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# Croquet New Zealand 2018 Player Survey Summary



**Croquet New Zealand**

2018 PLAYER SURVEY SUMMARY

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## Overview

In 2015 Croquet New Zealand began the process of developing their 2016-2020 Strategic Plan. Through this process, Croquet New Zealand set targets under four pillars; Increase Participation Nationwide, Excel in Croquet, Develop Best Governance Practices and Ensure Financial Sustainability. Refer [www.croquet.org.nz](http://www.croquet.org.nz) for the Croquet New Zealand Strategic Plan.

While Croquet New Zealand's operations have been influenced by the strategic outcomes listed in the Strategic Plan, there have been few mechanisms for measuring and reporting on progress.

During the 2017/18 season however, Croquet New Zealand has begun to implement strategies to collect qualitative and quantitative data to assess progress against the targeted strategic outcomes. Along with collecting this new level of information through mechanisms like; the levy returns, the deployment of feedback channels has provided Croquet New Zealand greater insights into the current internal related risks and opportunities.

Two factors that have been identified through this feedback channel are:

- The decline in Association Croquet participation nationally (comparative with worldwide trends)
- The need to increase participation in tournaments.

To better understand the membership's relationship with these two factors and, the potential impact to the relevant Strategic Plan goals, Croquet New Zealand authored a brief questionnaire to gather initial insight. To encourage as many player responses as possible, the questionnaire was kept to eight questions, having an average completion time of three minutes. In addition, participation was anonymous to encourage full and frank responses to the open-ended questions.

The questionnaire, (See Appendix A), was sent to Association Secretaries for distribution to all members. It was also posted on the Croquet New Zealand website. Reminders were posted on the website, Facebook and sent to Secretaries to encourage the best possible response. The questionnaire was available for 5 weeks, from 23 April 2018 to 31 May 2018 and received 1,492 responses or 33% of total membership.

This report presents the questionnaire's findings, what Croquet New Zealand is currently doing to combat some of the potential negative impacts and provide some recommendations on how Croquet New Zealand might improve participation in Association Croquet and tournaments.

## Summary of Findings

Croquet remains widely perceived as being a sport for the older generation, and little is known of the CNZ youth development players and the consistent high-performance success of our top players on the global stage. Croquet is one of very few sports that offers men and women, young and old the opportunity to compete against one another on a level playing field, where skill and touch are demanded over strength and power. It can be played at the recreational level that supports the tenants of the green prescription, and at the highly competitive national and international levels. Croquet has two primary codes, as well as other evolving minor formats, so is versatile and offers plenty of choice.

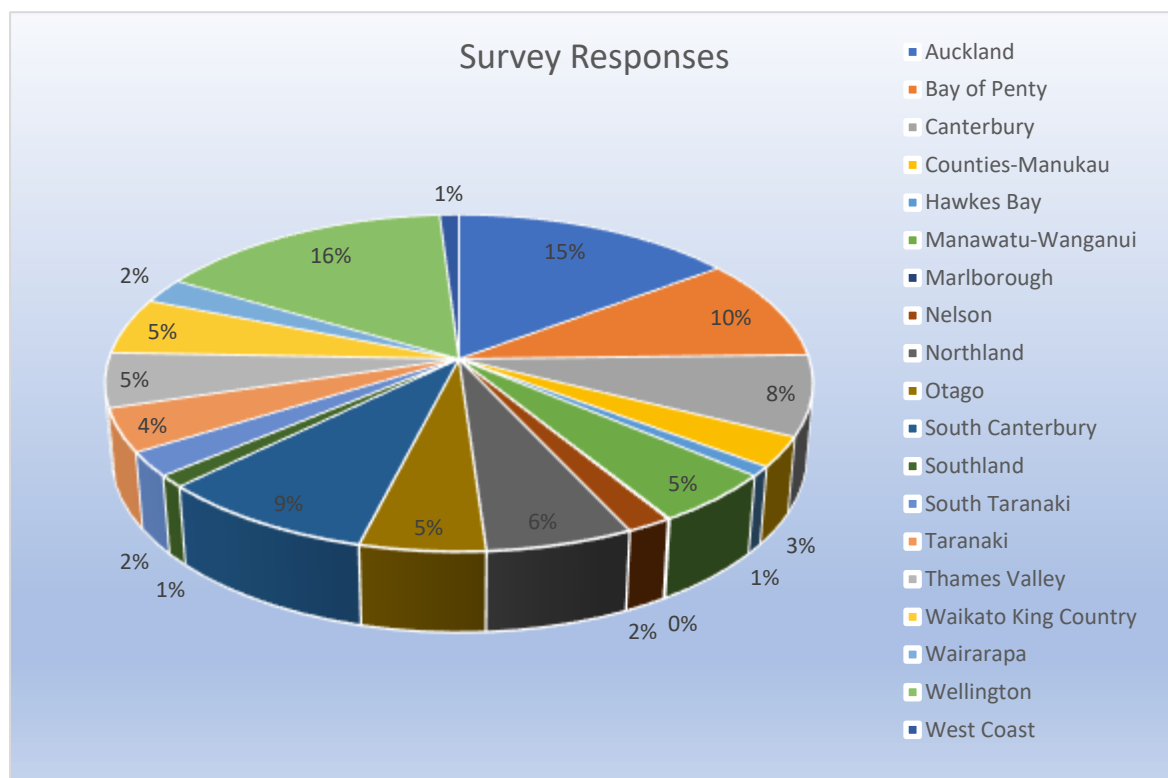
When Croquet New Zealand authored this questionnaire in April 2018, there were four key components that the questionnaire sought information about;

