



Formal Complaints Guidelines

Purpose & Scope

This guide applies to formal complaints alleging conduct connected with football activities, including alleged breaches of the Football Australia National Code of Conduct and Ethics, NNSWF regulations, Zone regulations, integrity obligations, member protection obligations or other conduct connected with football. It does not replace Football Australia, NNSWF or Zone regulations. Where there is any inconsistency, the applicable Football Australia, NNSWF or Zone regulatory document will apply.

Providing accurate and detailed information at the outset ensures complaints can be assessed efficiently and reduces the need for follow-up requests.

Reporting

Complaints should generally be raised at the level where the issue occurred. Club-based matters should first be raised with the relevant Club where safe and appropriate. Zone competition matters should be submitted to the Member Zone. Serious, complex, integrity, safeguarding, discrimination, harassment, abuse, Match Official abuse or conflict of interest matters may be referred to NNSWF or Football Australia as appropriate.

Where a matter involves child safety, safeguarding, violence, threats, discrimination, harassment, abuse, Match Official abuse, criminal conduct, reportable conduct, corruption, wagering, match manipulation, or an immediate risk to health, safety or welfare, the Club must notify the Member Zone immediately and preserve all available evidence. The Member Zone may refer the matter to NNSWF, Football Australia, Sport Integrity Australia, law enforcement or other relevant authorities as required.

Timing

Complaints should be raised as soon as practical. Allowing the relevant body to start any required investigation in the 7 days directly after the incident gives the best chance of getting accurate witness statements and recollections and also helps provide an efficient process for both the complainant and the accused persons or clubs.

Submission Requirement (Important)

All formal complaints must be submitted on official Club letterhead.

This ensures:

- The complaint is formally endorsed by the Club
- Accountability for the content provided
- Clear identification of the submitting organisation

Key Principle: Facts Over Interpretation

When submitting a complaint, it is critical to focus on:

- What actually happened (observable facts)
- Not what you believe was intended

Avoid assumptions about intent, motive, or character unless directly supported by evidence.



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Clubs should take reasonable steps to preserve and secure relevant evidence as soon as they become aware of an incident, including match footage, CCTV, photographs, screenshots, messages, social media posts, team sheets, match official reports, witness details and any internal notes. Evidence should not be edited, deleted, altered or circulated beyond those who need it for the complaint process.

Fairness and Integrity

In the interests of procedural fairness and integrity, any person alleged to have breached the Code of Conduct or other relevant policy has the right to be informed of the specific conduct alleged

This means:

- Complaints must contain sufficient detail
- Allegations must be clear, specific, and evidence-based

Incomplete or vague complaints may compromise the ability to take appropriate action.

Key Area	Key Details
Incident Details – a clear and structured account	• Date of incident • Time of incident (or best estimate) • Location (venue and specific area, e.g. sideline, tunnel, car park) • Match details (teams, grade, competition)
Description of What Occurred - This is the most critical section. *	• A step-by-step factual account • What physically occurred • Actions of each individual involved • Avoid generalisations—be precise
Exact Words Used (Where Relevant)	If the complaint involves verbal conduct: • Record exact words or phrases used • If not exact, state: “to the best of my recollection” This is particularly important for allegations involving: • Offensive or abusive language • Discrimination or vilification • Harassment (as defined within the Football Australia Code of Conduct and Ethics)
Identification of Individuals Clearly identify all persons involved:	• Full name (if known) • Club / team affiliation • Shirt number (if applicable) • Role (player, coach, spectator, official) If identity is unknown: • Provide a clear physical description • Note distinguishing features or behaviour
Witnesses	• Names and contact details of witnesses • Whether they are willing to provide a statement



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Evidence (Critical Requirement)	All available evidence must be submitted at the time of the complaint, including: • Video footage • Photographs • Screenshots (e.g. messages, social media) • Written witness statements
Alleged Breach of the Code or relevant governing document	If known, identify the relevant provision, policy or type of misconduct believed to be involved. Examples may include: • Offensive or abusive behaviour • Physical assault • Harassment or bullying • Conduct bringing the game into disrepute (Refer to the Football Australia Code of Conduct and Ethics)

** Example (Appropriate – Off-Field Incident):*

“At full time, as players were leaving the field via the northern sideline, a spectator wearing a red jacket approached Player B and pushed him in the upper body with both hands. The push caused Player B to step backwards. The incident occurred approximately 2 metres from the pitch fence, next to the clubhouse.”

