

WA Football.

**Appeals Handbook for
Community Football Volunteers**

How can this guide help me?

This guide is designed to support those who are thinking about appealing a decision. It provides general information to help you understand how the appeal process works and what to expect before, during, and after an appeal.

Appeals are not about simply disagreeing with a decision — they are used when you believe a serious error has occurred, such as a rule being applied incorrectly, an unreasonable outcome, or a penalty that clearly doesn't fit the situation.

The aim of this guide is to help all participants feel informed, supported, and equipped to take part in the appeal process with clarity and confidence.

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Community Football Appeals Overview

The WA Football Community Appeal Process exists to provide a fair, independent, and structured opportunity for decisions made by the Tribunal or WA Community Leagues to be reviewed under specific circumstances. It acts as an important safeguard to ensure that outcomes are not only consistent but also just and reasonable.

The appeal process supports transparency and accountability within Community football by allowing players, officials, and clubs to challenge decisions when there is evidence of a significant error — such as a mistake in applying the rules, an unreasonable outcome based on the evidence, or a penalty that is clearly too harsh or too lenient.

Appeals are handled by the Community Football Appeal Panel, a group independent from the original decision-makers. Their role is to assess whether the original decision met the required standards of fairness and integrity, and to correct it if it did not.

By offering a clear pathway for review, the appeal process reinforces participant confidence in the football system and upholds the values of fairness, consistency, and integrity across all community competitions in Western Australia.

The difference between a Tribunal Hearing and an Appeal

A **Tribunal hearing** is the original process used to decide whether an individual is guilty of a reportable offence, and what penalty (if any) should apply. It's where evidence is presented, witnesses may be involved, and both sides have the opportunity to explain what happened. The Tribunal makes a decision based on what is said, shown, and submitted during the hearing.

An **Appeal**, on the other hand, is not a re-hearing of the case. It's a formal process that happens *after* a Tribunal or League decision has been made, and it only takes place if there is a valid reason under the official appeal criteria. Appeals are used to review whether the original decision was made fairly, correctly, and according to the rules — not just because someone disagrees with the outcome.

Importantly, Appeals are decided by a separate, independent **Appeal Panel**, and they are decided **only on written submissions**. You don't get to attend an Appeal Hearing like you do at a Tribunal. The Panel doesn't re-argue the facts — it looks at whether the original process or decision met the standards of fairness, accuracy, and reasonableness set out in the appeal rules.

Appeal Deadlines

If you are considering lodging an appeal, it's important to be aware of the relevant deadlines. Appeal lodgements must be submitted within a specific timeframe following notification of the original decision. These timeframes vary depending on the competition you are part of. To ensure you meet the correct deadline for your specific competition, please refer to your League's Competition Rules and Regulations, as this will outline the appeal timelines that apply to you. **Late appeals may not be accepted**, so it's important to act promptly once a decision has been handed down. As a guide, the following deadlines apply;

Junior League Competitions and Perth Football League Competitions:

Must be submitted within 48 hours of notification of the decision.

Country Football League Competitions:

Must be submitted within 72 hours of notification of the decision.

Tribunal Decisions:

If you wish to appeal a Tribunal decision, you must submit your appeal by **5pm the day after the decision is made**.

How to lodge an Appeal

If you believe there are valid grounds to appeal a Tribunal or League decision, you must follow the official process in your League Rules and Regulations to ensure your appeal is accepted and reviewed. Your appeal submission must be clear, structured, and provide enough detail for the Appeal Panel to understand:

- The name of the Person or Club appealing
- The original decision you are appealing (include the date and summary of the decision)
- The appeal ground(s) you are appealing under
- A written explanation of why you believe the decision meets the appeal criteria
- Any supporting evidence
- Proof of appeal fee being paid

If you are requesting additional time, you must still **submit your appeal within the required timeframe** and clearly explain that you are requesting more time. Ensure the request details why you are requesting more time and include an estimated date for submission. The Appeal Panel may allow a short extension — but you must make the request at the time of lodging the appeal.

Appeal Fee and Payment Details

To lodge an appeal, a **\$750 appeal fee** must be paid at the time of submission. Your appeal will not be accepted without proof of payment.

Payment Details:

Bank: West Australian Football Commission

BSB: 086 006

Account: 871005544

Reference: Appeal [Club/League Name submitting the appeal]

If your appeal is successful and the Appeal Panel decides to reduce or overturn the original penalty, you will be eligible for a **partial refund** from your appeal fee.

In some cases, where the Appeal Panel or WA Football believes the circumstances were exceptional — such as if the original decision was clearly flawed or the appeal process resulted in a complete reversal of the outcome — the **full appeal fee may be refunded**. This is done at the discretion of WA Football and is not guaranteed.

