action:** NTRU Pathways Manager will develop a female focused program to create progression and confidence into the game. The draft program will be shared with the club presidents closer to the commencement of the new season.
10. Note: Note: At the planning session, clubs expressed a clear preference for a single season-based registration fee rather than a calendar-year model. While this presents operational challenges, NTRU is open to reverting to a season-based structure.
11. Note: Transitioning to a season-based model carries risk. Approximately 300 players are currently registered under the calendar-year system; their registration would expire in April 2026, requiring them to re-register for the 2026/27 season.

NTRU is unable to provide partial refunds—only full refunds of the State and Association component. Club fees are determined by individual clubs, and the insurance component is set by Rugby Australia.

NTRU will consider offering a discount code for affected players; however, there is a risk this may not sufficiently incentivise renewal. In addition, decisions regarding the junior competition structure must be finalised before a revised registration pricing model for 2026/27 can be developed.

12. **Action:** Clubs to review and consider the risks and implications associated with this proposed change.
- **Next Meeting:** Wednesday 25 March 5.30pm, NTRU Office.