

# Athletes' Survey Report 2025

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# Athletes' Survey Report 2025

## Preamble

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The Athletes' Commission (AC) of the Australian Fencing Federation (AFF) conducted a survey of the athlete population between May 11 and June 04, 2025. The purpose of the survey was to gather feedback and data from the AFF's stakeholders on what the AFF is doing well, what could be improved, and to provide recommendations to guide the AFF when making decisions.

This year's survey was the second survey completed by the athletes' commission. The first survey was done by the previous AC. This year's survey used the same questions as last year to allow the AC to compare to previous years data, with the addition of some new questions. Where possible this report will compare responses between the years.

There were 105 responses out of 338 athletes who were given access to the survey. Athletes who were invited to complete the survey had to meet the following criteria:

1. They had to have competed in an AFF tournament sometime in the last 12 months; and
2. They had to be at least 18 years of age.

This report provides the questions asked, response summaries, and recommendations for each section of the survey. The sections were as follows:

1. Demographics
2. Participation
3. Competitions
4. Communications
5. High-Performance Program
6. Para-Fencing
7. General Feedback

For each of these sections, there is a "Summary" component which aims to break down key insights and topics arising from a given section of the survey.

All sections except for "Demographics and Participation" contain a "Recommendations" component which lists the AC's recommended actions for the AFF to take in response to the survey.

Due to the volume and content of responses, the AC has attempted to distill the key areas of concern across all respondents and provide recommendations based on those. As such, there may be topics raised by some athletes that will remain unaddressed in this report.

## Section 1: Demographics

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### Questions:

1. Please specify your state/territory.
2. Please specify your primary weapon.
3. Please specify your age range.
4. Please specify your gender.

### Summary:

This section of the survey was designed primarily to enable the AC to break down the key issues according to various segments of the athlete population. A secondary benefit was to validate that the segmentation of respondents reflects the entire athlete population. The splits across state, primary weapon, age, and gender are approximately representative of the actual athlete population. State and weapon demographics are shown in Figure 1 and 2.

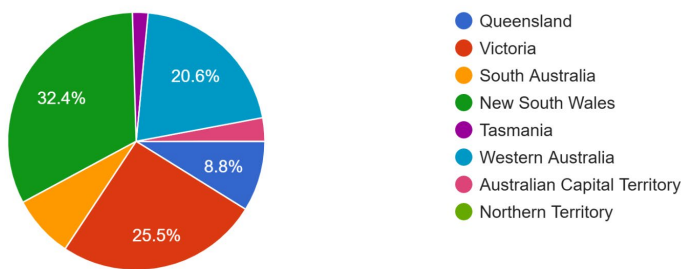


Figure 1. State

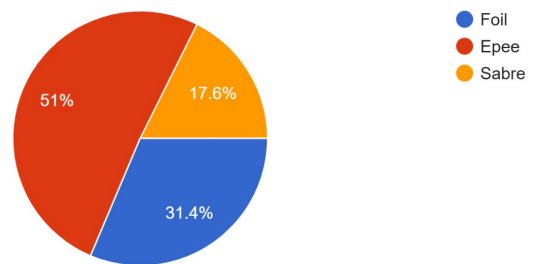


Figure 2. Weapon

## Section 2: Participation

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### Questions:

1. Please describe why you participate in fencing.
2. I started fencing through.
3. How regularly do you fence per week?
4. I currently compete in state level competitions. If no, why not?
5. Please describe any barriers that stop and restrict you from training and competing in fencing.
6. Please include any other information or feedback on how the AFF could increase participation.
7. Have you ever felt discriminated against or witnessed discrimination while participating in fencing activities?
  - a. If yes, what type of discrimination did you experience or witness?
  - b. If yes, how often have you experienced or witnessed discrimination in fencing activities?

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- c. Did you report the discrimination you experienced or witnessed?
  - d. If you did not report it, what were the reasons?
  - e. How has experiencing or witnessing discrimination affected your participation in fencing?
8. Do you feel there are adequate support systems in place to address discrimination in fencing?
  9. What changes would you like to see to better address discrimination in fencing?

### Summary:

This section of the survey aimed to understand how and why individuals begin and continue participating in fencing, how often they train and compete within their state and community, and what barriers may limit their involvement. It also sought feedback on how the AFF can increase participation and explored experiences of discrimination within the sport, its nature, frequency, impact, and whether adequate support systems are in place. The responses will help inform strategies to improve accessibility, inclusion, and overall participation in fencing.

### General participation:

Athletes competing in national fencing tournaments primarily started fencing through their *Local Club* (43.6%) or their *School* (20.0%). Fencers who began under *Other* (18.0%) were summarised via university, beginner courses and other come and try events or advertisements. See Figure 3 for summary of key pathways into fencing. When asked why they fence, respondents listed multiple reasons. The most common themes were fun/enjoyment, exercise/fitness, friendship/community and competition (Figure 4).

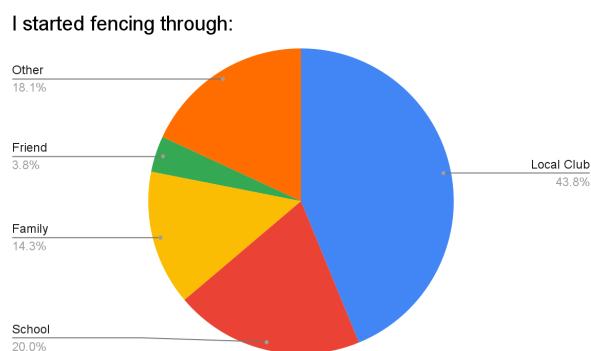


Figure 3. Pathways into fencing

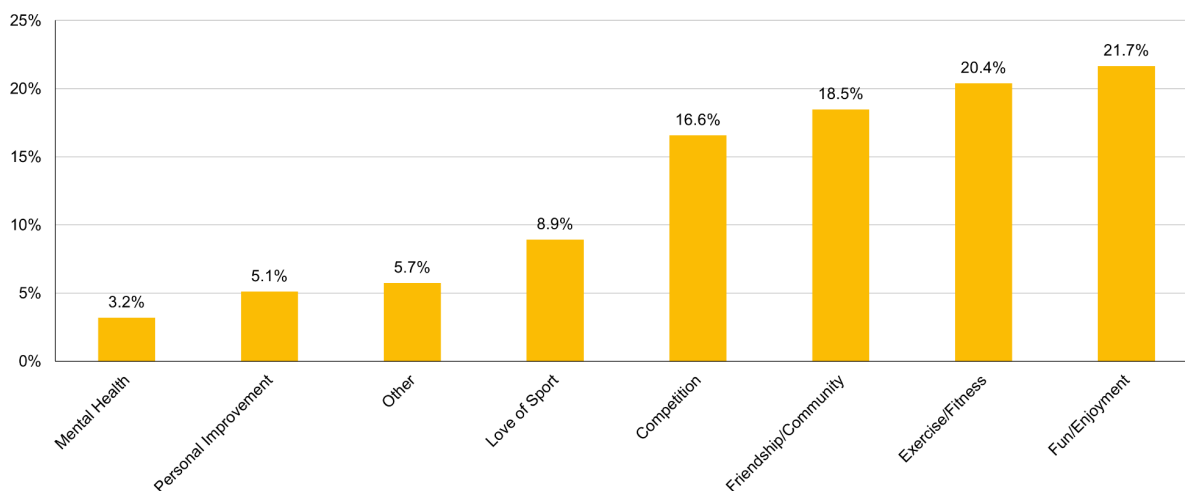


Figure 4. Key reasons for why athlete participate in

## Local training and competition:

When asked how regularly they train, 13.4% of fencers responded they trained over 5 times per week, 20.2% said they train 4 x per week, 40.4% train 3 times per week, and 26% train less than twice. Furthermore, the AC asked fencers if they currently participate in state competitions, where the majority reported competing in all or most or most (Figure 5).

Respondents cited a range of barriers to participating in state-level fencing competitions, with the most common reasons being *scheduling conflicts due to work, study, or family commitments*, and the *limited number of respondents*, which impacts competition quality and value. Other significant factors included poor organisation and communication, low-quality or biased refereeing, lack of inclusivity or a welcoming atmosphere, and the high cost of participation. It was also highlighted that there is a lack of state-level Para-fencing options and a broader challenge of fencing feeling inaccessible or culturally exclusive in Australia.

## Barriers to participation:

The main barriers to ongoing participation in fencing are summarised below:

- **Financial barriers:**
  - Travel and accommodation costs.
  - Competition fees.
  - Private coaching and equipment.
- **Time and scheduling:**
  - Limited ability to train and compete with conflicting work, study and family commitments.
  - Poor scheduling, including late notice of competition dates and location, rescheduled events, university clashes, back-to-back competitions.
  - Training times/availability, where local clubs often only open once or twice a week.
- **Competition and training quality:**
  - Limited sparring partners
  - Lack of competitive depth
  - Coaching quality and coaching availability, with some stating there are few high-level coaches, and these coaches may have limited availability/many students.
- **Accessibility and inclusion:**
  - Geographical isolation
  - Para-fencers have limited participants and limited opportunities.
  - Age and gender challenges, where some veterans, women and para-fencers reported difficulty fitting into squads and finding peers.
  - Barriers to self-funded athletes and athletes from lower economic backgrounds.
- **Administrative and structural issues:**
  - Competition dates and locations not finalised early enough, which has previously increased costs and reduced participation.
  - Event organisation.
  - Facilities, lack of permanent or accessible training venues in some states.
  - Frustration with entry and payment systems and credit card charges.

- **Personal barriers:**
  - Injuries
  - Balancing life commitments, including work, school, family, health
  - Energy and motivation, including burnout from running clubs, managing multiple commitments and feeling isolated at training.

## Discrimination:

For the first time, athletes were asked about their experiences with discrimination in sport. From the 105 respondents, 66.7% of athletes reported *No*, 26.7% reported *Yes* and 6.6% *Prefer not to say*, as shown in Figure 5.

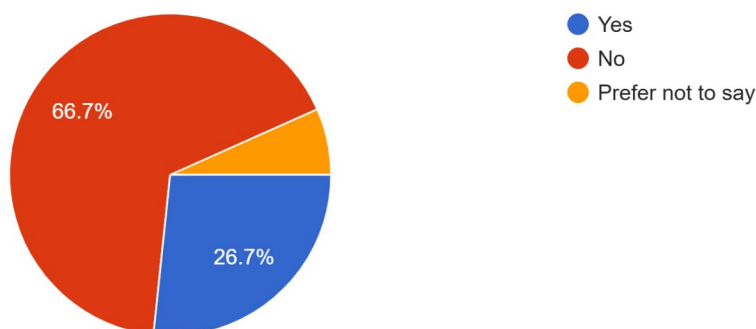


Figure 5. Percentage of athletes that experienced and/or witnessed discrimination while participating in fencing.

