SOCcer Growth spurt

The rapid growth of amateur sports is being hampered by a shortage of playing fields, with WA’s peak soccer body forced to turn down applications for new clubs.

Football West is predicting a 15 per cent leap in participation this year, but chief executive Peter Bugg said expansion was being restricted by ground availability.

Football West was now arranging more informal competitions, such as indoor and beach soccer, to accommodate demand.

“We fielded inquiries (between September and January) regarding setting up 30 new clubs but only five have been registered,” he said.

“Many of those that did not come to fruition were because of lack of grounds.

“If we don’t have grass pitches, we are trying to encourage and mobilise people to play wherever there is flat land – tennis courts, on the streets, indoors or on the beach.”

Registered players rose almost 18 per cent to 96,489 between 2010 and last year, with almost 26,000 of those junior players.

The WA Football Commission is also forecasting a surge in registrations, from about 141,000 to 150,000 this year.

WAPC junior football manager Troy Kirkham said though space was not currently an issue, it was expected to become a problem.

“Football is working with... government and developers to make sure that playing fields, rather than ponds or limited fields, are placed in new growth areas,” he said.

The concerns come three months after a government-funded study found suburban Perth needed another 51.6ha of open space – the equivalent of 72 soccer pitches or 23 Aussie Rules oval – to meet the needs of the growing population.

Report author Curtin University Associate Professor Garry Middle said Perth was underprepared for the demand for playing fields.

“Soccer is going through an incredible growth spurt,” Dr Middle said. “We haven’t got the balance right between passive recreation and active sport space.”

Southern River father-of-two and Gosnells under-10 soccer coach Duncan Sanderson said teams had to fight for space.

“It’s like bees to honey, everyone is trying to get in there,” he said. “I have to set up 45 minutes earlier before everyone arrives for training to make sure we have space.”

Sports ovals in short supply