



VSA Analysis of Clubs' Membership & Participation

What is Going Well

What Is Not

From Complacency to Action

Priorities for the Next 2–3 Years for reflection and action.



VSA Analysis of Clubs' Membership & Participation

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Executive Summary

The Victorian Soaring Association (VSA) currently has **567 members**, comprising 67 females, 494 males and 6 business accounts.

The most significant finding is the **long-term decline in membership**. VSA membership has fallen from 667 in June 2018 to 567 in July 2026 — a reduction of **100 members, or approximately 15%** in eight years.

The decline is not occurring evenly across the region. Some clubs are growing, while several larger and historically significant clubs are experiencing substantial membership losses. In particular, the reduction at the Gliding Club of Victoria, Grampians Soaring Club, and the Soaring Club of Tasmania warrants attention.

At the same time, the AEF figures provide an encouraging indicator of potential recruitment. During the 12 months to 30 June 2026, **550 identifiable male/female AEFs were recorded, of which approximately 156 were female**. This means females represented approximately **28% of the AEF activity**, compared with only **12% of current VSA membership**.

This is potentially one of the most significant opportunities available to clubs and VSA.

The issue is not necessarily attracting people to experience gliding; the challenge is **converting those experiences into ongoing club membership and participation**.

Overall, the data suggests that VSA clubs should move from a broad approach to membership promotion towards a more targeted strategy focused on:

1. Retaining existing members
2. Converting AEF and introductory participants into members
3. Understanding why larger clubs are losing members
4. Increasing female and junior conversion
5. Strengthening smaller and growing clubs
6. Addressing the ageing and shrinking volunteer/instructor/tow-pilot base
7. Establishing measurable membership targets and accountability

(Data supplied by Gliding Australia)

What Is Going Well?

1.1 There is still a substantial membership base

With **567 members**, VSA continues to represent a significant regional gliding community.

The membership base includes:

Membership category	Members
Flying	408
Junior	74
Other	85
Total	567

The flying membership of 408 represents approximately **72% of total membership**, demonstrating that clubs continue to have a strong core of active flying members. The 74 junior members are also encouraging. However, the challenge is ensuring that junior pilots transition successfully into long-term flying membership rather than being lost as they move into adulthood.

1.2 There are some clubs demonstrating positive growth

The club data shows that membership decline is not inevitable.

Several clubs have increased membership between 2024 and 2026:

Club	2024	2026	Change
Alpine Soaring Mount Beauty	8	17	+9
Beaufort	21	24	+3
Bendigo	48	41	-7
Murray Valley	1	4	+3
Outback Soaring	5	6	+1
Sunraysia	16	22	+6
Tocumwal Soaring Centre	27	39	+12

The most encouraging examples are **Tocumwal, Alpine Soaring and Sunraysia**.

These clubs demonstrate that growth is achievable within the current environment and that VSA should examine what these clubs are doing differently.

Rather than assuming the overall decline is simply caused by external factors, VSA clubs should identify and replicate the practices contributing to growth at these clubs.

1.3 Female participation in introductory experiences is encouraging

The AEF data is particularly interesting.

For the 12 months to 30 June 2026:

	Online AEFs	Manual AEFs	Total
Male	350	54	404
Female	138	18	156
Other	6	–	6
Total	494	72	566

Females therefore account for approximately **28% of recorded male/female AEFs**.

This compares favourably with the current VSA membership profile:

- Female members: **67 / 567 = 11.8%**
- Male members: **494 / 567 = 87.1%**

This suggests there is a **significant gap between female interest/participation at the introductory level and female representation in the membership base**.

That gap represents an opportunity.

The message should not simply be "we need more women to try gliding". The figures indicate that women **are already trying gliding**.

The strategic question is:

What happens after the first experience, and why are more female participants not progressing into membership?

This should become a measurable conversion project.

Important qualification

The AEF figures represent **forms sold, not necessarily flights actually flown**. In addition, the gender split for manual AEFs has been pro-rated using the national AEF gender split.

Therefore, the figures should be treated as an **indicator rather than an exact measure of participation**.

Nevertheless, the size of the difference is significant enough to warrant further investigation.

What Is Not Going Well?

2. The overall membership trend is clearly negative

The long-term figures are:

Year	Members
Jun 2018	667
Jun 2019	668
May 2020	610
Apr 2021	645
May 2022	592
Apr 2023	606
May 2024	624
Jul 2025	601
Jul 2026	567

Membership has fallen by:

667 → 567 = -100 members (-15%)

More concerning is the most recent period:

601 → 567 = -34 members in approximately one year (-5.7%)

This indicates that the issue is not simply historical decline.