- Generic Information (Association, gender and age band);
- Which codes and formats are played within New Zealand;
- Why people do not play Association Croquet and what might encourage increased participation and;
- What tournaments (Club, Association and CNZ national fixtures) are well attended.

This questionnaire supports the hypothesis that our playing population is predominantly comprised of an older demographic and that it is this sector that is most active in volunteering time to respond to the questionnaire. This is reflective of this demographic banding also being most active in the day to day club/association level sports administration and tournament play. It also supports the anecdotal evidence that Golf Croquet has a much larger participation base than Association Croquet. This is illustrated through only having 32% of the questionnaire respondents having participated in Association Croquet within the last two years, compared to 92% of the respondents having played Golf Croquet over that same period.

## Generic Information

Receiving 1,492 responses to this questionnaire was a solid return rate and represents 33% of Croquet New Zealand’s membership (4567) as at May 2018. The Association representation in the survey can be seen in the graph below. The full breakdown of the responses, the percentage of the survey each Association represents and the percentage of each Association which completed the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.



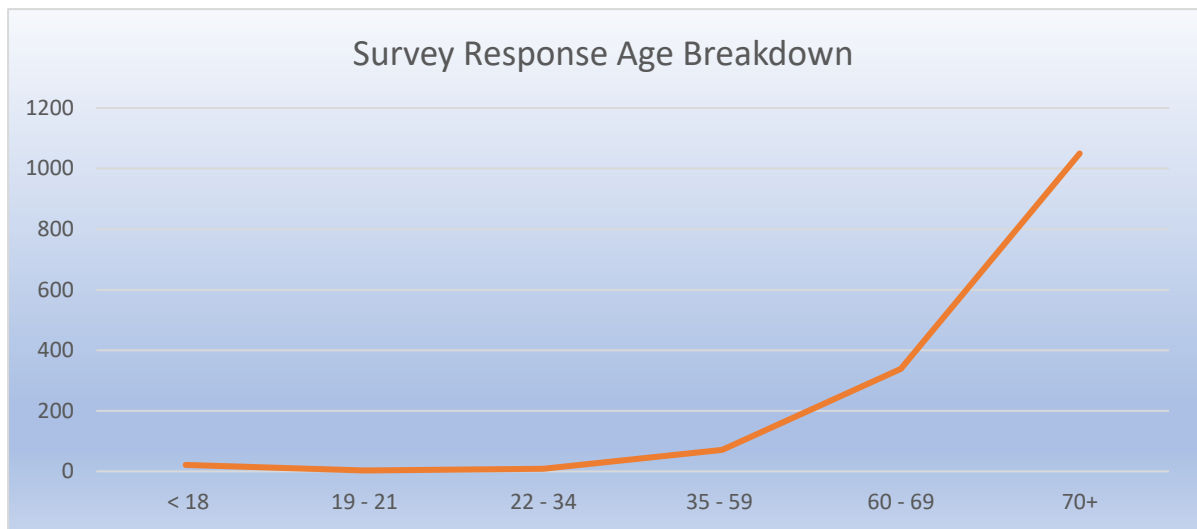
**FIGURE 1: SURVEY RESPONSE PER ASSOICATION**

Another surprising aspect of the received responses, was that 68% of the survey respondents were female to 31% male. Until the Croquet New Zealand database completes its programmed updates, gender diversity in the sport cannot be emphatically reported, therefore it is unclear whether this is a direct reflection of the Croquet New Zealand membership, or whether it is simply a case of getting a better response rate from the female members.

