New South Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association Inc.

President's Report November

2024-2025

Tom McDonald

On behalf of NSWHPA Committee of Management ("CoM")

NSWHPA President's Report 2024/25

It's wonderful to connect with all of you tonight as we reflect on what the NSW Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association has achieved over the past ten months. Since December 2024, our committee has been hard at work supporting our clubs, pilots, and instructors across the state not just through governance, but through practical programs, funding, and events that help more people get flying, stay current, and enjoy our incredible skies.

Flying, Growth, and Community

This year has been all about creating more opportunities to fly, connect, and progress. From supporting new pilots through our CFIs and schools, to helping clubs maintain sites and host events, our focus has been on making participation easier and more rewarding for everyone.
Across NSW, we've seen great energy at club level, from the Northern Rivers to the Illawarra, the Blue Mountains to Manilla, with flying days, training, and social gatherings helping to strengthen our community. NSWHPA funding has supported everything from weather stations and road maintenance to training subsidies and event logistics. These investments directly enable safer, more accessible flying and a more vibrant community.

We've also refined our event funding guidelines to help organisers cover essential costs for volunteers, and to support pilots representing NSW on the international stage. We want to ensure that enthusiasm, not financial limitation, determines who can take part.

Supporting Instructors and Training

One of the most exciting developments this year has been the introduction of our first-ever Chief Flight Instructor Liaison Officer, Tony Dennis. Tony has been travelling, talking, and listening, engaging directly with instructors to understand their challenges and aspirations. His work has highlighted how much passion exists within our training community and how important it is for us and SAFA to back them with the right support, mentoring, and pathways.

By improving collaboration between NSWHPA, CFIs, and clubs, as well as SAFA, we're helping ensure new pilots can access quality instruction and guidance, no matter where they're based. These conversations are shaping our Participation Plan, which aims to remove barriers to training, improve pilot progression, and keep instructors supported and sustainable.

Encouraging Inclusion and Participation

One of our biggest areas of focus this year has been the securing of the Office of Sport Organisation Support Program (OSP) grant funding on the grounds to achieve improved diversity. We successfully completed Milestone 2, which included the development and submission of our Governance and Participation Plans. These plans are crucial to ensure that our programs are well-structured, inclusive, and able to reach as many members as possible.
We gained feedback for this program, and it has been inspiring: participants have told us they want more mentoring, more coaching opportunities, and more events designed to build confidence and community.

We're responding by working with clubs and CFIs to expand these opportunities, through development weekends, Try & Fly events, and tailored support programs. The enthusiasm from across the community shows that when we create the right environment, participation flourishes.

Clubs at the Heart of It All

Our clubs remain the backbone of NSW free flight. They are where friendships are made, skills are shared, and flying dreams take off. The NSWHPA committee has been proud to assist clubs with funding, guidance, and resources, but it's the commitment of local volunteers and members that keeps everything running.

As we look ahead, it's vital that club members continue to step forward, whether by helping organise events, mentoring new pilots, or simply showing up to support initiatives that strengthen participation. The Participation Plan can only succeed if it's powered by the passion and involvement of our members. When pilots, instructors, and clubs work together, we not only increase participation but build the sense of belonging that makes our sport so special.

A Word of Thanks and What's Next

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing SAFA Liaison Officer, Phillip De La Hunty, for his outstanding contribution over many years. His guidance and advocacy have been invaluable, and we are grateful for his leadership and wisdom. We also welcome Claire Dickinson, who has stepped into the role of SAFA Liaison Officer with enthusiasm and fresh perspective.

As we move into the next year, our focus will be on bringing our Participation Plan fully to life, supporting more flying events, delivering instructor development opportunities, advancing the mentoring program, and strengthening communication across our community. We'll continue to back our clubs and pilots with the resources, funding, and coordination they need to grow and thrive.

Reflections

Serving as President this year has reminded me how much context, communication, and connection matter in everything we do. Governance gives us structure, but it's our shared passion for flight and the relationships that sustain it, that give NSWHPA its true strength.
The energy, generosity, and spirit of our members make this sport what it is. Every time someone volunteers at a site day, helps a new pilot, or organises a club event, they're building the future of free flight in NSW.