Refund decisions are based on the outcome of the appeal and the nature of the error or issue that led to the appeal being successful. If your appeal is unsuccessful, the full appeal fee will be retained.

Note: Appeal fees help cover the administrative and operational costs of running the appeal process, which is why only successful appeals may be eligible for a refund.

Appeal Panel

Appeals in community football are handled by an independent **Appeal Panel**. This panel is responsible for reviewing appeal submissions and deciding whether a Tribunal or League decision should be changed, overturned, or upheld — but only if it meets one of the approved appeal criteria.

The Community Football Appeal Panel is made up of people who are independent from the original case — meaning they had no involvement in the original hearing or decision.

The panel must include at least three members, including:

- One representative from the WA Football Integrity Unit, who will act as the Chair of the panel
- Two members who were not involved in the original hearing drawn from either WA Football Community Competition staff or Community Tribunal Members

The panel is selected to ensure fairness, neutrality, and consistency in decision-making across all community football appeals.

Appeal Panel Decisions

Once the **Appeal Panel** makes its decision, that decision is **final and binding**. There is **no further right of appeal** within the community football system — even if you continue to disagree with the outcome or believe the result was unfair.

This means that the appeal process is the last opportunity to have a decision reviewed or changed. The Appeal Panel will only make a change if the appeal meets one of the official appeal criteria and the evidence supports it. If the panel does not find a valid reason under the rules, the original decision will stand.

All individuals impacted by the decision are required to accept and comply with the final outcome — including any penalties, changes, or revised sanctions that may result. Refusal to comply with an Appeal Panel ruling may result in further disciplinary action.

Once a decision is made, the WA Football will formally communicate the outcome to the relevant Club and/or League, via email, within a reasonable time frame after the panel has met.

Important: *Even if you feel disappointed with the outcome, it's important to remember that the role of the Appeal Panel is to assess the process and decision-making — not to provide a second opinion. Once a ruling is handed down, the matter is officially closed and cannot be reopened or revisited.*

Understanding when you can appeal

A decision cannot be appealed just because you're unhappy with the outcome or think it was unfair. In Community football, appeals are only accepted when there are strong, legitimate reasons to believe that something went seriously wrong in the decision-making process.

The appeal process is not a second chance to argue the same case — it's a formal review that looks at whether the original decision was made fairly, according to the rules, and based on the evidence presented. If a mistake was made, or if the outcome clearly doesn't match the offence, the Appeal Panel may agree to review the case.

To be considered, your appeal must clearly fit into **at least one of the approved appeal reasons**. These reasons are set out in the rules and are designed to protect the integrity of the game while ensuring fairness for all participants.

You can appeal under **one or more** of these reasons, as long as you provide a clear explanation and supporting evidence for why you believe the original decision meets the criteria.

The following pages have a breakdown of the valid appeal reasons, explained in simple terms with real-world examples to help you understand when an appeal might be appropriate.

Appeal Reason – An Error in the Application of a Rule has occurred

This appeal reason applies when a decision-maker has misunderstood, misinterpreted, or incorrectly applied a rule, policy, or procedure that should have been followed.

It doesn't mean the rule itself was unfair — it means the rule **wasn't applied properly** in your specific situation. This could include using the wrong version of a rule, overlooking a relevant exemption, or applying a penalty that doesn't match what the rules say should happen.

This is one of the most common appeal reasons because competition rules, policies, and codes of conduct can vary across leagues and need to be applied carefully.

Examples of Errors in Rule Application:

- **Incorrect Finals Eligibility Decision**
A player is ruled ineligible for finals because they only played 5 matches, but the competition policy states that injured players can be considered eligible under special circumstances. The decision-maker did not consider this clause.
- **Wrong Penalty Applied for a Specific Offence**
A club is fined \$500 for failing to submit match results on time, but the competition rules state that the penalty for a first-time breach is a warning, not a fine. The decision-maker skipped the correct first step.
- **Ineligible Player Sanction Without Review Process**
A club is penalised for playing an ineligible player, but the competition policy requires a review process before a penalty is applied. In this case, the penalty was issued without any investigation or explanation, which breaches the policy.

Tips for your submission:

If you're appealing under this reason, be sure to:

- Clearly identify which rule or policy was applied incorrectly
- Explain how it should have been applied in your situation
- Provide a copy or reference to the official rule (from the Competition Policy, Code of Conduct, or League documentation)
- Include any relevant evidence (e.g., injury certificates, emails, or League correspondence)

Appeal Reason – The Decision was so unreasonable that no decision maker acting reasonably could have come to that decision having regard to the evidence before it

This reason applies when the decision seems completely out of line with the facts and evidence presented. It's not about whether you agree or disagree — it's about whether any reasonable person, looking at the same situation, would have come to the same conclusion.