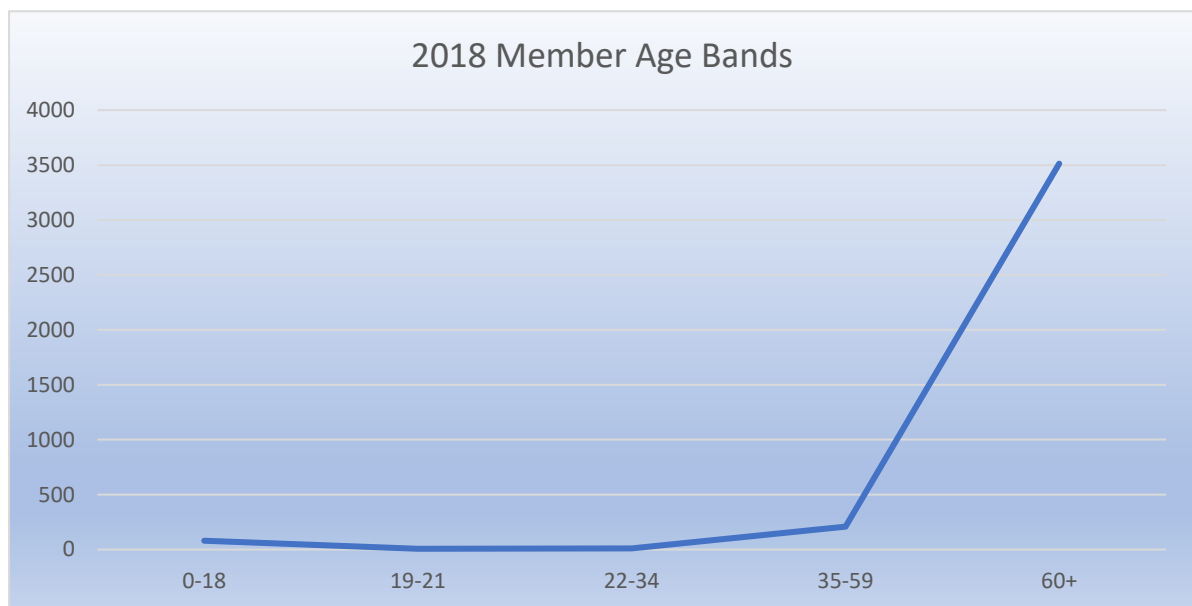
The eye opening, but not necessarily surprising result, came from of the age distribution data.

Croquet has long dealt with the perception of being an “old” persons sport, much like other sports such as bowls. These results reinforce this perception with 93% of the responses coming from those in the 60+ brackets.

It could be expected that the younger generation are likely to have a lower rate in returning survey’s, however figure 2 below shows a significant difference and it is likely to be a relatively fair representation of Croquet New Zealand’s membership, when compared with figure 3, 2018 membership demographic as informed by the levy returns.



**FIGURE 2: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC BANDS**



**FIGURE 3: 2018 MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHIC BANDS  
(Source: May Levy Return)**

It is vital for Croquet New Zealand to break the current perception of Croquet being a retirement sport to ensure its ongoing viability. Developing a comprehensive plan for promoting croquet as a sport of choice for all ages, genders and physical abilities is critical. This work currently starts with the continuous support and development of the New Zealand Secondary School GC Championship but needs support for the successful conversion of those players into club members. In discussions with our Executive youth voice and SDO, this development could be started at the earlier Year 7&8 (intermediate) age group, so that success in croquet is experienced before the secondary school and tertiary challenges are faced by our youth sector. Early adoption and strategies for youth player support and retention is critical to CNZ future sustainability.

