



MEMORANDUM

To: **Community football stakeholders**

From: **AFL Game Development, AFL Legal & Regulatory**

Date: **8 March 2024**

Re: **Summary of 2024 amendments to National Community Football Policy Handbook**

Dear all,

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of the substantive amendments to the National Community Football Policy Handbook (**Policy Handbook**) for 2024.

The Policy Handbook was introduced in April 2022 and is used across Australia. After an extensive review and feedback process in relation to the 2023 version of the Policy Handbook, the following substantive amendments will be implemented in 2024:

1. Section 3.1 (Player Eligibility) – A new section has been added to outline the minimum age requirements to play Australian Football (i.e. minimum age is 7 years old as at varying dates within a year depending on the State or Territory of the participant). Previously, these requirements were in the Australian Football Match Policy and it is now appropriate to include them in the Policy Handbook.
2. Section 3.1 (Player Eligibility) – A new section has been added to outline age eligibility to participate in each Competition age group (e.g. minimum age to participate in Under 8s is 7 years old) noting that a Controlling Body may permit a Player to participate in a higher age group than as specified where it determines that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that warrant such permission being granted.
3. Section 3.1 (Player Eligibility) – It has been clarified that a Player who is 14 years of age or older as at 31 December in the year prior to their applicable playing year must play in a Competition age group that accords with their gender, except where approved under the AFL Gender Diversity Policy Community Football or where a State Football Body determines, in its absolute discretion, that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that warrant otherwise, provided that the AFL Gender Diversity Policy Community Football does not apply. This is consistent with the position in the now retired Australian Football Match Policy. For the avoidance of doubt, this section outlines that mixed Competition age groups are only permitted up to and including Under 14.
4. Section 4.2 (Age dispensation: Relevant factors in assessing application) – The Policy Handbook now outlines that a Controlling Body will have regard to what reasonable adjustments have been considered, attempted or undertaken to facilitate a Player remaining in their eligible age group, and any reasons why those adjustments have been unsuccessful or not implemented. This is to ensure that Clubs are not just defaulting to age dispensation applications where there may be adjustments that can be made to facilitate the Player remaining in their eligible age group.
5. Section 9.4 (Member Protection: Additional responsibilities of a Club) – It is now expressly set out in the Policy Handbook that Clubs must provide a culturally safe and inclusive Club environment and use their best endeavours to procure compliance by their stakeholders with any sanctions imposed under

the Policy Handbook. These provisions will assist Controlling Bodies to hold Clubs accountable, including for the actions of their stakeholders.

6. Section 10.6 (Unsuccessful conciliation) – Where, following an unsuccessful conciliation, the AFL or Controlling Body (with the approval of the AFL) determines that exceptional and compelling circumstances apply, it may refer the matter directly to the Tribunal (without an Early Guilty Plea) or elect not to proceed with a Notice of Breach or refer the matter direct to the Tribunal. This added clause provides for flexibility that may be needed in exceptional and compelling circumstances, like, for example, where a complainant wants to withdraw from the process. Previously, following an unsuccessful conciliation, the parties had to proceed to tribunal.
7. Section 15 (Injury management) – The Appropriate Minimum Qualifications for Sports Trainers or First Aid Providers have been simplified. In Community Football, at least one AFL First Aider, who has a current First Aid and CPR qualification, must be in attendance at each match and training session. This section also outlines the process to register as a Sports Trainer or First Aid Provider. Further details on this process will follow separately.
8. Section 18 (Sun / UV Protection) – We have outlined sun protection risks when playing Australian Football and the responsibilities of a Club and a person with respect to those risks.
9. Section 20 (Pregnant players) – Previously, the Policy Handbook referenced the National Female Community Football Guidelines for guidance around Player participation during pregnancy. While there have been no substantive amendment to this section, this guidance will now be included within the Policy Handbook.
10. Sections 25 and 26 (Tribunal / Appeal – Procedure and evidence) – We have removed the ability for a parent or guardian to attend a tribunal or appeal hearing ‘in place’ of a Person under the age of 18 years at Tribunal or Appeal. Under the revised provision, a parent or guardian may only attend ‘in support’ of a Person under the age of 18 years. Based on feedback received, it was impractical for a parent or guardian to attend in place of their child.
11. Section 25 (Tribunal – Procedure and evidence) – We have included a new provision which outlines that where any person who is required to attend a Tribunal fails to do so, the Tribunal may proceed to hear and determine the matter and impose any sanction in the absence of that Person, or postpone the Tribunal hearing. Previously, this only applied where a person issued with a Notice of Charge or Notice of Breach, or that Person’s representative failed to attend and did not extend to witnesses. The provisions have been included to ensure that Tribunal panels can resolve matters in a timely manner.
12. Section 26 (Appeal – Grounds for appeal) – It has been clarified that only a Person the subject of a tribunal decision may appeal that decision. Previously, the appeal right was available to any Person ‘affected’ by a tribunal decision which was seen as too broad.
13. Section 26 (Appeal – Appeal Board may dismiss appeal) – Consistent with the AFL Rules, we have included a new provision which allows an Appeal Board to dismiss an appeal without conducting a hearing in certain circumstances (e.g. where the Appeal Board determines that an appeal is frivolous or vexatious).
14. Appendix 1 (Reportable Offences) – Following a strong push from the States and Territories, we have added Auditory Offences as a new category of Reportable Offence. As with other Reportable Offences, Auditory Offences will be graded under a Classification Table that considers the conduct (i.e. threatening, high level abusive / obscene / insulting, low level abusive / obscene / insulting), the receiver (i.e. Umpire or another Person) and volume (loud or medium / low) of the offence to

determine the Base Sanction and Early Guilty Plea penalty. Under the Classification Table, any Auditory Offence directed at an Umpire will result in a minimum sanction of a 1 match suspension.

15. Appendix 1 (Reportable Offences) and 2 (Example Reportable Offences) – These Appendices have been updated to align with the 2024 AFL Tribunal Guidelines (Elite). This update includes a key amendment which provides that where a Classifiable Offence is graded as Severe Impact, if only the minimum prescribed sanction is sought, the Controlling Body will, in its discretion, specify that minimum prescribed sanction and the Player may enter an Early Guilty Plea and accept the sanction without the matter being referred directly to the Tribunal.

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