



## MEMORANDUM

To: **Community Football stakeholders**

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

Date: **15 November 2024**

Re: **Summary of 2025 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 2025.

The Policy Handbook was introduced in April 2022 and is used across most of Australia. After an extensive review and feedback process in relation to the 2024 version of the Policy Handbook, the following substantive amendments will be implemented in 2025:

### 1. Section 6 – Coach and Umpire eligibility and accreditation

- a. **Previously Section 5 (Coach accreditation) and section 6 (Umpire accreditation)** – These sections have been combined due to duplicated processes for Accreditation determination (Section 6.3), Review of determination regarding Accreditation (Section 6.4), Accreditation status (Section 6.5) and Coach and Umpire disclosure requirements (Section 6.6).
- b. **Section 6.2(a) (Coach Eligibility)** – A new section has been added to outline age eligibility to be a head Coach and an assistant Coach. This includes the following new provisions:
  - i. A head Coach must be fifteen (15) years of age or older in the year prior to the applicable playing year and must meet the minimum age requirements applicable for coaching a Competition age group (e.g. must be eighteen (18) years of age in the year prior to the applicable playing year to be a Head Coach of a Seniors team).
  - ii. A head Coach who is under eighteen (18) years of age must have an adult assistant Coach (who is over 18 years of age).
  - iii. An assistant Coach must be twelve (12) years of age or older in the year prior to the applicable playing year.

Previously, coach age eligibility requirements were included in the Terms of Participation and required that all coaches must be sixteen (16) years of age.

- c. **Section 6.2(c) (Umpire Eligibility)** – A new section has been added to outline age eligibility to be a field Umpire, boundary Umpire and goal Umpire. This includes the following new provisions:
  - i. A field Umpire must be 12 years of age or older in the year prior to the applicable playing year and must meet the minimum age requirements applicable for umpiring a Competition age group (e.g. must be sixteen (16) years of age in the year prior to the applicable playing year to field Umpire a Seniors game) noting that a Controlling Body

or umpiring group may appoint a field Umpire to a higher age group than that specified where it determines that there are exceptional and compelling circumstances that warrant such permission being granted (e.g. with regard to the Umpire's physical capacity, experience, skill level and social maturity along with any child safeguarding considerations).

- ii. Boundary Umpires and goal Umpires must be nine (9) years of age or older in the year prior to the applicable playing year noting that a Controlling Body or umpiring group must have regard to the Umpire's physical capacity, experience, skill level and social maturity along with any child safeguarding considerations when appointing boundary and goal Umpires.
- iii. Where a Club is appointing an Umpire in accordance with a Controlling Body's rules and regulations (i.e. non accredited Club Umpires), the Policy Handbook outlines that the principles of the umpire age eligibility requirements should be applied.

Previously, umpire age eligibility requirements were included in the Umpire Terms and Conditions. However, these were removed for 2024 following a review of the requirements by AFL Game Development in consultation with AFL State Football Bodies.

- d. **Section 6.4 (Review of determination regarding Accreditation)** – Amendments to this section have been made to the following effect:
    - i. The structure for reviewing Accreditation has been changed from a three-tiered structure to a two-tiered structure. Previously, the structure consisted of an initial review decision, and where a person's Accreditation was revoked, the person seeking review could have the determination 'reviewed' at first instance and then, if unsuccessful, also 'appeal' that decision. This has been amended to a more streamlined structure where if a person's Accreditation is revoked, they may apply to have that decision reviewed by an Accreditation Panel who will make a final determination on the matter.
    - ii. A person can now only apply for review of their Accreditation once every 12 months, whereas this was previously unlimited. This amendment creates consistency with Section 6.4(f)(i), which deals with re-registration applications following Deregistration).
  - e. **Section 6.5 (Accreditation Status)** – A new section has been added to outline that a decision to not grant or revoke a person's Accreditation will apply until such time as that decision is reversed or modified. Previously, a person who had their Accreditation revoked could apply for Accreditation annually.
2. **Section 7.2(b) (Deregistration – Reportable Offences – Suspensions attained once 16 years or older apply)** – This section has been amended to allow for a person under 16 years of age to be Deregistered for serious or cumulative sanctions (under 7.3). Previously, 7.2(b) outlined that a person under 16 years of age could not be deregistered in any circumstance.
  3. **Section 7.4 (Deregistration – Coach citations)** – We have removed Deregistration for Coach citations (and reference to Coach citations throughout the Policy Handbook). Coach citations were rarely used, administered inconsistently and created unnecessary administration. The AFL or State Football Body (in consultation with the AFL) can instead rely on Section 7.3 (Deregistration - serious or cumulative sanctions) to Deregister a Coach.