Among those who reported experiencing discrimination, the most common forms were age (57.1%), gender (46.4%), and racial/ethnic discrimination (21.4%). Athletes also highlighted other issues, including discrimination based on disability, sexual orientation, speaking up, club affiliation, and perceived favouritism from board members. Athletes reported this reduced their enjoyment of the sport, with many reporting they considered quitting, reduced motivation, reduced trust in the fencing community and increased disdain for members involved.

When asked if athletes had reported incidents of discrimination, the majority said no (see Figure 6.). This was commonly due to belief nothing would be done (87.5%), lack of knowledge on how to report (33.3%) and fear of retaliation (25%).

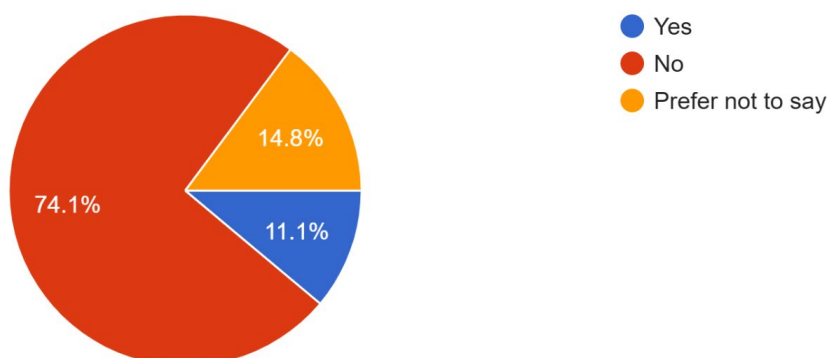


Figure 6. Percentage of athletes that reported any discrimination.

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Athletes called for stronger accountability and enforcement of consequences for discrimination, supported by independent and anonymous reporting systems. They emphasised the need to foster a culture of respect and inclusion across age, gender, and background, with greater acknowledgement that discrimination exists.

### **Athletes' Commission Recommendations:**

To improve participation in state and national events the athletes commission recommends the following:

1. Expanding tailored programs and visible role models to better engage women, veterans, para-athletes, and culturally diverse communities.
2. Increasing athlete awareness of reporting processes through clear, accessible resources (e.g., infographics, guides, posters).
3. Delivering education for athletes, coaches, and clubs on recognising and addressing discrimination in fencing.
4. Ensuring fair treatment across all age groups.
5. Providing equal recognition of achievements for all athletes.

## Section 3: AFF Competitions

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### Questions:

1. Please rate your satisfaction with the organisation and execution of AFF competitions.
2. Please rate your satisfaction with the refereeing at AFF competitions.
3. Please rate your satisfaction with the venues used for AFF competitions.
4. Please rate your satisfaction with the volume and spread of AFF competitions.
5. Please include any other information or feedback on Australian national competitions.

### Summary:

Satisfaction levels for AFF competitions have remained relatively stable from 2024 to 2025 with only minor shifts across the categories. However, there were a large number of issues raised in the open-ended response question. The main themes from these responses were:

- Complaints around the calendar not being announced far enough in advance. This causes issues with planning and booking of flights and accommodation.
- Clashes between the timing of Open and Veteran events
- Dates of events being changed after announcement.
- Lack of sufficient referees and complaints about the quality of referees.
- Competitions running with large delays and running overtime.
- Changes to the early bird fees, now requiring fencers to sign up further in advance.

**Table 1. Competitions - %Change in satisfaction ratings from 2024 to 2025**

Category	Very Unsatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Overall Change
	1	2	3	4	5	
Organisation & Execution	0.7%	5.6%	3.9%	-10.0%	-0.1%	▼
Refereeing	1.0%	2.0%	4.1%	-5.0%	-2.0%	▼
Venues	-1.2%	-1.1%	-7.5%	10.0%	-0.2%	▲
Volume/ Distribution	-2.4%	-0.3%	-0.9%	10.6%	-6.9%	▲

### Organisation & Execution:

In 2025, athlete ratings for the organisation and execution of fencing events showed a mixed response. The largest group (38.5%) rated their experience as neutral, while 31.8% expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction. However, dissatisfaction also rose to 29.5%. Compared to 2024, this marks a decline in overall satisfaction, which previously stood at 41.5%, with fewer neutral (34.6%) and dissatisfied (25.9%) responses.

This decline aligns with recurring concerns in the feedback. Athletes highlighted issues such as late release of competition schedules, overlapping events (especially between Open and Veteran categories), and long, exhausting competition days. Many noted that poor communication and last-minute changes to dates and formats disrupted travel plans and training cycles. The lack of athlete-centric planning, such as insufficient time for weapons checks, inadequate rest between events and finishing late when (individual/team), and venues do not open early enough for adequate warm up time, was frequently cited as a source of frustration. While some praised the efforts of volunteers and specific venues, the overall sentiment suggests a need for more strategic, transparent, and athlete-focused event management.

### Refereeing:

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with refereeing declined compared to the previous year. While 40.4% of respondents reported being satisfied to very satisfied, this marks a drop from 47.4% in 2024. Neutral responses rose to 30.8% (up from 26.7%), and dissatisfaction increased to 28.9% (from 25.9%).

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This shift reflects widespread concerns raised, including inconsistent referee quality, frequent reliance on self-refereeing, and a lack of qualified officials, particularly in sabre. Athletes expressed frustration with paying high entry fees while still being expected to officiate their own bouts. Many called for better referee training, clearer standards, and more equitable systems for referee participation and compensation. These concerns were raised in the 2024 survey however, do not appear to have been addressed adequately.

### **Venues:**

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with competition venues showed a modest improvement over the previous year. The proportion of respondents who were very unsatisfied dropped from 2.9% in 2024 to just 1.0% in 2025, and those who were unsatisfied decreased slightly from 5.9% to 4.8%. Neutral ratings also declined, from 26.7% to 19.2%, suggesting fewer athletes felt indifferent about venue quality.

The most notable change was in the satisfied category, which rose significantly from 46.0% in 2024 to 56.7% in 2025. Meanwhile, the percentage of athletes who were very satisfied remained stable at around 18% across both years.

This upward trend aligns with feedback praising venues in Adelaide, Perth, and Brisbane Nissan Arena, which were described as spacious and well-equipped. However, the feedback also highlighted persistent issues in NSW and VIC, such as poor infrastructure, limited parking, and inadequate PA systems. These mixed experiences suggest that while venue quality has improved overall, consistency across locations remains a concern. Athletes also called for minimum venue standards that prioritize athlete needs, such as warm-up space and functional pistes, to ensure a uniform experience across national events.

### **Volume & Distribution of Competitions:**

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with the volume and distribution of AFF competitions showed a slight improvement over the previous year. The percentage of respondents who were very unsatisfied dropped from 8.2% in 2024 to 5.8% in 2025, and those who were unsatisfied remained relatively stable (22.4% in 2024 vs. 22.1% in 2025). Neutral ratings also saw a minor decrease, from 33.6% to 32.7%.

The most significant change was in the satisfied category, which rose from 23.1% in 2024 to 33.7% in 2025. Meanwhile, the proportion of athletes who were very satisfied increased from 12.7% to 15.7%.

This improvement reflects some positive developments noted in the feedback, such as better venue experiences in certain cities and more consistent competition execution. However, the feedback also highlighted ongoing concerns about calendar congestion, poor scheduling, and clashes with international events. Athletes expressed frustration with competitions being too frequent, clustered in certain months, and mostly held in eastern states, making participation difficult for those in WA and other regions. The call for earlier release of dates, and more balanced distribution across the year and geography remains strong, suggesting that while satisfaction has improved, further refinement is needed to meet athlete expectations.

## **Athletes' Commission Recommendations:**

1. The AFF develops a plan to increase the number of qualified referees at each competition.
2. Ensure that Open and Veteran events of the same weapon and gender are not held on the same day.
3. Ensure that the schedule for all events be announced at least 4 months in advance.
4. Avoid changing of schedule after announcement unless necessary.
5. For events with large entries in individuals and teams should be run across multiple days. (i.e. at nationals Men's Epee individual and team should be on separate days to reduce time at the venue/risk of injury etc).

## Section 4: AFF Communications

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### Questions:

1. Please rate your satisfaction with communications by the AFF to its athletes.
2. Please rate your satisfaction with your own awareness of information and resources provided by the AFF.
3. Please rate your satisfaction with accessibility and presentation of the AFF website.
4. Please rate your satisfaction with the transparency of important decisions made by the AFF, particularly the AFF's communication of such decisions.
5. Please rate your satisfaction with posts, videos and stories on AFF social media pages.
6. What types of content would you like to see more of on the AFF's social media?
7. Please rate how satisfied you are with the AFF's representation of all athletes (able-bodied and para) and its promotion of diversity? (across their website and social media pages).
8. Please include any other information or feedback on AFF communications.

### Summary

Satisfaction levels with AFF communications remained largely consistent between 2024 and 2025, with only minor changes across rating categories. However, the open-ended responses revealed several recurring concerns. The key themes identified were:

- Delays and lack of responsiveness in communication from AFF.
- Insufficient transparency and clarity regarding funding allocations, High Performance Program (HPP) criteria, and decision-making processes; and
- Outdated, inconsistent, and unclear information across AFF's website and social media platforms.

### Communications

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with AFF communications remained relatively stable compared to 2024, with only minor shifts across the rating categories. The percentage of respondents who were very unsatisfied decreased slightly from 14.1% in 2024 to 13.5% in 2025. Similarly, those who were unsatisfied dropped from 23.0% to 20.2%.

However, there was a notable increase in neutral responses, rising from 33.3% in 2024 to 45.2% in 2025. This suggests a growing sense of disengagement or uncertainty among athletes regarding the quality of communication. Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents who were satisfied declined from 23.7% to 18.3%, and those who were very satisfied fell from 5.9% to just 2.9%.

This shift toward neutrality and away from satisfaction reflects the feedback that AFF's communication lacks direct engagement with athletes. Many respondents noted that they receive little to no formal communication unless they are part of elite programs. Instead, updates are often relayed through state federations, which increases the risk of delays and

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miscommunication. Athletes expressed a desire for more direct channels, such as newsletters, email updates, and timely notifications about competitions, selections, and policy changes. The reliance on social media was also criticised, as not all athletes use these platforms regularly. Overall, the feedback highlights a need for AFF to establish clear, consistent, and inclusive communication pathways that reach all members of the fencing community.