I would like to thank the NSWHPA committee members for all their hard work during this year. And a special thank you to all for your ongoing support, your time, and your commitment. Together, we'll continue to make NSW the best place to fly, learn, and belong.

Tom McDonald
NSWHPA President 2024/25

APPENDIX - Executive Summaries of NSWHPA Participation & Inclusion Surveys (October 2025)

1. "Women with Wings" Participation & Inclusion Survey

A total of **31 responses** were received from female and gender-diverse participants across NSW and other states, providing insights into participation pathways, barriers, and support needs. Respondents represented a range of experience levels, from early learners to advanced pilots across both **hang gliding (HG)** and **paragliding (PG)** disciplines.

Key Findings

1. Participant Demographics

- Majority aged **25–55 years**, with representation across all age groups.
- Most respondents reside in **NSW and Victoria**.
- Primary entry pathways: **friends or partners** and **Try & Fly/Tandem experiences**.

2. Pilot Experience

- Majority are **PG-qualified**, with some holding **HG or PPG endorsements**.
- Highest ratings range from **Level 2 (Supervised)** to **Level 4+/Advanced**.
- Common endorsements: **Towing**, **XC**, **Radio**, and **Passenger carrying**.

3. Participation & Interests

- Most respondents have been involved in the sport for **2–10 years**.
- Popular recent activities: **competitions, club flying, and training events**.
- Programs of greatest interest include:
    - **Coaching & mentoring pathways**
    - **Progression and confidence-building clinics**
    - **Cross-country (XC) training**
    - **Women's events and fly-ins**

4. Support Needs & Priorities

- The top three types of support requested were:
    - **Access to affordable coaching or mentoring**
    - **Financial assistance for training**
    - **Improved local opportunities to fly and progress**
- Around **two-thirds** said **financial support would make a difference** to their progression.

5. Barriers & Inclusion

- About half have **observed or experienced participation barriers** for women — most commonly:
    - **Gender imbalance** and **lack of visible female role models**
    - **Cultural attitudes** and **confidence barriers**
    - **Limited access to instructors and structured development pathways**

- The majority **feel welcomed and supported** by their clubs and instructors, though several noted that inclusion varies between sites and clubs.

6. Engagement & Willingness to Contribute

- Many respondents are **interested in helping shape future women-focused programs**.
- Several expressed willingness to **mentor, coach, or support community events**.
- Feedback praised previous **"Try & Fly" and women's weekends** as effective models to build community and confidence.

7. Key Opportunities for NSW flying communities

- **Establish structured coaching and mentoring programs** for women and new pilots.
- **Provide targeted financial support or sponsorships** for training and progression.
- **Increase visibility of female coaches, instructors, and leaders.**
- **Promote welcoming club cultures** through communication and awareness initiatives.
- **Replicate successful event models** (e.g. Try & Fly, women's development weekends) in more regions.

Conclusion

The Women with Wings survey highlights strong enthusiasm among women and gender-diverse pilots for **growth, mentorship, and community engagement**, yet ongoing barriers around **access, confidence, and cost** persist. Strengthening **financial support**, **mentorship structures**, and **representation** will directly enhance participation, retention, and leadership diversity across NSW's free-flight community.

2. CFI Participation & Inclusion Survey

The NSWHPA conducted a survey of Chief Flight Instructors (CFIs) to assess current training capacity, inclusion practices, and areas for organisational support. A total of **nine responses** were received from schools and instructors across NSW, representing a mix of hang gliding and paragliding operations.

Key Findings

1. Towing Capability & Training

- Most respondents have **tow capability** through NSWHPA or private winches.
- Around half currently **offer or plan tow training** events in the next 12 months.
- Several plan to partner with local clubs for joint towing activities.

2. Inclusion & Gender Equity

- **Few schools** currently run programs specifically for **women and girls**, but **several expressed interest** in developing these.
- Key barriers include **limited instructor availability**, **site access**, and **lack of funding or structured resources**.

3. Mentoring, Safety & Progression

- Many CFIs provide **informal mentoring** and **safety awareness** programs, while some have **club-based initiatives** underway.
- **Tracking of pilot progression** is lacking or inconsistent, with varying metrics and record-keeping practices.