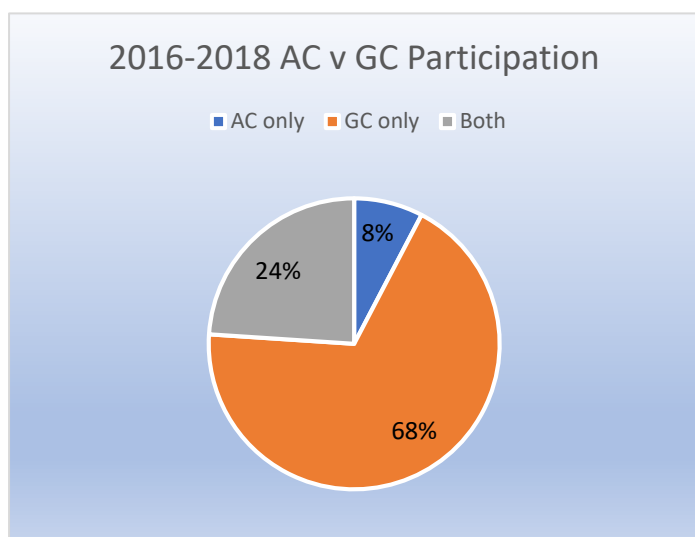
# Croquet Code Participation

The common perception around the world is that participation in Association Croquet is on the decline. While many people have discussed this decline, few have attempted to understand the factors underpinning the decline, how it might be reversed or indeed whether resources should be put into a recovery strategy?

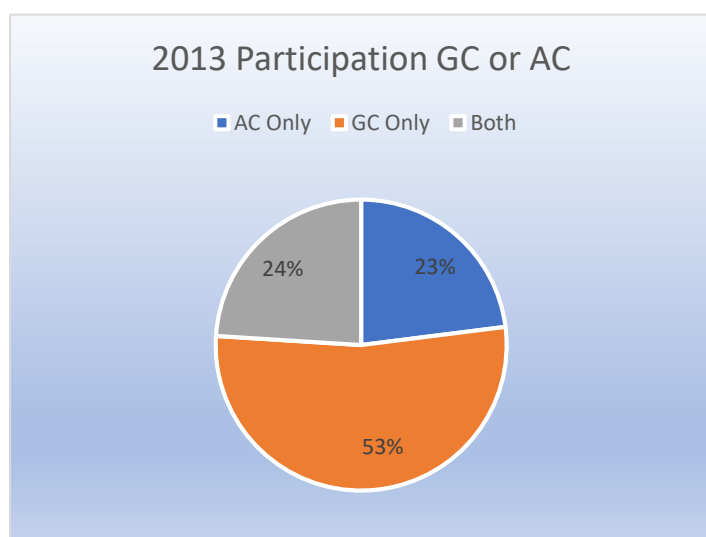
The survey question was set up to establish which different codes the Croquet New Zealand membership has played over the past two years and sought data on the split between the two primary codes of Association Croquet and Golf Croquet.

The graph below depicts which of the two main codes the Croquet New Zealand membership has played over the past two seasons.

Of the 1,492 responses received, 1,486 people had played either Association Croquet or Golf Croquet over the past two years. The other six responses were from members still involved with their clubs but who have not played any croquet over the past two seasons for a variety of reasons. For evaluating this section of the survey, these six responses were removed.



**FIGURE 4: PRIMARY TWO CODES PARTICIPATION LEVELS OF NZ PLAYERS**



**FIGURE 5: COMPARISON TO 2013 PRIMARY TWO CODES PARTICIPATION LEVELS OF NZ PLAYERS**

Of the remaining responses, 68% played Golf Croquet, 8% played Association Croquet only, and the remaining 24% had played both codes over the past two years. Figure 5 above illustrates the comparative figures collected in the 2013 Club Questionnaire. These results confirm the hypotheses that Association Croquet participation is struggling compared to the shorter version of the game and that Association Croquet appears to have had a 15% reduction over the last five-year period.

The increased participation in Golf Croquet can be attributed to several factors, including;

- the social aspects of doubles play on club days,
- the instant gratification of continuously being involved through the alternating shots,
- the perceived simplicity of Golf Croquet compared to Association Croquet,
- that Golf Croquet is a quicker version of croquet making it more accessible in people's busy lifestyles, and
- the fact that Golf Croquet is used to introduce people to the sport and is therefore usually taught first.

It is important to note, that even though Association Croquet and Golf Croquet are the two main variation codes of croquet played in New Zealand, and the codes to which Croquet New Zealand and the World Croquet Federation currently hold tournaments/championships for, there are many other formats played throughout the country.