**Table 2. AFF Communications - %Change in satisfaction ratings from 2024 to 2025**

Category	Very Unsatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Overall Change
	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall Communications	-0.6%	-2.8%	11.9%	-5.4%	-3.0%	▼
Awareness of Information & Resources	-3.1%	9.9%	2.8%	-7.9%	-1.8%	▼
AFF Website	-1.9%	4.5%	-0.5%	1.1%	-3.2%	▼
Transparency & Communication in AFF Decisions	-1.8%	0.3%	2.4%	-2.4%	1.6%	▼
Social Media	-2.7%	1.1%	-0.9%	0.6%	1.7%	▲
Representation of Athletes/Diversity	Not Asked Previously					-

### Awareness of Information & Resources

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with their awareness of AFF information and resources showed a mixed shift compared to 2024. The proportion of respondents who were very unsatisfied decreased from 8.9% in 2024 to 5.8% in 2025. However, those who were unsatisfied rose significantly from 17.0% to 26.9%, indicating growing concern about the accessibility and clarity of available resources. Neutral responses also increased slightly, from 38.5% to 41.3%, suggesting that many athletes remain uncertain or disengaged.

Meanwhile, the percentage of athletes who were satisfied dropped from 31.9% to 24.0%, and those who were very satisfied declined from 3.7% to just 1.9%. This downward trend in satisfaction reflects the feedback that AFF's resources, particularly its website and documentation, have been described as often outdated, inconsistent, and difficult to navigate.

Athletes reported that key information, such as competition schedules, rule updates, and selection criteria, is frequently missing or unclear. Several noted that changes to published events were made without explanation, and that outdated rules remained listed on the website. There were also concerns about the lack of transparency around funding and High Performance Program (HPP) strategy, with limited access to reports or criteria for athlete categorisation.

Overall, the feedback highlights a need for AFF to improve the organisation, accuracy, and visibility of its resources, and to ensure that all members of the fencing community can easily access the information they need.

### **AFF Website**

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with the accessibility and presentation of the AFF website remained relatively consistent compared to 2024, with only minor shifts across the rating categories. The proportion of respondents who were very unsatisfied decreased slightly from 6.7% in 2024 to 4.8% in 2025. However, those who were unsatisfied rose from 12.6% to 17.1%, indicating a growing number of athletes are dissatisfied with the website's usability and content.

Neutral responses remained stable, with 34.3% in 2025 compared to 34.8% in 2024. The percentage of respondents who were satisfied increased slightly from 37.0% to 38.1%, while those who were very satisfied declined from 8.9% to 5.7%.

Many athletes described the AFF website as outdated, difficult to navigate, and inconsistent in its presentation of key information. Specific concerns included missing or removed competition details, outdated rule documents, and lack of clarity around changes made to published content. Athletes also noted that the website does not effectively support planning, with limited visibility of future events and no clear communication when updates occur.

The feedback suggests that while some users find the website functional, a significant portion of the community feels it lacks the professionalism, transparency, and reliability expected of a national sporting body. Improvements in design, content accuracy, and update transparency are needed to enhance athlete trust and engagement.

### **Transparency & Communication of AFF Decisions**

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with the transparency of important AFF decisions remained largely consistent with 2024, though overall satisfaction levels remained low. The proportion of respondents who were very unsatisfied decreased slightly from 23.7% in 2024 to 21.9% in 2025. Those who were unsatisfied remained almost unchanged, with 31.4% in 2025 compared to 31.1% in 2024.

Neutral responses increased slightly from 28.1% to 30.5%, suggesting that more athletes are uncertain or disengaged when it comes to understanding how decisions are made. The graph does not show a significant rise in satisfaction, indicating that transparency continues to be a concern for a large portion of the fencing community.

This is strongly supported by the open-ended feedback, where athletes repeatedly called for greater transparency in AFF decision-making. Concerns included a lack of clarity around selection criteria, policy changes, and funding allocations, particularly within the High-Performance Program (HPP). Athletes expressed frustration that decisions are often made without consultation or explanation, and that changes are implemented without prior notice or opportunity for feedback.

There were also calls for AFF to publish key documents, such as financial reports and strategic plans, and to provide clear communication channels for athletes to engage with leadership. The perception that decisions are made behind closed doors has led to a lack of trust and confidence in the organisation's governance.

Overall, the feedback highlights the need for AFF to adopt more transparent, inclusive, and accountable decision-making practices to rebuild athlete confidence and engagement.

### **Social Media**

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with AFF's social media and promotional efforts showed only modest changes compared to 2024. The proportion of respondents who were very unsatisfied decreased slightly from 11.5% in 2024 to 8.8% in 2025. Those who were unsatisfied remained relatively stable, rising marginally from 21.4% to 22.5%.

The majority of respondents rated their experience as neutral, with 37.3% selecting this option in 2025, making it the most common response across both years. This suggests that while dissatisfaction has slightly declined, many athletes remain indifferent or disengaged with AFF's social media and promotional content.

Athletes acknowledged some improvement in AFF's social media presence but noted that it still lacks depth and consistency. Several respondents suggested that posts often lack full context, such as competition results or links to relevant updates, and that reliance on social media alone excludes athletes who do not actively use these platforms. Others expressed a desire for more engaging and informative content, including regular updates, athlete highlights and biographies, competition highlights, education pieces, club representation and engagement, and behind-the-scenes insights into AFF operations and athlete's training. Furthermore, ensuring equality and consistency across team announcements and results.

Overall, the feedback indicates that while AFF's social media efforts are improving, there is a clear opportunity to enhance engagement, accessibility, and relevance, particularly by integrating social media with broader communication strategies and ensuring that key updates reach all members of the fencing community.

### **Representation of Athletes & Athlete Diversity**

In 2025, athlete satisfaction with how athletes are represented in AFF communications showed a broad range of responses. The largest group of respondents (39.4%) rated their satisfaction as neutral, indicating that many athletes feel indifferent or uncertain about how

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well they are represented. 23.2% reported being satisfied, and 12.1% were very satisfied, suggesting that a portion of the community feels positively about current efforts.

However, 16.2% of respondents were unsatisfied, and 9.1% were very unsatisfied, highlighting that a significant minority feel underrepresented or misrepresented in AFF communications. There is no comparative data from 2024, however year-on-year changes will be assessed in the future.

This distribution aligns with feedback calling for greater inclusivity and visibility across AFF platforms. Athletes expressed a desire to see more diverse representation, including veterans, para-athletes, and those outside elite programs. Several comments noted that AFF communications tend to focus on high-performance athletes, leaving others in the community feeling overlooked. There were also suggestions to highlight achievements from a broader range of backgrounds and regions, and to ensure that promotional content reflects the full spectrum of the fencing community.

Overall, the feedback suggests there is a clear opportunity for AFF to improve representation, diversity, and inclusivity in its communications to better reflect and engage the wider fencing community.

### **Athletes' Commission Recommendations**

1. Invest in forming a communications strategy to be used across multiple platforms, including a newsletter, email updates and social media updates, to ensure all athletes receive timely information
2. Acknowledge receipt of enquiries and develop communication workflows to triage incoming emails and respond effectively, within appropriate timeframes.
3. Utilise email more often as a means of communication. Athletes can be notified of the following via email:
  - a. Competition scheduling updates,
  - b. Registration reminders,
  - c. Major announcements,
  - d. Rule changes, and
  - e. Expressions of interest for volunteer roles.

Where possible and relevant, include links to the AFF website in these communications.

4. Clean up the AFF website to fix or remove all broken or outdated links. Also update documents and policies to their latest versions, and ensure these items are continually updated going forward.
5. Use social media more broadly to capture what the entirety of Australian fencing is about. This means working with clubs and states to promote grassroots participation and celebrating the achievements of **all** our international athletes. Ensure promotional content reflects the full spectrum of the fencing community.
6. Cease the use of videos of still shots to convey results on social media. Instead, utilise still images on "stories" that can be more efficiently digested.
7. Publish up-to-date versions of key documents such as financial reports, selection criteria, and strategic plans to increase transparency between the AFF and its athletes.
8. Introduce feedback periods before implementing major changes affecting athletes.

9. When providing updates on changes and decisions provide clear and transparent explanations.

## Section 5: High Performance Program

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### Questions:

1. Are you an active member of the High-Performance Program?
2. How many hours do you fence per week?
3. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the High-Performance Program.
4. Please rate your satisfaction of communications with the High-Performance Program staff.
5. Please rate your satisfaction with the competition nomination and selection processes.
6. Please rate your satisfaction with international training and competition tours run by the AFF.
7. Please rate your satisfaction with coaches provided by the AFF at international events.
8. Please rate your satisfaction with the Mobility Sparring Program.
9. Please rate your satisfaction with the camp component of the HPP.
10. If yes, please rate your level of satisfaction with the way the camp was run?
11. Please rate your satisfaction with the Strength & Conditioning component of the HPP.
12. Please rate your satisfaction with the Mindset component of the HPP.
13. Please rate your satisfaction with funding for international competitions and tours.
14. Please include any other information or feedback on the High-Performance Program.

Following questions 3 to 13, athletes were also asked: Do you think it has improved over the past 12 months?

