AFL NSW/ACT Tribunal Quick Guide – 2026

NOTICE: This Quick Guide is no substitute for a thorough understanding of the documents that govern the Tribunal process. These documents include the AFL Laws of the Game (the Laws), the National Community Football Policy Handbook (Policy Handbook), the AFL NSW/ACT Hearing Procedures (the Hearing Procedures), and the relevant Controlling Body's Rules (the Rules) all of which may be found at the Controlling Body's website.

In this Quick Guide, a reference to a Reported Person includes, as relevant, any person reported for a Reportable Offence or Policy Breach (as defined in the Policy Handbook).

Preparation for a Tribunal

- All witnesses, including the Reported Person, should be interviewed prior to the decision to accept or reject an Early Guilty Plea Offer (EGPO). The witnesses who are to give evidence must be carefully selected, not only in terms of relevance , but also their ability to provide accurate and concise evidence.
- It is the responsibility of the Reported Person's Club to arrange for all evidence to be available at the hearing, including any vision, which must be submitted to the Controlling Body in accordance with the relevant Rules and, for example, a medical or expert report and, where the Tribunal hearing is online, to have access to a fully functioning internet connection and video conferencing facilities as required by the Controlling Body, including both vision and sound.
- A Reported Person if they are, or have at any time been a Player, must bring to the Tribunal a completed pre-sentence report.

Prior to the Hearing

- Carefully select your advocate. All Reported Persons should be represented. An advocate can be legally trained where the Rules allow.
- Advise the Controlling Body of the name, email address and phone number of all witnesses, together with the substance of their evidence (and this provision includes the Reported Person, if they are to give evidence) within the required timeframe. The Policy Handbook provides that only in exceptional and compelling circumstances, as determined by the Controlling Body, will the Tribunal receive evidence, in the case of a Notice of Report, of a person who is not an umpire or recorded on the Club official team sheet for the relevant match.
- Advise the Controlling Body of the name and address of any expert witness, together with the substance of their evidence, along with their qualifications, expertise and experience, also within the required timeframe.
- Where appropriate, ensure that the witness/es provides a diagram of the positions of all relevant persons involved in the incident.

Hearing Procedures

NOTICE: Appendix 1 in the Policy Handbook provides guidelines as to different categories of Reportable Offences, assessing particular offences and appropriate sanctions for such an offence. It includes definitions for Conduct (Intentional, Careless, Threatening, High Level, Low Level), Impact (Low, Medium, High or Severe), Contact (High/Groin/Body) and Volume (Low, Medium, High). It also provides information on the Classification and Grading of Reportable Offence.

The Hearing

Should the Reported Person not be available to attend the hearing, a Appendix 4- Non Attendance (click here) must be provided by the Reported Person stating the reason for their non-attendance and also stating whether they want the matter to be heard in their absence in addition to a completed Pre-Sentence Report, if applicable.

- Special provisions apply to Reported Persons who are under 18 at the time of the hearing – see the *Policy Handbook* and *Hearing Procedures*.
- The Tribunal only accepts oral evidence. The evidence of witnesses who are unable to attend will only be allowed in the most exceptional circumstances, and even then, may only be accepted by the Tribunal for very limited purposes and may be given very limited weight. DO NOT prepare your case on the basis that the Tribunal will accept a written statement from a witness who is unable to attend the hearing and give oral evidence.
- Advocates cannot give evidence.
- Witnesses cannot be advocates.
- Check the *Hearing Procedures* on what is acceptable evidence and questions, including hearsay, multiple or loaded questions and the proper cross examination of witnesses. For instance, except for non-controversial issues (name, age, address and the like) advocates cannot ask leading questions of any witness. A leading question is a type of question that pushes the witness to answer in a specific manner, based on the way it is framed, and when asked by the person calling that witness, often includes questions that can be answered by "yes" or no".

Other issues at the Hearing

- At the commencement of the hearing, the advocate must advise the Tribunal as to how the Reported Person intends to plead, confirmation of the witnesses the Reported Person intends to call and whether there is any visual evidence.
- If the Reported Person intends to challenge the grading only (for example, that the action was careless, rather than intentional), the Reported Person must plead guilty/admit the report and call evidence to challenge the grading. Only if they do this will the Tribunal consider whether they may be entitled to receive the benefit of an early plea.
- Witnesses may give their evidence by reading a prepared statement or may be questioned by the advocate.
- All conversations must be related in direct speech. The exact words used, or as best the witness can recall, or words to the relevant effect, are required.
- Witnesses are to give evidence of fact, not opinion.
- Witnesses may be questioned by the opposing party, but questions must be limited to the matters at hand. The Tribunal will control the questioning of witnesses.
- If the Reported Person's version of events is at odds with the Reporting Person's/umpire's evidence, the Reported Person's version of events should be put to the Reporting Person/umpire to enable them to respond to same.
- The parties are to make brief submissions at the conclusion of the hearing.
- A diagrammatic representation of the usual procedure for hearing an umpire's report is found at the conclusion of this document.