The rate of decline appears to be continuing.

3. The Decline Is Concentrated in Particular Clubs

The club figures show that the regional result is being heavily influenced by losses at a number of clubs, including some larger clubs.

Major membership changes from 2024 to 2026

Club	2024	2026	Change	% Change
Gliding Club of Victoria	172	134	-38	-22%
Grampians Soaring Club	40	26	-14	-35%
Soaring Club of Tasmania	38	26	-12	-32%
Melbourne Gliding Club	73	64	-9	-12%
South Gippsland	43	35	-8	-19%
Southern Riverina	22	14	-8	-36%
Bendigo	48	41	-7	-15%
Horsham	11	6	-5	-45%

These losses are significant.

In particular, **GCV has lost 38 members over two years**, representing approximately 22% of its 2024 membership. The decline at GCV alone is equivalent to almost **7% of the entire current VSA membership base**.

The losses at Grampians and the Soaring Club of Tasmania are also proportionally substantial.

This suggests that VSA should not treat the membership decline as one single regional problem. It is likely to have **different causes at different clubs**.

4. The Membership Profile Remains Very Narrow

The gender figures show:

- 67 female members — **11.8%**
- 494 male members — **87.1%**
- 6 business accounts — **1.1%**

The sport remains overwhelmingly male.

This matters because a narrow demographic base creates vulnerability.

If the traditional membership population continues to age and fewer younger people enter the sport, there is insufficient replacement capacity.

The AEF figures indicate that VSA and clubs may have an opportunity to change this situation, particularly with female participants, but that opportunity needs to be actively managed and implemented by clubs.

5. Juniors Are Encouraging — But Conversion Is Critical

There are currently **74 junior members**, representing approximately 13% of total membership.

This is a positive foundation.

However, junior membership should not simply be measured by the number of juniors currently on the books.

The more important measures are:

- How many juniors commence?
- How many progress to solo?
- How many become qualified pilots?
- How many remain members after turning 18?
- How many remain members at 21, 25 and 30?
- How many eventually become instructors, tow pilots or other volunteers?

Without a deliberate pathway, VSA and clubs risk investing in juniors only to lose them when education, employment, university or other life changes occur.

6. The Most Important Strategic Issue: **RETENTION!**

The figures suggest that clubs have traditionally placed considerable emphasis on **attracting new people**, but the data indicates that **retention must receive equal or greater attention**.

The loss of 100 members over eight years cannot be solved through recruitment alone. For example, if 100 people are recruited but a similar number leave, the organisation remains at the same level.

VSA and clubs need to understand:

Why are people leaving?

Possible areas for investigation include:

- Cost of membership and flying
- Reduced flying activity
- Lack of time
- Age and retirement
- Loss of social connection
- Club culture
- Volunteer expectations
- Difficulty progressing through training
- Lack of instructors
- Lack of tow pilots
- Equipment availability
- Perceived value of membership
- Relocation
- Family and work commitments
- Frustration with administration
- Lack of opportunities to participate

These should not be assumed to be the causes.

A **structured member-exit survey** should establish the actual reasons.

7. Areas of Priority for Focus

PRIORITY 1 – Stop the membership leakage

Before trying to dramatically increase recruitment, clubs should establish a **Membership Retention Program**.

Each club should know:

- How many members joined
- How many renewed
- How many did not renew
- How many stopped flying
- How many became inactive
- Why members left

A simple annual online "Why did you leave?" survey could provide valuable information.

Target

Clubs should aim to reduce annual membership losses before setting an aggressive growth target.

PRIORITY 2 – Convert AEF Participants into Members

The AEF data may represent the largest immediate recruitment opportunity.

The pathway should be:

AEF → Follow-up → Second experience → Introductory program → Membership → Active participation

Every AEF participant should receive a structured follow-up.

The club should know:

- Who purchased the flight
- Whether it was flown
- Whether they enjoyed it
- Whether they want to fly again
- Whether they were offered a pathway into the club
- Whether they joined
- If they did not join, why not

The female AEF participation, in particular, should be tracked separately to determine whether the current female recruitment initiatives are producing actual membership growth.