**Table 3. High-Performance Program - %Change in Satisfaction from 2024 to 2025**

Category	Very Unsatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Overall Change
	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall HPP	32.5%	-16.3%	-8.1%	-1.9%	-6.3%	▼
Communication	-15.6%	10.6%	1.2%	-5.0%	8.7%	▲
Nomination & Selection Processes	3.5%	-4.4%	6.0%	0.6%	-5.8%	▼

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International Training & Tours	9.8%	-25.0%	6.9%	14.6%	-6.5%	▲
Coaches at International Events	13.4%	-0.3%	6.9%	-16.5%	-3.6%	▼
<b>HPP Benefits</b>						
Mobility Program	44.4%	-8.9%	-18.9%	-12.2%	-4.4%	▼
Camps	Not Asked Previously					-
Strength & Conditioning	13.3%	13.8%	-16.7%	-2.3%	-8.2%	▼
Mindset	29.8%	-8.2%	-4.3%	-16.7%	-0.6%	▼
Funding for International Events	44.7%	-4.7%	-16.1%	-17.3%	-6.5%	▼

### Summary

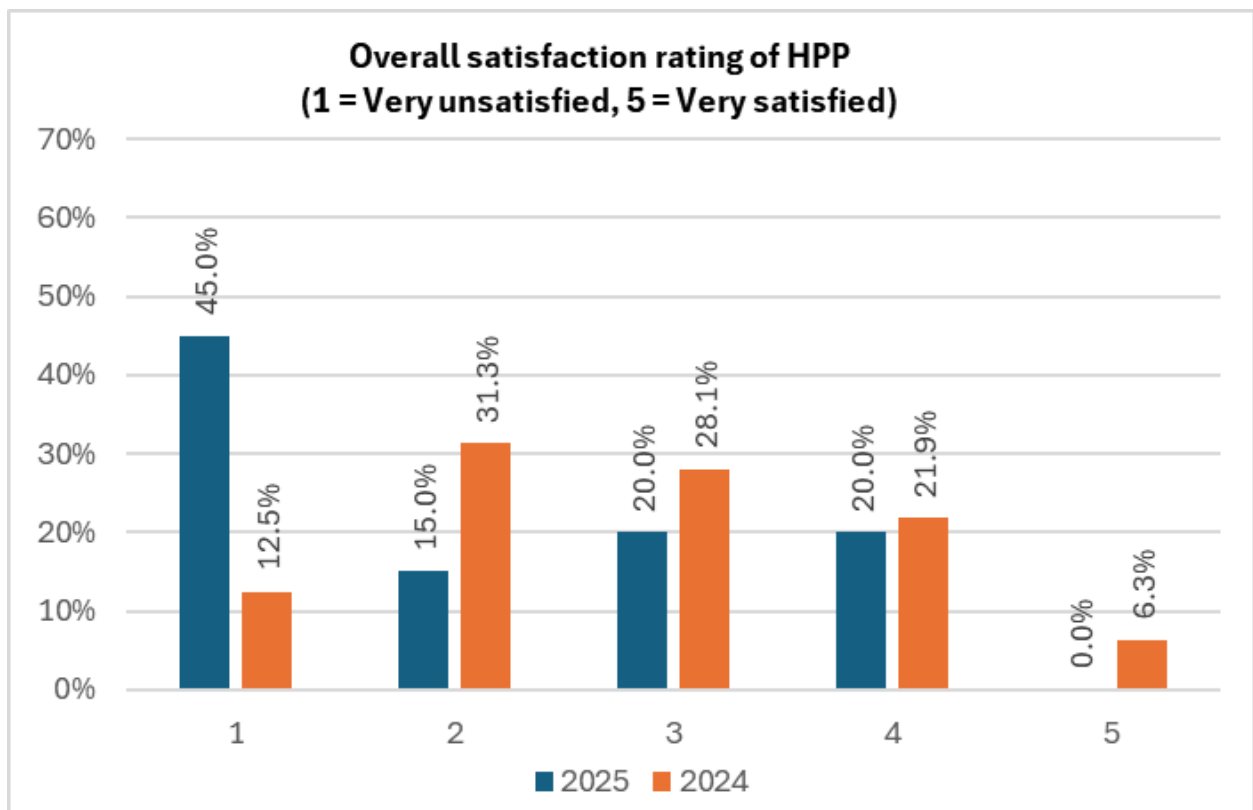
Unfortunately, there has been a decrease in athlete satisfaction across most categories compared to 2024. This decline comes during a period of transition for the High-Performance Program, with new coaches and managers having been appointed over the past year. While some of the reduction in satisfaction may be attributed to the adjustment period associated with these changes, further work is required to reverse the trend and rebuild athlete confidence in the HPP. Areas of particular concern include the mindset program and funding for international competitions which have both seen a significant decrease in athlete satisfaction. On a positive note, satisfaction with communication has improved, suggesting that some of the recent changes are beginning to have a positive impact.

Athletes also had the opportunity to leave an open-ended response with any other feedback, the main themes from these responses were

- Inadequate funding/high costs
- Inconsistent communication
- Lack of national foil coach
- Positive feedback regarding new national coach/managers
- Frustration with organisation of tours, including lack of clarity around price before tour and inadequate training on tour.

## Athletes' Commission Recommendations

1. HPC should have a HPP specific survey and feedback form at the end of each season. As well as create a clear and direct communication path for providing in-season feedback.
2. A review of the mindset resources being provided to athletes to ensure they are meeting the needs of athletes.
3. A push to increase funding available to HPP athletes including through fundraising and donations. Some potential fundraising opportunities include
  - a. Donation campaigns to raise my money from the fencing community, these could be competition specific e.g. running a campaign to raise money for fencers going to world championships.
  - b. Add an optional donation when signing up for AFF competitions/Fundraiser opportunities for teams going to major events/championships.
  - c. Approach business to sponsor the team for particular tours/events.
4. That the continued search for a national foil coach be a high priority for the AFF.
5. That HPP management continues to work to improve communication with athletes.



## Section 6: Para-Fencing

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### Questions:

1. Do you compete in Para-Fencing?
2. Do you feel the AFF provides adequate support and opportunities for Para Fencers?
3. What are the key challenges you face as a Para athlete in Australian Fencing?
4. Please include any other feedback on how the AFF could improve Para Fencing representation and participation

### Summary:

This section captures responses from four Para/Wheelchair Fencers. Although the sample is small and reflects the grassroots status (currently delivered at one club nationally), the responses are consistent with, and reinforce, the 2024 recommendation to build inclusivity through the wheelchair-fencing program (p12 - 2024 Athlete Survey Report). The para athletes have enthusiasm for the sport, but also describe persistent barriers that limit growth: having only one club nationally that offers para fencing, lack of diverse local opponents and state level competition, low visibility and engagement from governing channels (notably AFF social media and website), and the high cost of specialised equipment (customised fencing chair). AFF support ratings varied from 2 to 5 out of 5, showing mixed satisfaction and highlighting specific, actionable areas where changes can translate last year's inclusivity goal into measurable progress.

### Opportunities:

- Promote para fencing more widely to increase awareness, attract new respondents, and to help attract sponsors for para fencers (and clubs) - this also applies to promoting able-bodied fencing.
- Establish state-level para competitions and development pathways to create consistent, local competitive opportunities in addition to existing international competitions - this helps include those who cannot participate due to financial barriers or have no interest in international competitions.
- Provide targeted funding opportunities for specialised equipment and travel to international competitions to lower financial barriers - an easy workaround for this is better promotion and visibility. Which can aid in finding sponsors for clubs, para teams, and individual para fencers - again, this also applies for able bodied fencers.
- Partner with additional clubs and community organisations to expand program availability beyond the single current location.

### Barriers:

- Minimal visibility and promotion in the AFF social media. The AFF's social media currently shows little to no engagement with para fencing content, reducing recognition and recruitment potential.
- Single club delivery for para fencing.

- No state competition and lack of diverse opponents.
- High specialised equipment costs - most notably the customised fencing chair.

## **Athletes' Commission Recommendations:**

### Overview of recommendations

1. Increase the visibility for para fencing through promotional campaigns that para-athletes and ensure regular engagement across AFF social media channels - this will operationalise the 2024 Athlete Survey Reports call to "build inclusivity". This can easily start with reposting/sharing clubs and individual para fencers' content and achievements. This also applies to our able-bodied fencers - a great and easy start would be to follow and engage with para fencers; plus able-bodied fencers content on Instagram.
2. Push for clubs willing to host para fencing and partner with disability organisations to pilot para fencing programs nationally.
3. Once participation increases, develop and fund state-level para competitions.

***If there's one thing the AFF can do, it's to increase the visibility of para fencing through promotional campaigns and ensuring regular engagement across AFF social media channels. Strong, consistent promotion helps everyone.***

***Para and able-bodied fencers alike.***

**Issue:** Para fencing has little to no presence on the AFF Instagram and website, limiting recognition, recruitment, and awareness. This also affects able-bodied fencing, where stronger promotion would benefit athletes and the sport overall.

**Impact:** Para fencers feel underrepresented. Able-bodied fencers also miss exposure. Missed opportunities for inclusion, growth, and athlete sponsorship

**What Para Fencers Want:** A consistent social media strategy that highlights para and able-bodied athletes

### **What it achieves:**

- Greater awareness and inclusion across the sport.
- More participants, chance for sponsorship for athletes and the AFF, along with community engagement.
- Aligns AFF with the best practice in inclusivity and promotion.

**Desired outcome:** Increases visibility, engagement, and sponsorship opportunities for para and able-bodied fencing, driving growth nationally.

## Section 7: General Feedback

### Questions:

1. Please provide a rating of the AFF's overall performance.
2. Please rate how you resonate with the following statement: "I feel the AFF treats everyone fairly and equally".
3. Please rate how you resonate with the following statement: "I trust the AFF".
4. Please provide any other information, feedback or suggestions for the AFF.

### Summary:

Overall, the AC asked respondents to rate the AFF's performance and reflect on key statements. Much of the feedback in this section reiterated concerns raised earlier. Respondents expressed a strong desire for greater transparency, fairness, and inclusivity across all levels of fencing in Australia. Key concerns included:

- The need for clearer communication.
- More equitable team selection processes based on merit rather than program membership or financial capacity.
- Better support for athlete development beyond major metropolitan areas.

Additional issues highlighted were inconsistent ranking systems, inadequate competition management, and a lack of community engagement. While respondents acknowledged recent improvements, particularly in governance and social media presence, the overall sentiment emphasized the need for a more athlete-focused, transparent, and community-driven approach to growing the sport.