This survey established that the following formats are played to varying degrees (not listed in order):

- Gateball
- Ricochet
- One ball
- Sevens
- Six Ball
- Eight Ball
- American Croquet
- Scarborough

These games can be used in conjunction with both Golf Croquet and Association Croquet to further develop individual skills.

While we are currently unable to unequivocally determine which way the Association Croquet participation is trending due to lack of historic comparative evidence, if Association Croquet is to continue, and be strengthened, then the survey results indicate that Croquet New Zealand needs to develop a recovery strategy that may require additional resources, to affect an increase in participation in this sector of the business.

It should be emphasised that Golf Croquet is an essential part of Croquet in New Zealand and currently a main contributor to the financial sustainability of CNZ. Golf Croquet should not be neglected in any attempt to increase the participation in Association Croquet.

As seen in the next two sections, time availability is a key predictor for the uptake of Golf Croquet and a resister toward the uptake of Association Croquet, especially in the '19 to 59' demographic brackets and this key influencing condition must be considered when allocating resources within strategic goals and tactical targets.



# What would encourage people to try / participate in Association Croquet?

Answered: 1,247 Skipped: 245

This question was the first of which the respondents could skip the question. The intention was that if there was nothing that would encourage someone to try or participate more in Association Croquet they would skip this question. It was made clear by many of the other responses this option to skip was not obvious. For future survey's, another option for "nothing" or "N/A" will be included.

Post collation, some answers were removed from the total as they had simply stated they already play under the other category. This left a total of 1,134 different responses over the four options.

The graph below shows the distribution of the responses. There isn't a clear element that would increase participation in Association Croquet, but rather the data suggests a combination of different techniques tailored to the variety of ways individuals learn and engage with sport.



**FIGURE 6: ELEMENTS THAT ENCOURAGE ASSOCIATION CROQUET PARTICIPATION**

Of the three prescribed answers, we see the distribution of answers to what may encourage more participation in Association Croquet as being reasonably evenly weighted. Having more people playing Association Croquet at a club is an important aspect to encouraging more people to participate.

Clubs with stronger Association Croquet participation will inevitably find it easier to encourage people to give it a go with more people able to mentor new-players, and an increased probability that there will be players of similar abilities providing people to play against. By providing coaching and resources for people to watch top players and how they manoeuvre around the lawn, with commentary explaining why they are playing certain shots should increase players understanding of the game and give them more confidence to have a go at Association Croquet.

In a world where people are living busier lives, taking on more responsibilities and prefer to consume sport on a pay-to-play basis when it suits them, it comes as no surprise that a significant portion of

the 'other' response category alluded to the fact that people would be willing to give Association Croquet a try if they had more time. Some responses also indicated that, "they will try it once they retire". A limiting condition to Association Croquet participation was the availability for the working age band to try Association Croquet during the week due to work commitments and on the weekend due to their club not offering weekend Association Croquet club days and/or conflicting commitments with their kid's sports.

It is imperative for clubs to ensure that all variations of croquet are made available to all members at a time that members can participate. Understanding, local market predictors, how to offset time and availability conflicts, and membership needs is essential to building member-diversity success. By making all codes of croquet accessible to all members, it provides the clubs with a better opportunity to grow participation in both Association Croquet and Golf Croquet and in turn, hopefully their overall membership.

The other significant response was the fact that people saw Association Croquet as a progression from Golf Croquet and cited improving their current skills would encourage them to try Association Croquet. It is important for Croquet New Zealand to support the development of club coaches and provide them with the resources and support to run club coaching so that there is less reliance on the club coaching provided by the Sport Development Officer. Having more able coaches around the country will provide Croquet New Zealand members with more opportunities to improve their basic skills including roqueting, hoop running control and weighting shots, which will inevitably provide them with more confidence to try Association Croquet or enter more tournaments.

A summary of other responses that were mentioned multiple times includes:

- Better health
- Being younger
- More time available / weekend play
- Shorter version of the game offered
- Better individual skills
- Social session to learn

Having more people around the same skill level, having more lawn space available, and using the handicap cards were also mentioned, but were not recurring response themes.

A worrying response to this question was one respondent being told they were "too old" to try Association Croquet. This goes against our uniqueness outlined in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, 'Gender and Age inclusive'. Croquet is a sport where people of any age and any gender can compete on the same lawn against each other with individual skill being the difference rather than physical qualities. We must continue to promote this unique aspect to encourage people to try croquet. Additionally, when a sport code is struggling for numbers, why are players being turned away? Word of mouth is one of the most powerful marketing tools, both in a positive and a negative context.