PRIORITY 3 – Investigate the Growing Clubs

VSA can conduct a short case study of:

- Alpine Soaring
- Sunraysia
- Tocumwal
- Beaufort
- Murray Valley

The question should be:

What are these clubs doing that enables them to grow or maintain membership while other clubs are declining?

Areas to examine include:

- Recruitment
- Member experience
- Training
- Social activities
- Volunteer culture
- Pricing
- Marketing
- Local community engagement
- Leadership
- Accessibility
- Follow-up of trial flights

The objective is to replicate successful behaviours, not impose a one-size-fits-all solution.

PRIORITY 4 – Immediate attention to declining larger clubs

Particular attention should be given to:

Gliding Club of Victoria	172 → 155 → 134
Grampians Soaring Club	40 → 35 → 26
Soaring Club of Tasmania	38 → 36 → 26
Melbourne Gliding Club	73 → 68 → 64

These clubs represent a substantial proportion of VSA membership.

A continuing decline at the larger clubs will have a disproportionate effect on the regional organisation.

VSA can work with each club to develop a **two-year membership recovery plan**, rather than simply providing generic recruitment material.

PRIORITY 5 – Build the Female Participation Pipeline

The AEF data provides an important opportunity.

Rather than treating women as simply another marketing demographic, VSA and clubs should measure the complete pathway:

Female AEF → repeat experience → introductory course → membership → flying → solo → ongoing membership

The objective should be to determine where the conversion process is breaking down. This should also be supported by female members who can act as ambassadors and demonstrate that gliding is accessible, enjoyable and achievable.

The current figures suggest there is **already interest**. The opportunity is to convert that interest.

PRIORITY 6 – Protect the Junior Pipeline

The 74 juniors represent one of the most valuable long-term assets in the membership figures.

Clubs should establish a clearly understood:

Junior → Solo → Qualified Pilot → Young Adult → Instructor/Volunteer pathway.
The critical point is preventing the drop-off between junior membership and adult membership.

PRIORITY 7 – Address the Volunteer and Skills Pipeline

Membership numbers alone do not guarantee a healthy sport.

Gliding requires people with specialist skills:

- Instructors
- Tow pilots
- Tug pilots
- Launch officers
- Duty pilots
- Club administrators
- Committee members
- Ground crew
- Technical personnel
- Safety personnel

If membership declines while the average age of those performing these roles increases, the problem becomes considerably more serious.

The issue then changes from:

"How many members do we have?"

to:

"Do we have enough people capable and willing to operate the clubs?"

This should become a major VSA and Clubs strategic consideration.

8. What Happens If These Issues Are Not Addressed?

8.1 Continued membership decline

If the current trend continues, VSA could potentially fall below **500 members within several years**.

At that point, clubs will have significantly less capacity to support their current operations.

8.2 Club viability becomes increasingly uneven

Declining membership creates a cycle:

Fewer members → fewer volunteers → fewer activities → poorer member experience → fewer new members → further decline

Smaller clubs are particularly vulnerable because losing even five or ten people can have a major operational impact.

8.3 Instructor and tow-pilot shortages

A declining and ageing membership base will eventually reduce the number of people available to perform essential operational roles.

This could lead to:

- Fewer training days
- Longer training times
- Reduced flying opportunities
- Increased workload on existing instructors
- Volunteer burnout
- Reduced club operating capacity

8.4 Increased financial pressure

Membership losses affect more than membership subscriptions.

Fewer members can mean:

- Less flying revenue
- Fewer aircraft hours
- Lower course participation
- Reduced AEF conversion
- Reduced volunteer capacity
- Less ability to maintain aircraft and facilities
- Greater reliance on a smaller number of active members

This can create a financial and operational spiral.

8.5 Loss of critical club infrastructure

If membership falls below the level required to operate a club effectively, clubs may have to consider:

- Reducing operating days
- Sharing resources
- Selling or reducing aircraft fleets
- Consolidating activities
- Sharing instructors and tow pilots
- Potentially merging or closing operations

This is not an immediate prediction, but it is the logical longer-term risk if declining membership is combined with volunteer and financial pressures.

8.6 Increasing pressure on the remaining volunteers

One of the greatest risks is that fewer members will be required to do more.

The result can become:

Declining membership → fewer volunteers → greater workload → burnout → more people leave → further membership decline.

Breaking this cycle is likely to be more important than simply increasing advertising.

9. Recommended VSA Dashboard

All clubs should consider monitoring a small number of indicators every quarter.