This is a high threshold to meet. You must show that the decision was so far outside what's fair or logical that it simply couldn't be justified.

Examples of Unreasonable Decisions:

- **Overwhelming evidence ignored**
A player is found guilty of striking, even though multiple camera angles and five witness statements involved in the incident confirm the player wasn't involved in the incident.
- **Decision made on speculation**
The League suspends a Coach for Umpire Abuse after hearing second-hand comments from an opposing team's parent, with no supporting evidence, official report, and no opportunity was given to the Coach to respond to the allegation.
- **Ignored Mitigating Circumstances**
A match is deemed a forfeit, even though the Club notified the League in advance that their ground would be unavailable, and the policy allows for exemptions in exceptional cases — which were never considered.
- **Inconsistency with similar case**
Two players involved in the same incident receive completely different penalties, even though their conduct and roles were nearly identical, and no explanation is provided for the inconsistency.

Tips for your submission:

If you're appealing under this reason, be sure to:

- Clearly identify what the decision was and why it's unreasonable based on the facts
- Explain what evidence was available and how it supports a different outcome
- Keep your appeal focused on the decision, not on emotions or frustrations. Avoid blaming individuals or accusing people — stick to what the evidence shows and how the decision missed the mark
- You must show that the decision was unreasonable, not just that you think it was unfair. Make sure you explain what you believe would have been a more reasonable decision.

Appeal Reason – The sanction imposed was manifestly excessive or inadequate

This reason is applied when the penalty (suspension, fine, reprimand, etc.) handed down by the Tribunal or League is obviously out of proportion to the incident — either too harsh (excessive) or too light (inadequate).

The key word here is manifestly, which means the issue is clear, obvious, or glaring. It's not about small differences of opinion — it's about the decision being so far off the mark that it's unreasonable in the context of similar cases, competition guidelines, or the specific facts of the incident.

Examples of Unreasonable sanctions:

- Disproportionate suspension for a minor offence
A player is suspended for six matches for attempting to trip an opposition player. The offence is listed as a Low-Level Offence in the Competition Rules, but the player has not been given a Low-Level penalty.
- No suspension for serious conduct
A Player strikes an opposition player off the ball, and despite clear footage, the Tribunal only gives a reprimand, which does not align to the penalty matrix.
- A team is fined \$1,500 for being involved in a melee, even though the Competition Rules state the penalty for a first offence is capped at \$100.

Tips for your submission:

If you're appealing under this reason, be sure to:

- Clearly show how the penalty differs from similar Community League cases – do not refer to AFL cases.
- Don't just say the penalty is unfair – If your league has a disciplinary matrix, code of conduct, or policy that outlines standard penalties for offences, refer to it directly.
- Stick to facts and avoid emotional or accusatory language. The goal is to show the panel why the penalty doesn't align with established standards — not to criticise the Tribunal or League personally.
- End your submission with a proposed outcome that you believe would be more appropriate, based on the facts and comparisons.

Appeal Reason – The Classification of the offence by the Tribunal was manifestly excessive or inadequate

This reason is applied when the Tribunal has incorrectly assessed how serious the offence was, which led to the wrong penalty being applied.

In community football, offences are usually assessed based on things like:

- **Conduct** (Was it careless, reckless, or intentional?)
- **Impact** (Was it high, medium, or low impact?)
- **Contact** (Was it to the head, body, or elsewhere?)
- **Potential to cause injury** (was the action dangerous or pose a risk to the opponent?)

The combination of these factors determines how an offence is classified — and that classification directly affects the type and length of the penalty handed down.

If the Tribunal got the classification wrong, the penalty may not fit the conduct — even if the finding of guilt was correct. You can appeal on this ground if you believe the wrong classification led to an incorrect penalty being applied. This doesn't mean you're saying the person didn't do something wrong — you're saying the incident was wrongly labelled as more or less serious than it actually was, leading to the wrong outcome.

Examples of Unreasonable sanctions:

- **Low-Level Conduct Classified Too Harshly**
A player makes slight contact while attempting to spoil the ball, and the opponent falls over. The action is classified as *intentional, high-impact, high contact* when it should be *careless, low-impact, body contact*
- **Offence Downgraded Without Clear Reason**
A player strikes another behind play, but it is classified as a *careless* act instead of *intentional*, resulting in a much lighter penalty than standard for striking.

Tips for your submission:

If you're appealing under this reason, be sure to:

- Clearly state the classification the Tribunal applied and explain why it was incorrect, using facts, footage, or policy references
- Suggest a more appropriate classification based on what actually happened
- Refer to similar incidents (if known) that were classified differently
- Avoid arguing whether the person was guilty — focus on the severity level assigned
- You must show the classification was clearly excessive or inadequate, not just slightly off

Appeal Reason – An Error of Law has occurred (Tribunal Decisions only)

This reason applies when there has been a serious mistake in how the hearing was conducted, not just in the outcome. It means the Tribunal may have:

- Applied the wrong rule or policy,
- Failed to follow its own procedures, or
- Breached the principles of natural justice — which are the basic rights to a fair and unbiased hearing.