The notion that someone is too old, provides that person with a negative experience and this will be shared with their family and friends, who in turn inform their friends and so on. Whereas, if people are given the opportunity to try Association Croquet and enjoy the experience, the same cycle of telling family and friends about their positive experience contributes positively to the reputation of Croquet as a sport of choice and might also support the club with new member potential. Although not highlighted in this survey, anecdotal feedback has been highlighted around a similar negative behaviours toward younger players, i.e. that they damage the lawns more than older players, and the like.

Understanding and developing strategies that support effective management at all level of the organisation of negative attitudes that sit below these types of behavioural situations, is essential to 'walking the inclusiveness and diversity talk'.

# What discourages people from trying Association Croquet?

Answered: 1,104 Skipped: 388

While it is important to look at what new initiatives Croquet New Zealand could pursue to encourage participation in Association Croquet, it is equally important to review what may be deterring people from participating.

Like the previous questions, the “other” responses were reviewed and any responses that stated they were already playing or similar were removed. This left 71 ‘other’ responses and a total of 1,278 different answers.



**FIGURE 7: ELEMENTS THAT DISCOURAGE ASSOCIATION CROQUET PARTICIPATION**

The primary reason (56%) for not trying Association Croquet is that the respondents play Golf Croquet and are happy just playing Golf Croquet. This is hardly surprising given earlier discussion in section 3.

However, 6% of the answers indicating they have never been offered to be taught Association Croquet. Croquet New Zealand needs to further investigate this condition to understand why this is. Are clubs becoming solely focussed on GC for instance? Or do clubs not have people who feel comfortable teaching new players? Or, with all the tournaments and club days, is there simply not enough lawn space or person hours available for coaching? Croquet New Zealand will explore these questions further and look to support clubs who wish to run coaching sessions.

As with the previous question, time is again a major contributing factor to why people do not participate in Association Croquet. To encourage more people to try or participate in Association Croquet, it may be beneficial to understand how many people may give it a go if shorter games were available, such as a tournament with 14-point games.

With the new initiatives that will be drawn from this report, Croquet New Zealand would hope to see a decline in people being discouraged by not having enough players. Developing more players will encourage others to give it a go once they realise that there are enough people to play against and that there is significant self-gratification in achieving and then mastering the challenges of the game. Again, starting youth players earlier on in their player development pathway may increase Association Croquet participation and have it sustained through their entire croquet career.

A common perception was that Association Croquet is boring and has too much sitting round, and presented as the most common answer under “other” category, making up 23% of the 72 responses. This is a perception that will be difficult to break, but with more coaching, demonstration games and general knowledge of the game being shared, this should reduce. As different games appeal to different people, it would be unreasonable to expect everyone to enjoy Association Croquet.

The following list highlight some of the additional answers in the “other” category:

- Not played at their club
- Attitude / Negative perception
- Not Social enough
- Health
- Age
- New to Croquet
- Desire to better GC first
- Lack of understanding

Again, while some of these are out of Croquet New Zealand, Association and Clubs control – i.e. health, the desire to improve Golf Croquet before moving onto Association Croquet and the perception from some that it is not social enough are influencing conditions that can be addressed. What is concerning, is that the pervasive attitude of some individuals that works to deter people from trying the code. As mentioned in the previous section, Croquet is a small community that needs to encourage and support each other in all forms. Negative attitudes between Association Croquet players and Golf Croquet players creates an ‘us versus them’ scenario which distracts from achieving working together to grow the sport. This can also be distracting and discouraging for younger members to observe. Having a strong code of ethics for behaviour on and off the lawns will support the development of positive, healthy culture at all levels of the organisation.

# Tournament Participation

Tournament participation plays a significant role in the development of any sport, and croquet is no different. Tournaments provide benefits to everyone involved, whether at the club, the administrative official, or the individual competitor levels.

But moreover, the tournament pathway provides an essential part of a player's development. By entering Club, Association and Croquet New Zealand tournaments, players can develop their skills and tactics in a competitive format. They can also develop their networks, refining all round knowledge through observation and shared learning on the finer points of how other players approach the game.