Membership

- Total members
- New members
- Renewals
- Non-renewals
- Members leaving
- Flying members
- Junior members
- Female members

Recruitment

- AEFs sold
- AEFs flown
- AEF repeat bookings
- AEF-to-membership conversion
- Female AEF-to-membership conversion
- Junior conversion

Participation

- Active flying members
- Members who have not flown for 6-12 months
- Training activity
- Solo progression
- Instructor numbers
- Tow-pilot numbers

Club health

- Membership by club
- Two-year membership change
- Volunteer numbers
- Instructor availability
- Club operating days
- Aircraft utilisation

This would allow clubs and the VSA to identify problems **before they become critical**.

10. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

WHAT IS GOING WELL

- ✓ VSA still has a substantial membership base of 567 members.
- ✓ There are 408 flying members and 74 juniors.
- ✓ Several clubs are growing despite the overall regional decline.
- ✓ Tocumwal, Alpine Soaring and Sunraysia demonstrate that growth is achievable.
- ✓ Female participation in AEFs is significantly higher than female representation in the membership base, suggesting considerable untapped potential.
- ✓ There is evidence of an existing pipeline of people interested in experiencing gliding.

WHAT IS NOT GOING WELL

- ☒ Membership has declined by 100 members, approximately 15%, since 2018.
- ☒ The decline has accelerated, with a loss of 34 members in the latest year.
- ☒ Several important clubs have experienced substantial membership losses.
- ☒ Female membership remains only approximately 12%.
- ☒ The sport remains heavily dependent on a predominantly male membership base.
- ☒ The data does not currently tell VSA or clubs sufficiently clearly why members are leaving.
- ☒ There is a risk that recruitment initiatives are not being matched by sufficient conversion and retention.
- ☒ The longer-term instructor, tow-pilot and volunteer pipeline remains a significant strategic risk.

11. The Key Message for the VSA Board and Regional Clubs

The figures should not be viewed simply as a membership problem.
They indicate a broader **sustainability issue**.

The central question for VSA and regional clubs over the next 2–3 years should be:
How do we turn interest in gliding into active, retained and contributing members, while ensuring that existing members continue to find value in belonging to the sport?

The AEF figures suggest that **the market is still interested in gliding**.

The membership figures suggest that **we are not yet converting and retaining enough of that interest**.

That distinction is important.

Gliding clubs do not necessarily have an "awareness" problem alone. It may have a **conversion, retention and a member-experience problem**.

The priority should therefore be:

ATTRACT → CONVERT → ENGAGE → RETAIN → DEVELOP

rather than simply:

ATTRACT → RECRUIT

If VSA and clubs can improve each stage of that pathway, particularly retention and conversion, even modest improvements could materially change the membership trajectory over the next three years.

12. Suggested Strategic Priority

For the next 12 months, regional gliding clubs should establish five measurable strategic goals and report to VSA on the outcomes:

1. Stop the annual membership decline.
2. Increase conversion of AEF participants into club members.
3. Increase female membership through conversion rather than recruitment alone.
4. Protect and grow the junior-to-adult pathway.
5. Identify and address the reasons for membership losses at individual clubs.

The objective should not simply be to achieve a larger membership number.

It should be to create a **larger, younger, more diverse, more active and more sustainable membership base capable of supporting the clubs and the sport for the next decade.**

VSA MEMBERSHIP DASHBOARD

VSA Committee Snapshot — July 2026 (Data supplied by Gliding Australia)

1. MEMBERSHIP TREND — THE KEY MESSAGE

567 total members

67 female | 494 male | 6 businesses

9-Year Position

 **Membership has declined significantly over the past nine years.**

The current membership base is also heavily weighted towards existing, predominantly male participants. This means the priority is no longer simply *recruiting more members* — it is **rebuilding the membership pipeline and retaining people once they join.**

VSA message:

Without a sustained focus on recruitment, conversion and retention, the membership decline will continue, and the average age of the membership will continue to rise.

2. CLUB PERFORMANCE — WHO IS GROWING?

Club position	What it tells us	Board focus
 Clubs gaining members	Strategies are working somewhere in the region	Identify and replicate what works
 Clubs broadly stable	Existing membership is being maintained	Prevent future decline
 Clubs losing members	Recruitment and/or retention problem	Targeted support and intervention

Key question for the VSA and Clubs

What are the growing clubs doing differently?

Rather than applying a single regional solution, successful club practices and provision of practical support for clubs experiencing decline should be identified.