**Table 4. General Feedback - 2025 Satisfaction Ratings from General Feedback Questions**

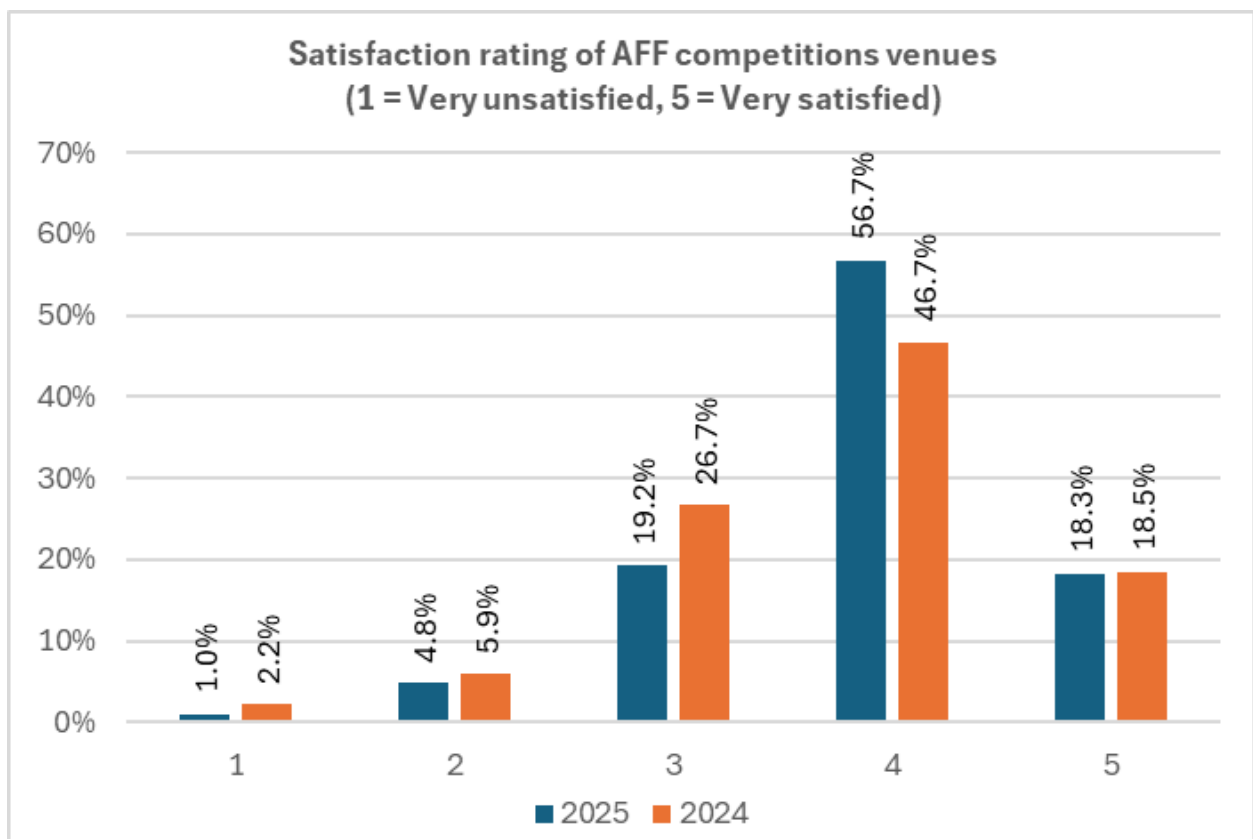
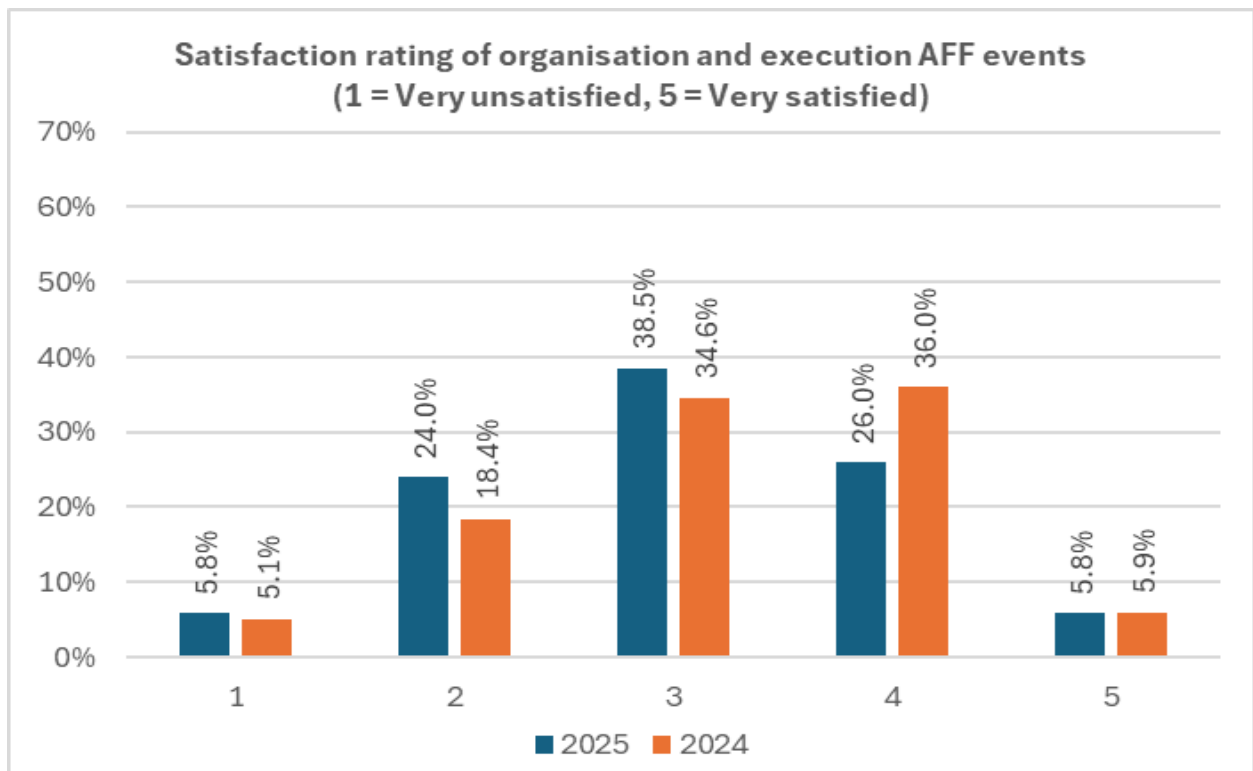
Category	Very Unsatisfied/ Strongly Disagree	Dissatisfied/ Disagree	Neutral	Satisfied/ Agree	Very Satisfied/ Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
AFF Overall performance	8.8%	20.6%	39.2%	29.4%	2.0%
"I feel the AFF treats everyone fairly and equally"	12.9%	20.8%	21.8%	30.7%	13.9%
"I trust the AFF"	17.0%	19.0%	35.0%	24.0%	5.0%

## **Acknowledgements:**

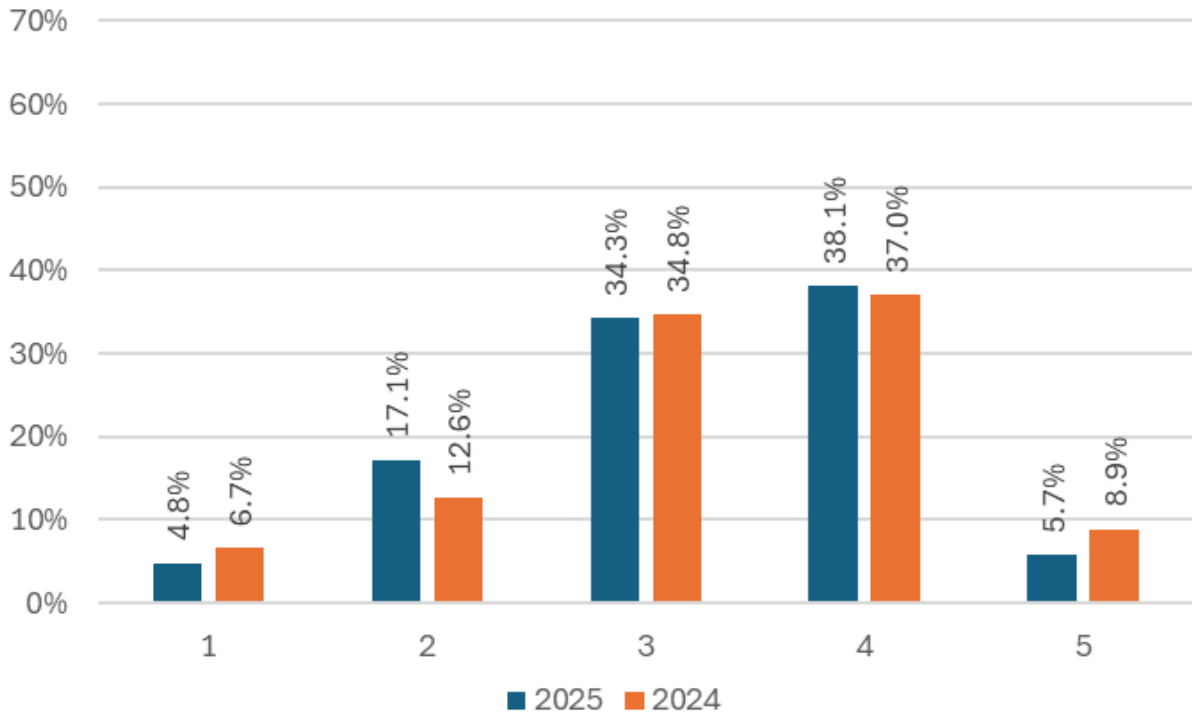
The AC would like to thank everybody who responded to the survey. The feedback we have received is invaluable – we hope that, through this format, it can be used to drive meaningful change that will impact the Australian fencing experience in a positive way.

Thank you to Alex English and the 2020-2024 Athletes Commission for building the survey. Thank you to Andrew Weiss and Avery Holderness-Roddam for their input and contribution to the 2025 Survey.

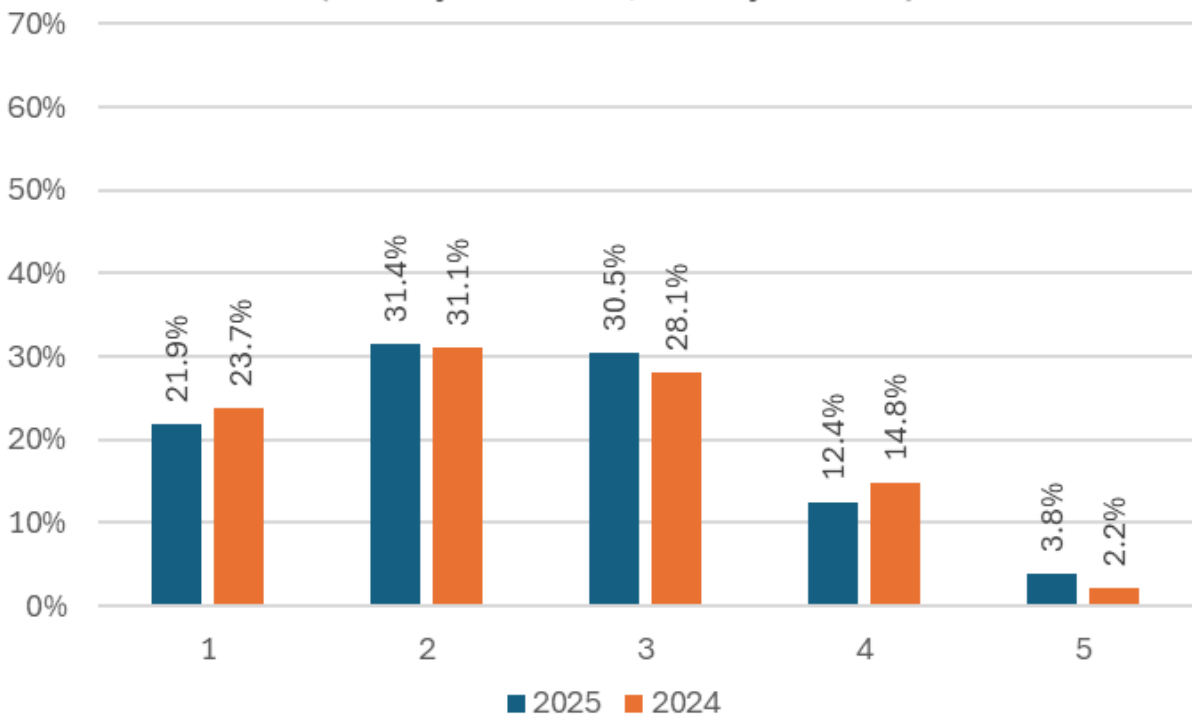
## Appendices (results for numeric response questions)