4. Inclusive Operations & Accessibility

- Some CFIs have **experience training pilots with disabilities**; others are interested but require **suitable sites and assistive equipment** (e.g. flight chairs).
- There is a clear **interest in guidance and support** for inclusive flying operations.

5. Governance & Organisational Needs

- Respondents highlighted the need for **operational templates**, **insurance documentation**, and **risk assessment tools**.
- Support with **working-with-children compliance** was also requested.

6. Communication & Engagement

- Most instructors **do not have structured diversity or communication plans**.
- Outreach is typically **ad hoc** or **club-based**, rather than guided by policy or media frameworks.

7. NSWHPA Support Priorities

The most commonly requested areas of assistance were:

- **Funding support** for programs and events
- **Promotion and advertising assistance**
- **Access to equipment and training resources**
- **Instructor development and mentoring support**

8. Alignment with NSWHPA Goals

- Most respondents **agree or strongly agree** with NSWHPA's goals to improve **participation, inclusion, and equity** across the sport.

Conclusion

Overall, CFIs demonstrate strong alignment with NSWHPA's inclusion objectives but face **resource, capacity, and structural barriers** to implementing new programs. Targeted **funding, communication guidance, and practical governance support** would enable broader participation and strengthen inclusive practices statewide.

3. Club Inclusion & Participation Survey

The NSWHPA received **five club responses** representing a range of regions and membership sizes. The survey assessed clubs' operational capacity, inclusion practices, and areas where NSWHPA support could strengthen participation and diversity outcomes.

Key Findings

1. Tow Capability & Operations

- **Most clubs (3 of 5)** have access to an **NSWHPA or private winch** and are capable of offering tow events.
- A small number actively **plan to host towing events**, including **CFI-led endorsement courses** and **training sessions**.
- Only **one club** expressed interest in establishing **tow-related programs for women and girls**.

2. Safety & Training Programs

- The majority run or plan to run **safety awareness programs** and **skill development activities**, often in collaboration with CFIs.
- Clubs identified **ongoing needs** for **training support** and **volunteer development** (e.g. Safety Officers and Site Supervisors).

3. Inclusion of Women & Underrepresented Groups

- Only **one club** currently runs **specific programs for women**, such as check flights and mentoring support.
- **Most clubs** expressed **limited capacity or interest** to initiate dedicated programs, citing already open participation and volunteer constraints.
- While some noted female committee or safety officer representation, **structured inclusion planning is minimal** across all clubs.

4. Accessibility & Disability Inclusion

- A few clubs showed **interest in inclusive flying opportunities**, though **none currently have tailored programs** for people with disabilities.
- Clubs identified **lack of suitable equipment (e.g. flight chairs)** and **trained instructors** as barriers to inclusion.

5. Governance & Communication

- **Few clubs** have formal **diversity or communication plans**.
- **Governance support** (templates, equity plans, constitutions, etc.) was requested by one club, suggesting **low awareness of potential benefits**.
- Several clubs acknowledged using **welcoming language and imagery**, but policies and processes remain informal.

6. Attitudes Toward Inclusion

- Clubs generally **support the goals** of increasing participation and inclusion, with **three of five agreeing** with NSWHPA's direction.
- However, **two clubs expressed scepticism**, noting that "barriers are minimal" and that **gender-specific initiatives may not be necessary**.
- This highlight **varying cultural attitudes** toward inclusion and differing levels of readiness to adopt structured diversity initiatives.

7. Key Opportunities for NSWHPA

- **Promote awareness and benefits** of inclusive practices and gender balance at the club level.
- **Provide toolkits and templates** for governance, communication, and inclusion planning.
- **Encourage clubs to host women-focused or introductory events** (e.g. Try & Fly, mentoring weekends).
- **Support collaboration between CFIs and clubs** to deliver inclusive training and safety programs.
- **Recognise and celebrate inclusive leadership** and visible role models within clubs.

Conclusion

The survey shows that NSW free-flight clubs are broadly **supportive of inclusion goals** but vary in **capacity, culture, and readiness** to implement structured programs. Practical **resources, guidance, and recognition** from NSWHPA will be key to encouraging consistent inclusive practices and ensuring that participation and leadership opportunities are accessible to all members across the state.