4. **Section 9.1 (Member Protection)** – A new section has been added to outline that a Person must not consume alcohol, smoke or vape at Junior Football (defined as u18 football and below). The Australian Football Match Policy included a similar provision but is no longer in force.
5. **Section 9.3 (Member Protection – Coach code of conduct)** – Amended section to outline that a Coach who is coaching Junior Football (i.e. u18) must use best endeavours to ensure that every Player plays a minimum of 50% playing time. Previously, this section required coaches to use best endeavours to ensure Players gain equal playing time which was impractical. This amendment aligns with the AFL Junior Rules which outline that a Coach must provide each Player with 50-75% playing time for u18 and below.
6. **Section 10.3(b) (Preliminary conciliation process)** – Amended section to allow flexibility for the AFL, where it determines it is appropriate in all the circumstances, to bypass the otherwise mandatory conciliation process and proceed to deal with the matter in accordance with section 10.6 (e.g. Notice of Breach or direct Tribunal referral). The aim of this change is to address circumstances where conciliation may not be appropriate, such as when a vilified person does not wish to go to conciliation, or the matter involves young children (e.g. Players under 12 years of age).
7. **Section 10.6(e) (No conciliation outcome)** – Amended section to add flexibility for the AFL where there has been no conciliation outcome, and the AFL determines that exceptional and compelling circumstances apply which justify dealing with a matter in an alternative manner. This is to allow for alternative resolution mechanisms when dealing with young children (e.g. Players under 12 years of age) rather than putting them through a typical Tribunal hearing. For example, issuing a warning and gaining commitment from the Club to undertake broader education.
8. **Section 25.3(b) (Tribunal – Procedure and evidence – Representation)** – Amended to allow a person who is approved by the Controlling Body to represent the charged Person in a Tribunal hearing. This is intended to address circumstances where the charged Person is not represented by a Club Officer or a barrister or solicitor. For example, a Club may wish to use someone as the representative of their charged player who does not meet the definition of a Club Officer – i.e. someone with little connection to the Club but who has relevant advocacy skills.
9. **Section 25.3(n) (Tribunal – Procedure and evidence – Recording a Tribunal hearing)** – Added a new section to outline that a Tribunal hearing may be recorded by a person authorised to do so by the Tribunal Chairperson and that no other person shall record a Tribunal hearing without the prior consent of the Tribunal Chairperson.
10. **Section 25.5(a) (Suspension of Person)** – Added a section to outline that any sanction imposed via a Notice of Charge, Notice of Breach or as a Tribunal outcome must not contain a suspended Match suspension. Previously, this may have been interpreted as only applying to Tribunal outcomes for a Policy Breach.
11. **Section 25.5(b) (Suspension of Person)** – This section has been amended to clarify the terms of suspension of a person, including the following:
  - a. where the offence or breach was committed while playing or participating in a Match, the suspended Person must serve the suspension in the grade in which the offence occurred.
  - b. where the breach was committed while not playing or participating in a Match, serve the suspension as determined by the Controlling Body.

Previously, this section was ambiguous and created queries around the application of a suspension where the suspension was delayed (e.g. following investigation into policy breach) and the Person had subsequently played or participated in a different grade to that where the offence or breach occurred.

12. **Section 25.5(g) (Suspension of Person)** – Added a section to outline that for the purpose of any suspension arising under Part E of the Policy Handbook, including a suspension for a Policy Breach, the terms of Law 24.4.4 (Effect of Suspension) of the Laws of the Game will be deemed to apply to that suspension. Law 22.4.4 of the Laws of the Game only apply to Reportable Offences and this added section ensures that Law also applies to Policy Breaches.
13. **Appendix 1, Section 8(f) (Reportable Offences – Other factors regarding certain Reportable Offences)** – A further example has been added in relation to Rough Conduct (Dangerous Tackles) to account for the scenario where the tackler drops their knees and uses their full body weight to bring the tackled player to the ground with excessive force.
14. **Appendix 1, Section 8(h) (Reportable Offences – Other factors regarding certain Reportable Offences)** – Added a new clause in relation to Umpire abuse that outlines that where a Person is reported for an Auditory Offence that is directed at, or in relation to, an Umpire, and responds with further abuse that is directed at, or in relation to, an Umpire, the Controlling Body or Tribunal, may increase the penalty for the Auditory Offence by one (1) additional match. This gives a Controlling Body or Tribunal the ability to further deter this behaviour.

Please note that there are expected to be further amendments and a subsequent release of the Policy Handbook in early 2025 including with respect to the following sections:

1. Section 20 (Pregnancy) – This section is currently being reviewed and may result in amendments.
2. Appendix 1 (Reportable Offences) – Amendments to the AFL Tribunal Guidelines (for elite) will result in further amendments to this Appendix to ensure consistency between the documents (where practical).
3. Appendix 2 (Example Reportable Offences) – Updates to the vision examples will result in amendments to this section.

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