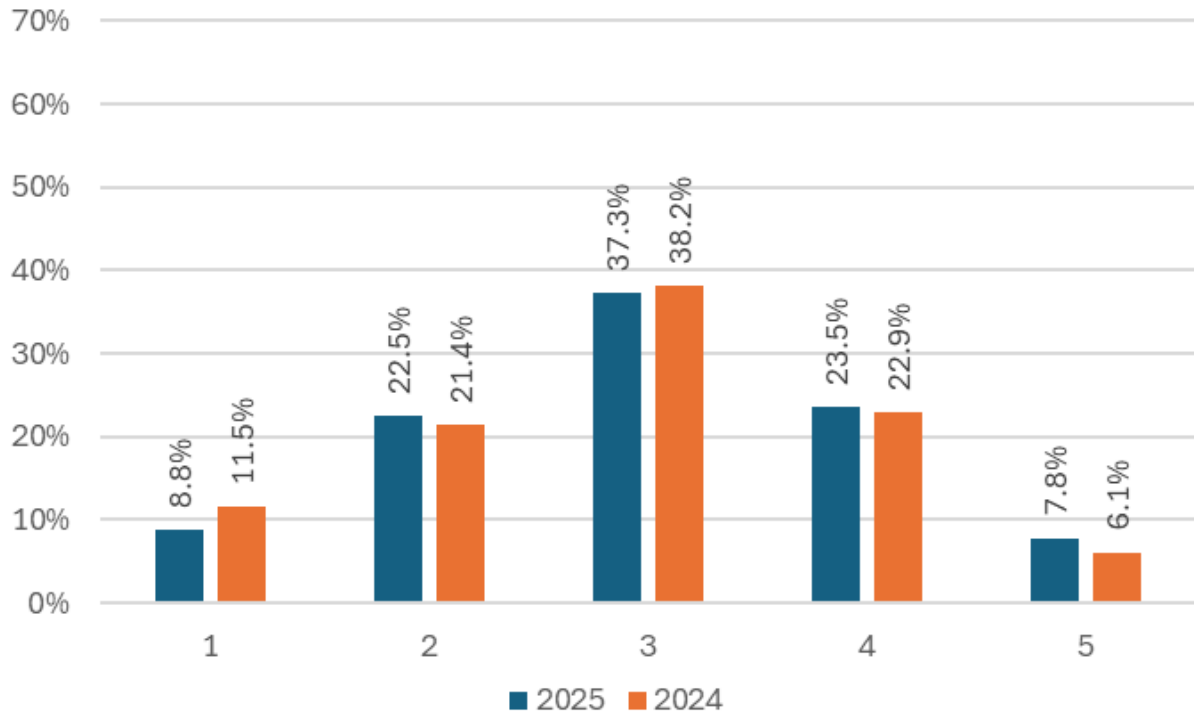
**Satisfaction rating of accessibility & presentation of AFF website**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



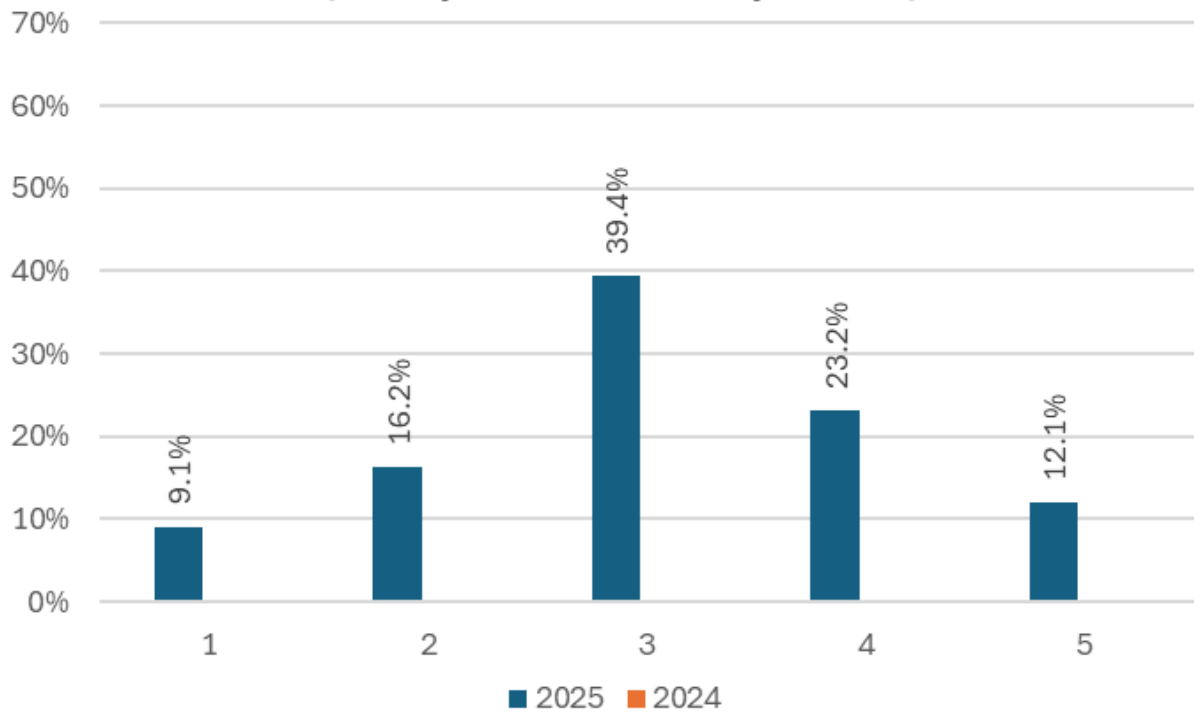
**Satisfaction rating of transparency of important AFF decisions**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



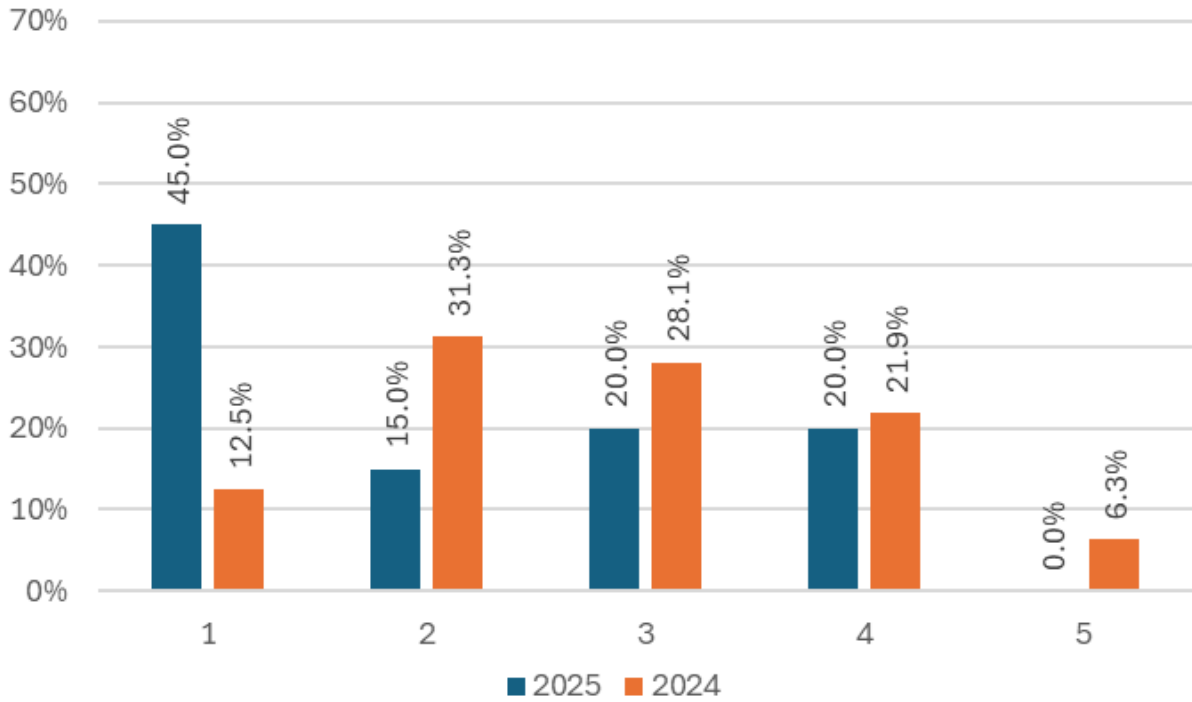
**Satisfaction rating of AFF social media & promotion  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)**



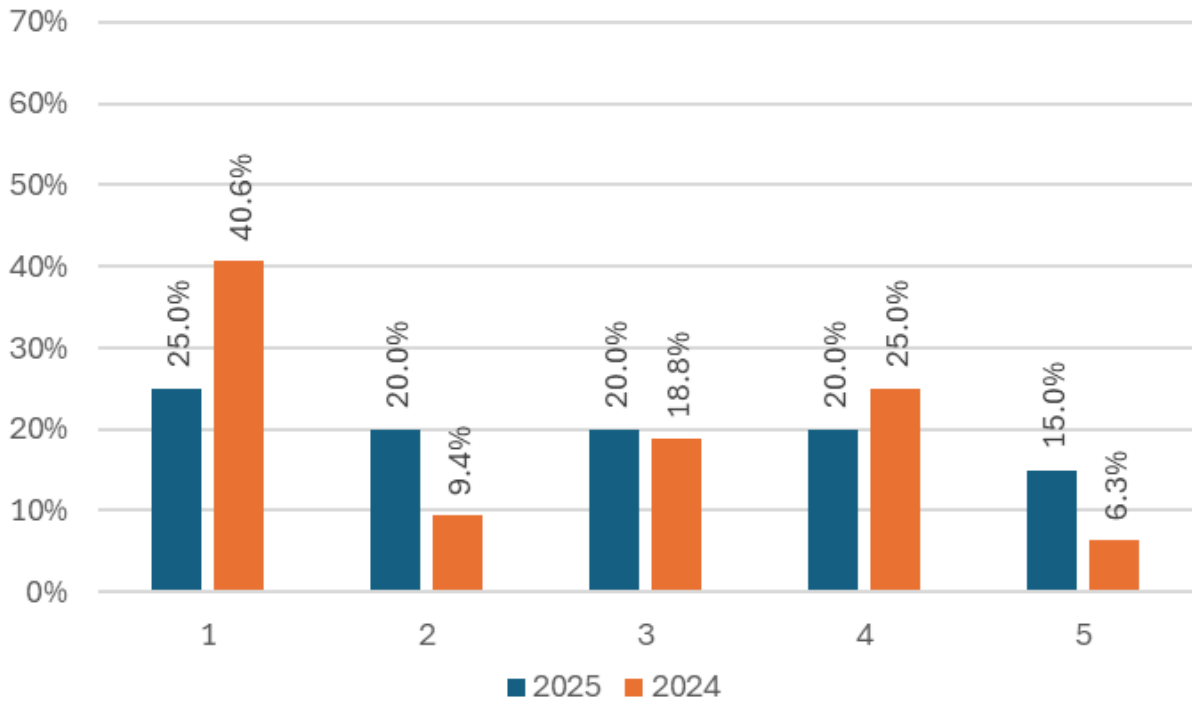
**Satisfaction rating of representation of athletes on AFF comms  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)**