3. GENDER PROFILE — A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY

67 Female Members

494 Male Members

Female participation is approximately 12% of individual membership.

This represents both a **significant imbalance** and a substantial opportunity for growth.

The objective should not be to create a separate form of gliding for women, but to make the sport more **welcoming, visible and accessible** to women who may never have considered gliding.

Opportunity

YesGirlsGlide + Come & Try + targeted promotion + visible female role models + supportive entry pathways

If women represented even 20% of membership, VSA would have approximately 45 additional female members at the current overall membership level.

4. AEF — THE UNDER-USED OPPORTUNITY

Victorian Government / AEF-style funding & participation opportunities

VSA has access to funding mechanisms and initiatives capable of supporting:

- Recruitment and Come & Try activities
- Junior and youth participation
- Women and girls
- New-member conversion
- Club advertising and promotion
- Training and development
- Community engagement

The issue is not simply availability of funding.

The opportunity is converting available funding into measurable membership growth.

VSA focus:

Make funding easier for clubs to understand, apply for and use — with clear outcomes and simple reporting.

5. FIVE PRIORITY ACTIONS — 2026/27

① STOP THE MEMBERSHIP LEAK

Retention first.

Identify why members leave, particularly newer members, and introduce a simple 6-12 month retention process.

② TARGET NEW PARTICIPANTS

Focus marketing on **women, youth, aviation-adjacent groups and experience seekers** rather than trying to market gliding to everyone.

③ REPLICATE CLUB SUCCESS

Identify clubs that are gaining or retaining members and document **what they are doing that works**.

④ TURN FUNDING INTO MEMBERS

Simplify VSA funding initiatives and actively help clubs use available funding for **advertising, Come & Try events and new-member conversion**.

⑤ BUILD A 3-YEAR MEMBERSHIP PIPELINE

Set measurable annual targets for:

Enquiries → Come & Try → Trial Flight → Membership → Retention

Track the numbers at regional and club level.

SITUATION AT-A-GLANCE

Indicator	Current position	Assessment
Total membership	567	● Declining trend
Female members	67 / ~12%	● Major growth opportunity
Male members	494 / ~88%	● Significant imbalance
Business members	6	● Small but useful
Club performance	Mixed	● Learn from successful clubs
Funding opportunities	Available	● Greater uptake required
Retention	Requires attention	● Priority
Recruitment pipeline	Requires development	● Priority

THE CORE MESSAGE

From Complacency to Action

The message from the membership data is clear: **we cannot continue to rely on the existing membership base to sustain the sport.**

For too long, we have been able to operate with the assumption that there will always be enough members, volunteers and participants to keep our clubs going. The data is telling us that this is no longer a safe assumption.

Declining membership, an ageing demographic and a narrow membership profile are not simply statistics — they are warnings about the future sustainability of our sport.

The next three years must therefore be a period of **deliberate action, not business as usual.**

We have the opportunity. Women, young people, families, local communities, aviation enthusiasts and new participants represent significant potential for growth. Funding programs are available. Marketing opportunities exist. Clubs have passionate people, facilities and aircraft that can provide an extraordinary experience to new participants.

But opportunity alone will not change the membership trend.

The critical question is whether we are prepared to turn good ideas and available resources into **consistent action at club level.**

Every club needs to ask itself:

- **What are we doing to attract new people?**
- **What are we doing to make them feel welcome and want to stay?**
- **Who is responsible for converting interest into membership?**
- **How are we measuring whether our efforts are actually working?**

And perhaps most importantly —

- **What are we prepared to change?**

We cannot afford to wait for membership numbers to fall further before responding. We cannot assume that someone else — VSA, Gliding Australia, another club or a future committee — will solve the problem.

Every club has a role. Every committee has a responsibility. Every member can contribute.

Stop assuming. Start acting.

Over the next three years, VSA and its clubs need to set clear membership growth and retention targets, actively pursue new audiences, make better use of available funding, and hold ourselves accountable for delivering results.

Success should not be measured by how many initiatives we announce. It should be measured by how many new people we attract, how many become members, how many stay, and whether our membership profile becomes stronger and more diverse.

The choice is ours.

We can continue doing what we have always done and hope the decline slows — **or we can deliberately change the trajectory.**

The opportunity is there.

The resources are there.

The people are there.

What is required now is **urgency, leadership and action.**

The future of Victorian and Tasmanian gliding will not be determined by what we intend to do. It will be determined by what we actually do — starting now.