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# MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

IN COMMUNITY FOOTBALL

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# CRITICAL INCIDENTS



## CARPARK ASSAULT

- Following last round women's match.
- Player from Team A physically assaulted by a player from Team B
- Police matter

## VILIFICATION

- Player was racially vilified by coaches and teammates via a mock "fine / reward" system within the club two years earlier
- Failed 'in-house' resolution
- Player remains highly impacted and angry about his treatment & is active on social media about his treatment
- State Body / AFL management

## SOCIAL MEDIA (1)

- Registered player used naked picture of his ex-girlfriend as profile picture
- Police charges & Court conviction
- Significant media exposure for Club of player

# CRITICAL INCIDENTS



## **SOCIAL MEDIA (2)**

- Three players at a pub film a sexualized message about an underage female water-runner in their Team
- They send it to the water-runner's brother, also a player in the team
- Integrity matter

## **COACH CONDUCT**

- Report of multiple instances of sexual misconduct by a Coach toward female players at a Club in 2023
- Club attempted and failed to resolve complaints internally in 2023
- Significant social media activity regarding conduct & threats of national media
- Integrity matter

## **UMPIRE**

- Charged and convicted of financial fraud in another sport
- Charged and convicted of falsifying Court documents
- Found to have provided false information to AFL
- Umpire Accreditation revoked

# CLUB v AFL MANAGEMENT



## Club

- Member disputes / grievances
  - Financial matters
  - Internal operational disputes
  - Committee disputes
  - Coach conduct (may also fall under AFL)
  - Club code of conduct breaches (e.g. bullying)

## AFL

- AFL NSW/ACT Rules or Policy Handbook Breaches
  - Section 9 – (Serious) Code of Conduct
  - Section 10 – Vilification / Discrimination
  - Section 11 – Child safeguarding
  - Section 12 – (Serious) Social Media

## Other

- Criminal conduct (Police & AFL Integrity)

# CLUB GRIEVANCES



## Grievance Process

- Have a **documented process** and follow it
  - Established in Club Constitution
  - Detailed in the associated Club Rules, Regulations, By-laws
- Process must be **accessible** to members and **unbiased**
- Have a **Club Code of Conduct** (provided to all members)

## Reporting Mechanism

- **How** to report (e.g. a template complaint notice)
- **Who** to report to (e.g. Club Integrity Officer, Club President)
- **When** to report (reasonable timeframe to limit significantly delayed reports)

## Investigation

- **Appoint** an appropriate person to do this (Internal / external)
- Establish **facts**
- Afford **right of response**
- **Stand-down** provision

## Determination

- **How / Who** (e.g. Disciplinary Panel for behavioural matters)
- Has **Standard of Proof** been met (as per Constitution / Regs)
- Dismiss, uphold & sanction, mediation

# AFL COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT HIERARCHY



## AFL Controlling Body

- Competition Management breaches (determined by CMC)
- Lower-level Code of Conduct matters

## AFL State Body

- Code of Conduct Policy Breaches
- Serious Competition Management breaches
- Deregistration (in consultation with AFL National)

## AFL National

- Serious Section 9 (Code of Conduct) or Section 12 (Social Media) breaches
- Section 10 (Vilification or Discrimination)
- Section 11 (Child Safeguarding breaches)
- Deregistration / Accreditation
- Criminal conduct

# AFL COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT PROCESS



## Complaint Reporting

- Notice of Complaint
- AFL Online Complaint Portal

## Preliminary Assessment

- Does it meet fundamental requirements to be complaint / policy breach under the Policy Handbook
- Next Steps (Investigation, Notice of Breach, Referral to Authority, Other)

## Investigation

- Reviewing current evidence
- Obtain “direct” evidence of the conduct (witness statements, footage, screen prints)
- Right of response for Offending Person

## Determination

- Has *Standard of Proof* been met
- Notice of Breach (EGPO or Tribunal)
- Dismiss
- Other

## Tribunal

- Evidentiary Hearing
- Determination

## Appeal

- Hearing on specific grounds
- Determination

# CLUB ROLE (In AFL Managed Complaints)



## 1. Support (to any Victim)

- Immediate (e.g. matchday support)
- Ongoing (e.g. check-ins, assist within external resources)

## 2. Gather Information

- Focus people on facts (not opinion)
- Focus on “direct” evidence
- Some “indirect” evidence may add context
- Witness statements
- Other forms of evidence (footage, screen prints etc)

## 3. Report (lodge Complaint)

- **How** – *Notice of Complaint* to Controlling Body or via *AFL Online Complaint Portal*)
- **When** – ASAP
- **Who** – a Club / Team Official, Player, Parent, Supporter
- Attach any available **supporting evidence**

## 4. Assist

- Co-operate with AFL throughout process
- Establish single point of contact (Club Officer)
- Keep relevant persons (e.g. Complainant) updated

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



## **MULTIPLE CONDUCT BREACHES**

- Each to be reported, assessed, investigated, determined

## **FIT & PROPER PERSON (COACHES)**

- Club responsibility

## **SANCTIONS**

- Punitive options
  - Suspension
  - Deregistration
  - Revocation of Coach or Umpire Accreditation
- Education
- Apology

## **SECTION 9.4**

- Onus on Club to provide safe and inclusive environment for all (including visiting teams & umpires)
- Clubs have been sanctioned under this section

# RESOURCES



## AFL

- Controlling Body staff
- State Body
- National (via Controlling Body or State Body)

## POLICY

- *AFL National Community Football Policy Handbook*
  - Sections 9 to 12
  - Section 23
- AFL NSW/ACT Rules

## TEMPLATES

- Notice of Complaint
- Notice of Complaint - Vilification
- Club Vilification Management Guideline (via Controlling Body)
- Witness Statement Template

# KEY MESSAGES



## CURRENT CLUB DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS

- Updated constitution / rules (& ensure readily available to members)
- Ensure clear process for reporting, investigation and resolution of member disputes

## APPOINT A CLUB INTEGRITY OFFICER

- Suitably skilled person within Club

## CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

- Don't attempt resolution of serious policy breach matters between clubs
- Follow AFL process
  - Support (initial and ongoing)
  - Gather information (important of direct evidence)
  - Report (via proper mechanisms)
  - Assist

## PREVENTION

- Club standards / culture
- Education