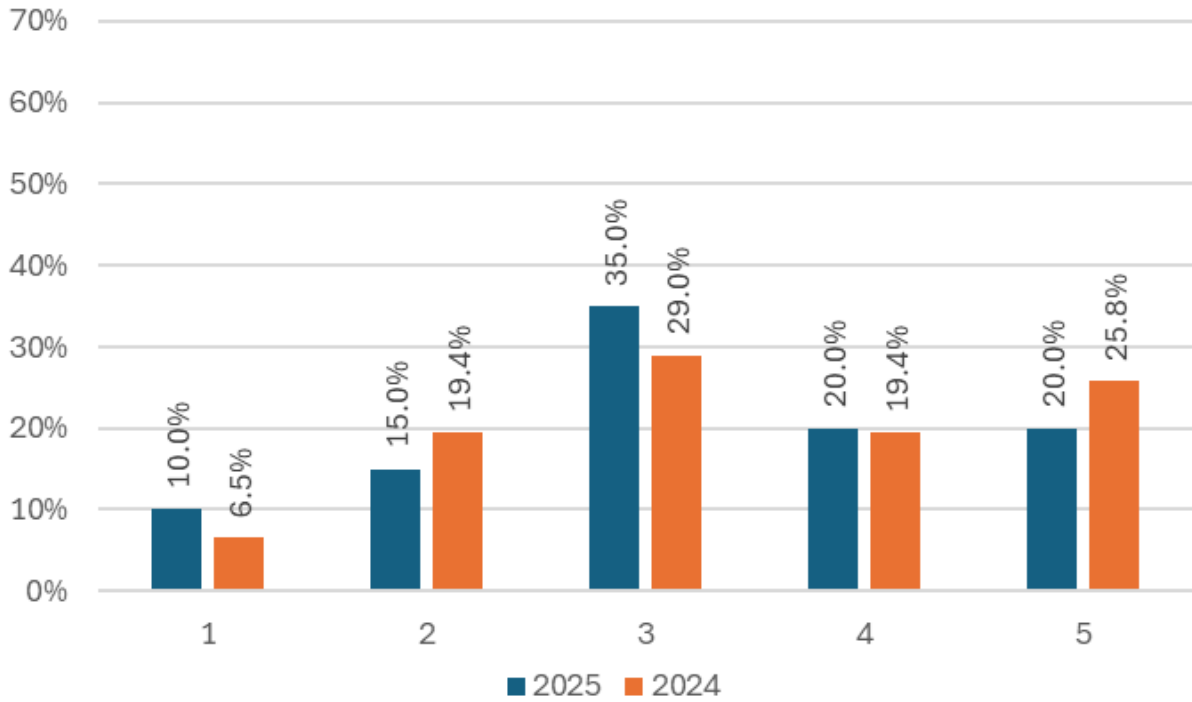
### Overall satisfaction rating of HPP (1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



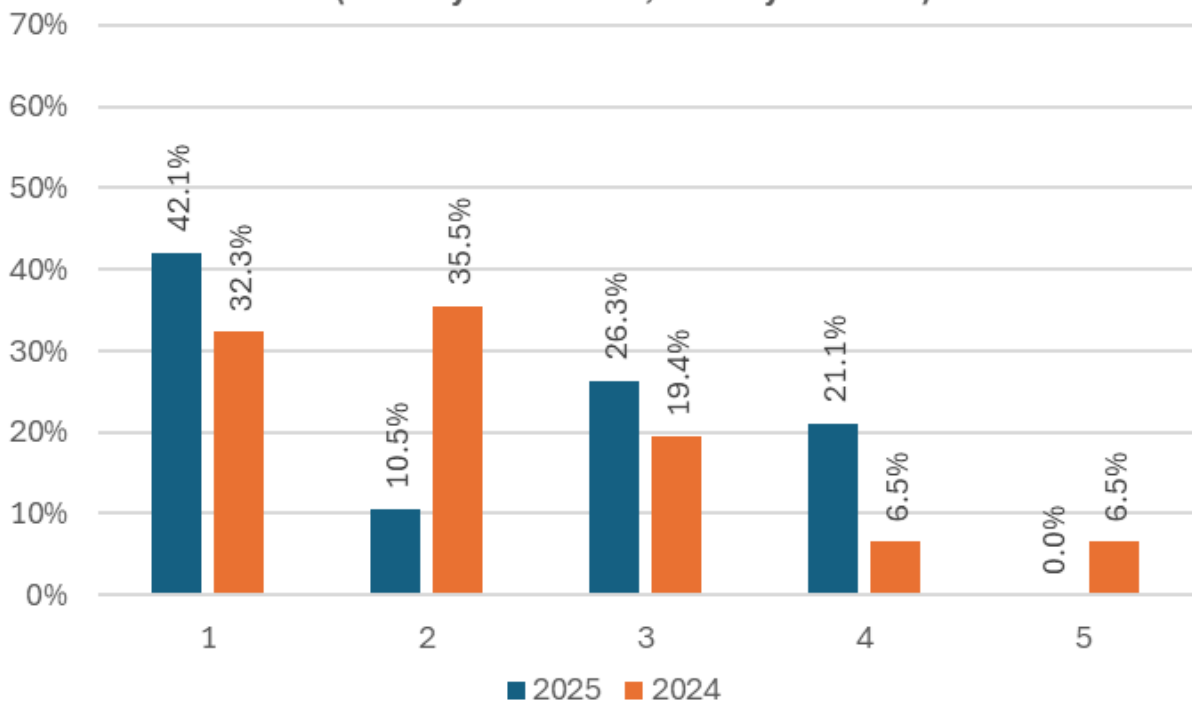
### Satisfaction rating of HPP communications (1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



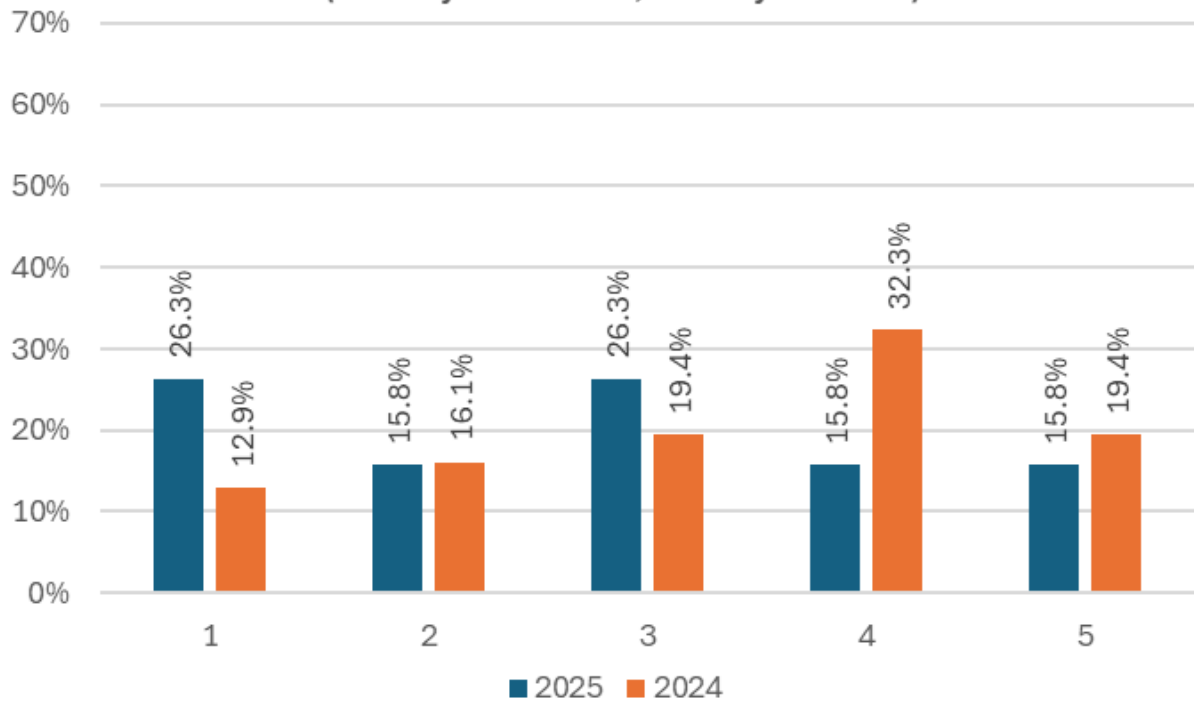
**Satisfaction rating of international events nomination & selection process**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