It is Croquet New Zealand's desire to provide tournament play for members of all skills and abilities. From those who have only just started playing, through to the top players looking to hone their skills before the next big international event. It was therefore concerning to receive the comment, "as a new player I am not skilled enough to have a handicap yet".

Clubs must be encouraged to give all new members a handicap, so that they can begin participating in tournaments to help their game develop.

A significant portion of the responses to the question, what would encourage you to participate in more competitions, centred around poor health limiting the ability to participate, getting too old to compete, and a lack of time availability for competition play. All three aspects fall outside of Croquet New Zealand, Association's or Club's sphere of influence or change control.

However, the other significant categories of responses related to;

- the cost of tournaments,
- the travel involved,
- tournament timing, and
- a desire to have more coaching/skills and confidence improvement before entering competitions.

Croquet New Zealand currently rotate its tournaments through three Northern, Central and Southern Regions, to try and give all members an equal opportunity to attend National events.

However, it should be noted that some of these tournaments are limited to Clubs within their region that have enough lawns available for hosting events, for example; the NZ Open. By rotating the tournaments, it is expected that the cost and required travel to attend are distributed evenly over the three-year rotation.

Timing for tournaments was another influencing factor for reducing the number of tournament entries and the per player frequency. Prime reasons included; school, university and work commitments. Players are unable to play competitions during the week and rely on weekend competitions or competition that fall during holidays to form part of their annual playing calendar selections. Equally, there were also players that had other commitments on the weekend, so relied on playing competitions during the week. While Croquet New Zealand has a mixture of tournaments spanning various lengths, tournament calendar preparation at local, regional and national levels, need to better understand the specifics of their membership needs.

Undoubtedly, at the introduction phase and Club level play, by including more local competition tailored to the local player needs will encourage more participation. But equally, understanding the needs of player's build up toward an international play season will also support our top and emerging player contingent.

Using the AHS card is important to ensure that a player's handicap accurately reflects their playing ability and can provide extrinsic motivation for some player's improvement. AHS card management is an important part of learning the game.

Other aspects that would encourage participation included, shorter games, less games in a day, more handicap tournaments, playable lawns, more entries and the availability of more competitions.

It is important to note that Croquet New Zealand does not believe that competition play is for everyone or should displace regular club days. Croquet New Zealand simply recognises that there are currently barriers restricting some participation in competitions and are looking at ways to remove these barriers, as a part of its pursuit of the CNZ aspiration; More people, playing better croquet, more often.

## Croquet New Zealand Activities

The Executive of Croquet New Zealand is currently reviewing its organisational performance, to ensure that they are effectively and efficiently meeting the requirements of the membership and achieving the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan goals.

The first, and most critical change Croquet New Zealand has implemented has been the appointment of a full time Sport Development Officer. The Sport Development Officer plays a vital role in creating and implementing the framework for player development, as well as the upskilling of administrative officials (umpires, coaches, tournament managers and Club management committees).

To date, the Sport Development Officer has;

- developed the highly successful youth development programme underpinned with a transition performance pathway;
- spent considerable time on upskilling coaches, and providing club coaching to create a higher calibre of coaching network.

This should have the flow on effect of more coaching sessions being available to members at a local level, improving their skills and providing them with the confidence to try Association Croquet, enter more competitions or just enjoy their croquet more.

Upskilling players and all administrative officials, but particularly coaches in the first instance, is imperative to providing better player confidence and experience.

The more coaches, who have been properly trained and are confident in their own style of coaching, will allow newer players to access a coaching style that best suits them and be enabled to develop skills more rapidly. The coaching provided by the Sport Development Officer ranges from introduction to the basics of coaching, to covering the more advanced aspects of Association (and other codes of) Croquet.



## Recommendations

1. Encourage clubs to simply invite players to have a go – some clubs already running ‘have a go days’ are experiencing excellent uptake results;
2. Encourage clubs to include and promote both forms of croquet (AC and GC), and develop a healthy, positive interaction between the players of the two codes;
3. Encourage all clubs to provide new players with a starting handicap asap, so that they can enter Club, regional and national tournaments as interest and time permits;
4. Develop ‘benefits of Association Croquet’ promotional material to highlight the skills a player develops, and the personal sense of accomplishment this brings. This might include endorsement comments from a range of existing players;
5. Record high-performance Association Croquet matches, edited with expert commentary, and make available via CNZ webpage and Facebook sites for new and developing players self-development;
6. Develop material for a ‘player steps’ pathway, that illustrates how the two codes can support overall player development, and how/where tournaments fit into the pathway;
7. Set specific targets around improving the quality and quantity Association Croquet Coaches / coaching sessions, and support with adequate resources to provide high-calibre, sought after club coaching networks;
8. Consider introducing youth players to Association Croquet earlier on in their croquet career pathway;
9. Introduce an U21 Association Croquet Tournament (like the current U21 GC Tournament) to encourage youth participation in this code of the sport;

## Appendix A – The Questionnaire

1) Which Association do you belong to?