In simple terms, it's not about whether someone was guilty or innocent — it's about how the decision was made. If the Tribunal broke the rules of how hearings must be run, ignored key steps, or denied someone a fair chance to respond, that could be an error of law.

Examples of Error of Law Unreasonable sanctions:

- **Right to Respond Denied**
The Tribunal makes a decision without giving the Reported Individual an opportunity to respond to allegations or provide evidence
- **Improper Tribunal Panel Composition**
The hearing was conducted without the required number or type of Tribunal members as set out in the League Policy documents
- **Unauthorised evidence considered**
The Tribunal bases its decision on information that was never shared with the parties involved or introduced during the hearing.
- **Bias or Conflict of Interest not declared**
A Tribunal Member has a connection to one of the Clubs or people involved but did not declare it or remove themselves from the case

Tips for your submission:

If you're appealing under this reason, be sure to:

- Clearly describe what rule or process was not followed
- Explain how this error affected your ability to defend yourself or the outcome
- Refer to the relevant section of the competition rules, Code of Conduct, or Tribunal guidelines
- Avoid re-arguing the facts of the case — focus on the legal or procedural problem

General tips for writing a strong Appeal submission

Writing an appeal might seem intimidating, but a clear, well-structured submission can make all the difference. Remember, the Appeal Panel won't re-hear your case — they will only review your written submission to decide if the original decision was flawed based on the appeal criteria.

Here's how to give your appeal the best chance of being understood and considered fairly.

- **Know your Appeal Grounds**

Start by clearly identifying which of the approved appeal reasons you're appealing under (e.g. error of law, unreasonable decision). You can appeal under more than one reason — just be sure to explain each clearly.

- **Be Clear and Structured**

Use headings, bullet points, or short paragraphs to organise your points. Avoid long blocks of text. Make it easy for the Appeal Panel to follow your reasoning.

- **Use plain, clear language**

Write your submission in a way that's easy to understand. You don't need legal jargon — just explain what happened, why you believe the decision was wrong, and how it meets the appeal criteria.

- **Stick to the Facts**

Focus on what happened, what was decided, and why you believe that decision was flawed. Don't include irrelevant details or opinions that don't relate to the appeal criteria.

- **Use Evidence Where Possible**

Support your points with video clips, match reports, screenshots, written statements, or competition rules. Make sure anything you refer to is included with your submission.

- **Keep It Respectful and Professional**

The Appeal Panel is there to review the decision fairly, so it's important to stay calm, polite, and focused on the facts. Avoid personal attacks or criticism of the Tribunal or decision makers involved — instead, direct your attention to explaining why the decision should be reviewed based on the appeal criteria.

- **Suggest a Fair Outcome**

At the end of your submission, you can briefly explain what outcome you believe would be fair (e.g. reduced penalty, reclassification, or dismissal of the charge).

- **Ask for Help If You're Unsure**

If you're not sure which appeal ground applies or how to structure your submission, don't guess. Reach out to your League Administrator for guidance before the deadline.

Common mistakes to avoid

Even with the best intentions, some appeals are rejected or not considered simply because of avoidable errors. To give your appeal the best chance of being accepted and understood, it's important to avoid the most common mistakes people make when submitting. Here's what to watch out for:

- **Appealing just because you disagree with the decision**
An appeal must meet one of the official criteria. Simply thinking the decision was unfair or harsh isn't enough unless you can show why it was flawed under the rules.
- **Submitting an appeal without evidence or explanation**
Don't just say, "We think the penalty was too harsh." Explain *why*, compare it to similar incidents, and provide evidence to back it up.
- **Missing the deadline**
All appeals must be lodged within the required timeframe for your competition. Late submissions may not be accepted — even with good intentions.
- **Repeating the same arguments from the Tribunal Hearing**
An appeal is not a second hearing. Simply re-stating your case without showing a specific error in the original process or decision is not enough.
- **Too much emotion, not enough evidence**
While it's natural to feel frustrated or upset, appeals must be based on facts and evidence, not emotions or opinions. Avoid turning your submission into a personal complaint.
- **Assuming the Panel will "just know" what you mean**
Be as clear and specific as possible. The Appeal Panel can only assess what you put in writing — if you don't explain it clearly, they won't guess.
- **Submitting too close to the deadline without time to fix issues**
Waiting until the last minute to lodge your appeal may leave no time to correct missing documents, clarify your points, or request more time for evidence.