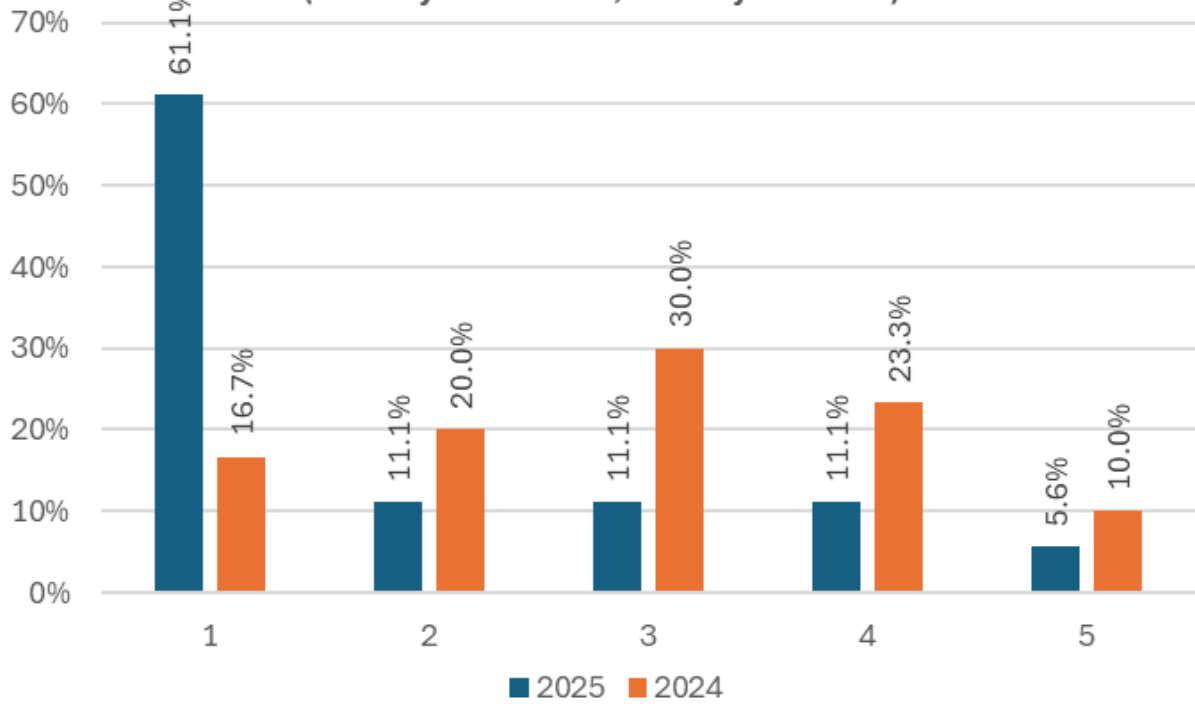
**Satisfaction rating of international training & tours**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



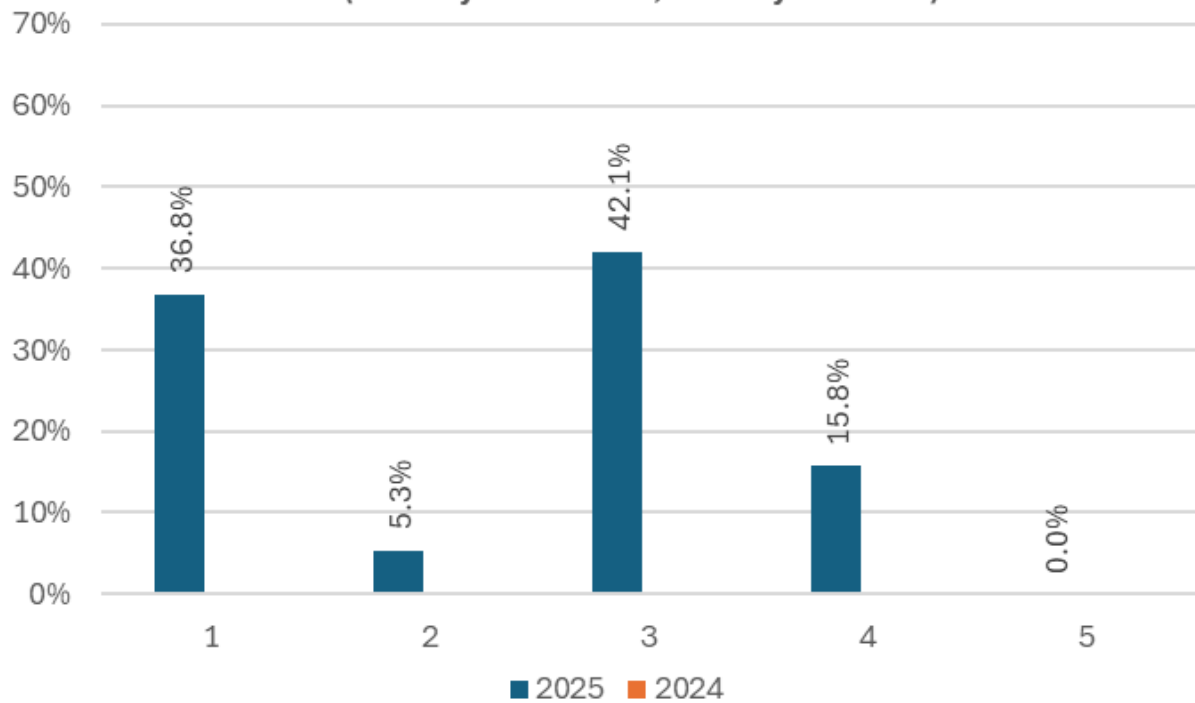
**Satisfaction rating of coaches provided at international events  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)**



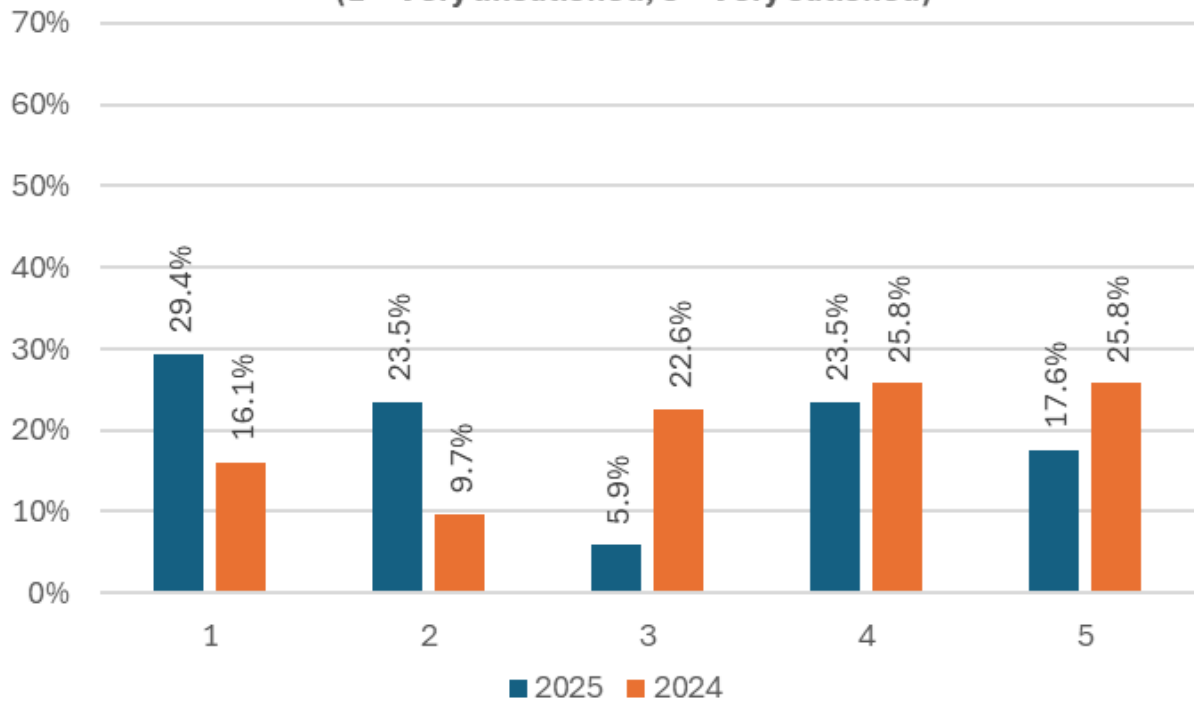
**Satisfaction rating of HPP Mobility Sparring Program**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



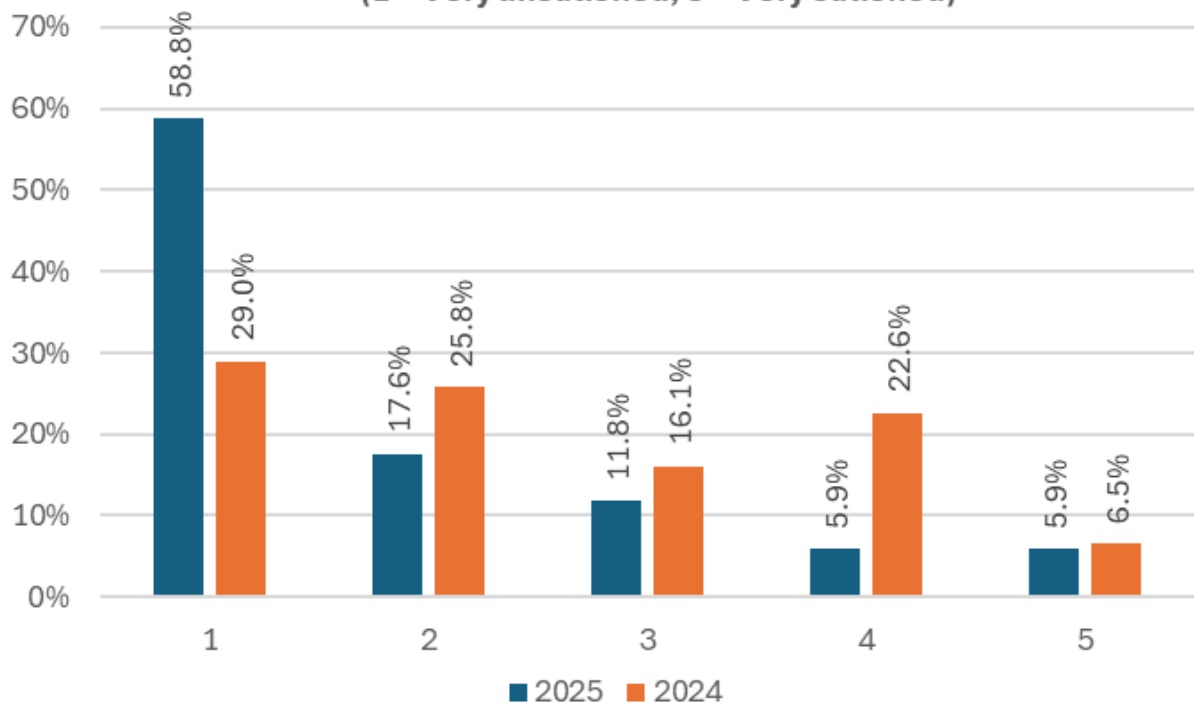
**Satisfaction rating of HPP Camps**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



**Satisfaction rating of HPP Strength & Conditioning**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



**Satisfaction rating of HPP Mindset Coaching**  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)



**Satisfaction rating of HPP Funding for international events/tours  
(1 = Very unsatisfied, 5 = Very satisfied)**