2) Gender

Male

Female

Other

3) Age

18yrs >

35-59

19-21

60-69

22-34

70+

4) What forms of Croquet have you played in the past 2 years?

Association Croquet

Golf Croquet

Other (please specify)

5) What would encourage you to try / participate in Association Croquet?

A demonstration game with expert commentary

Availability of Coaching at your club

A presence of more people playing Association Croquet at your club?

Other (please specify)

6) If you don't currently play Association Croquet, what discourages you from trying it? (if you play AC move to Q7)

- Not enough time for it
- Takes too long to learn
- It is too difficult to learn
- Not enough other AC Players at my club
- I am happy playing GC and AC doesn't interest me
- I was taught GC when I joined and no-one have ever offered to teach me AC
- Other (Please specify)

7) What competitions have you played in over the past 2 years?

- Club - Association Croquet
- Regional (Association organised tournament) - Association Croquet
- National (CNZ Tournaments) - Association Croquet
- Club - Golf Croquet
- Regional (Association organised tournament) - Golf Croquet
- National (CNZ Tournaments) - Golf Croquet
- I don't play in any tournaments
- Other (please specify)

8) What would encourage you to participate in more competitions?

## Appendix B – Data Tables

**2018 CNZ Player Survey Response Summary**

Association	Survey Responses	Membership at May 18	% Total Survey Responses	% of own membership responded
Auckland	221	493	14.8%	44.8%
Bay of Plenty	146	320	9.8%	45.6%
Canterbury	115	545	7.7%	21.1%
Counties-Manukau	43	196	2.9%	21.9%
Hawkes Bay	14	259	0.9%	5.4%
Manawatu-Wanganui	75	253	5.0%	29.6%
Marlborough	1	98	0.1%	1.0%
Nelson	27	182	1.8%	14.8%
Northland	88	199	5.9%	44.2%
Otago	75	195	5.0%	38.5%
South Canterbury	131	348	8.8%	37.6%
Southland	17	99	1.1%	17.2%
South Taranaki	35	94	2.3%	37.2%
Taranaki	62	146	4.2%	42.5%
Thames Valley	78	211	5.2%	37.0%
Waikato King Country	81	284	5.4%	28.5%
Wairarapa	36	66	2.4%	54.5%
Wellington	232	522	15.5%	44.4%
West Coast	15	57	1.0%	26.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1492</b>	<b>4567</b>		

Figure 1

Gender Breakdown		
Gender	Survey Responses	% Total Survey Responses
Male	470	31.5%
Female	1018	68.2%
Other	4	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1492</b>	

Figure 2

**Age Breakdown**

Age Bracket	Survey Responses	% Total Survey Responses
< 18	21	1.4%
19 - 21	3	0.2%
22 - 34	9	0.6%
35 - 59	71	4.8%
60 - 69	338	22.7%
70+	1050	70.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1492</b>	

Figure 3

**Croquet Forms Played prev 2yrs**

Code	Survey Responses	% of Survey Responses (1492)
AC	469	31%
GC	1373	92%
Other	95	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1937</b>	

Figure 4

**Breakdown AC v GC v Both (1486)**

Code	Survey Responses	% of Survey with GC or AC
AC only	114	8%
GC only	1016	68%
Both	356	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1486</b>	

Figure 5

**What would encourage participation in AC**

Option	responses	% of responses
Demonstration with expert commentary	249	22%
Availability of coaching at your club	174	15%
A presence of more people playing AC at your club	235	21%
Other	476	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1134</b>	

Figure 6

**What discourages participation in AC**

Option	Response	Percentage
Not enough time	207	16%
Takes too long to learn	75	6%
It is too difficult to learn	56	4%
Not enough other players	67	5%
I am happy playing GC	720	56%
I was taught GC and no-one has offered to teach me AC	82	6%
Other	71	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1278</b>	

Figure 7