Example (Not Helpful):

“A spectator acted aggressively and assaulted a player.”

Complaints should be submitted as soon as reasonably practicable after the incident, particularly where witness recollections, footage retention periods or safeguarding considerations may be affected by delay.

Complaints are often delayed by the failure to provide available evidence at the time of submission, vague or general descriptions of events, missing key details such as the time, identity of those involved or sequence of events, the late submission of evidence, speculation about intent without supporting evidence, or the failure to identify the alleged breach or type of misconduct where known.

Submission Checklist & Considerations:

Checklist:

- ✓ Complaint is on Club letterhead*
- ✓ Date, time, and location included
- ✓ Clear factual description of events
- ✓ Exact words included (if relevant)
- ✓ Individuals identified (or described)
- ✓ Witness details provided
- ✓ All available evidence attached
- ✓ Relevant breach or type of misconduct identified (if known).



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Considerations:

- Has the Club preserved all relevant evidence, including footage, screenshots and communications?
- Has the Club avoided public comment or circulation of complaint material?
- Has the Club considered whether the matter involves safeguarding, discrimination, harassment, abuse, Match Official abuse, violence, integrity or criminal conduct?
- Has the Club identified whether urgent notification is required?
- Has the Club provided a nominated Club contact person for follow up?
- Has the Club confirmed whether any immediate welfare or safety steps have been taken?

** Where urgent safety, safeguarding, integrity or serious misconduct concerns arise, the matter should still be notified immediately, even if formal Club letterhead cannot be prepared at that time. A formal letterhead submission may then be provided as soon as practicable.*

A Club is not required to prove a matter before making a complaint. Its role is to provide a clear, honest and complete account of the allegation, together with any available evidence, so the matter can be assessed through the appropriate process.

Complaints, evidence, witness details, personal information and other sensitive information must be treated confidentially. Clubs should only share complaint material with those who genuinely need to know for the purpose of making, responding to, assessing or administering the complaint.

Complaints must be made honestly and in good faith. They must not be used to harass, intimidate, retaliate against, or unfairly damage another person or organisation. Knowingly false, misleading, materially incomplete or improper complaints may themselves constitute misconduct.

What Happens Next?

After a complaint is submitted, the Member Zone or NNSWF will assess the information provided, determine the appropriate pathway, request further information if required, and determine whether the matter should be managed as a routine disciplinary matter, complex disciplinary matter, integrity matter, complaint, grievance or other regulatory matter. Timeframes may vary depending on complexity, evidence availability, safeguarding considerations and procedural fairness requirements.

Final Note

Complaints are assessed on objective facts, available evidence, procedural fairness and the applicable football regulatory framework. Providing a clear and complete complaint at the outset helps the Member Zone and NNSWF assess the matter fairly, efficiently and consistently.

Complaints should generally be directed first through the relevant Member Zone, which will determine whether the matter can be managed locally or should be referred to the Northern NSW Football Centralised Discipline and Integrity Unit, Football Australia or another appropriate body.



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Clubs that are unsure how to classify a matter should contact their Member Zone for guidance. Where the matter involves member protection, safeguarding, integrity or serious misconduct, the Member Zone may seek guidance from NNSWF or refer the matter to the appropriate body. Clubs may also encourage affected people to seek support through appropriate welfare or member protection channels.

All complaints should be directed to the relevant Member Zone initially. The Member Zone will then liaise with the Centralised Disciplinary and Integrity Unit.