Penalties

- If the finding is that the report is proven, or the Reported Person admits the report, the Tribunal will call on submissions from the Reported Person's advocate as to penalty.
- Submissions on penalty must not ignore the finding of the report being proven or the plea admitting the report being proven. Any submission which challenges such a finding or plea will be rejected.
- The Tribunal will determine the penalty as provided in the Policy Handbook. The penalty is recorded in writing, signed by the Presiding Member. The penalty shall take effect immediately on the pronouncement of the Penalty by the Presiding Member. The Controlling Body will provide to the Reported Person's Club a document advising as to how the penalty is to take effect.
- See also the Policy Handbook and the Rules for the application of penalties.
- The Tribunal may defer, on terms or absolutely, the operation of any penalty or part thereof.

Appeals

Provisions relating to appeals are contained in Rule 26 of the Policy Handbook and Reported Persons and their advocates are reminded of the strict timelines for the lodging of an Appeal and the limited grounds to do so.

DIAGRAMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE PROCEDURE FOR HEARING A REPORTABLE OFFENCE

1.

Hearing opens with the Chairperson introducing themselves and the panel along with general housekeeping. The Reported Person and Umpire/Prosecution are then identified. The Charge is read to the Reported Person, who is asked to plead **'Guilty'** or **'Not Guilty'** to the Charge.

Note: The Reported Person's Advocate does not plead on the Reported Person's behalf, unless the person is under the age of 18.

2.

PLAYER PLEADS 'NOT GUILTY' TO THE CHARGE

1. All witnesses asked to leave the room.
2. Umpire/Prosecution witness delivers their evidence (with assistance of their Advocate if need be)
3. Umpire/Prosecution witness questioned by Reported Person's advocate
4. Umpire/Prosecution witness may be questioned by tribunal at any time
5. Reported Person delivers their evidence (with assistance of their Advocate if need be)
6. Reported Person questioned by Umpire Advocate/Prosecution Advocate
7. Reported Person may be questioned by the tribunal at any time
8. Umpire/Prosecution witness allowed to clarify evidence through their Advocate
9. Umpire's witness called:
    - questioned by umpire's advocate
    - questioned by Reported Person's advocate
    - clarification by umpire's advocate
    - Umpire witnesses may be questioned by Tribunal at any time
10. Reported Person allowed to clarify evidence through Advocate
11. Reported Person's witness called:
    - questioned by umpire's advocate
    - questioned by Reported Person's advocate
    - clarification by umpire's advocate
    - Umpire witnesses may be questioned by Tribunal at any time
12. Advocates sum up
13. Tribunal retires to consider finding

PLAYER PLEADS 'GUILTY' TO THE CHARGE

1. All witnesses asked to leave the room.
2. Reported Person delivers their evidence (with assistance of their Advocate if need be)
3. Umpire/Prosecution witness delivers their evidence (with assistance of their Advocate if need be), which should just supplement or traverse Reported Person's account of what they have admitted to
4. Umpire/Prosecution witness and Reported Person questioned as need requires
5. Witness called and examined if required

3.

FINDING 1: REPORTED PERSON FOUND GUILTY

FINDING 2: REPORT DISMISSED

4.

PRE-SENTENCE REPORT HANDED UP

REPORTED PERSON'S ADVOCATE MAKES A SUBMISSION ON PENALTY

TRIBUNAL RETIRES TO CONSIDER PENALTY

TRIBUNAL DECISION ON PENALTY DELIVERED

5.

HEARING CONCLUDES

NATIONAL COMMUNITY FOOTBALL POLICY HANDBOOK- APPENDIX 1

Classifiable Offences Grading Matrix

Conduct	Impact	Contact	Base Sanction	Early Guilty Plea
Intentional	Severe	High/Groin/Chest	5 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
		Body	4 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
	High	High/Groin/Chest	4 Matches	3 Matches
		Body	3 Matches	2 Matches
	Medium	High/Groin/Chest	3 Matches	2 Matches
		Body	2 Matches	1 Match
	Low	High/Groin/Chest	2 Matches	1 Match
		Body	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand
Careless	Severe	High/Groin/Chest	4 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
		Body	3 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
	High	High/Groin/Chest	3 Matches	2 Matches
		Body	2 Matches	1 Match
	Medium	High/Groin/Chest	2 Matches	1 Match
		Body	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand
	Low	High/Groin/Chest	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand
		Body	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand

Some main points of consideration: (Taken from Appendix 1- National Community Football Policy Handbook). These points should be reviewed in conjunction with the entirety of Appendix 1 and not as stand alone rules or advice.

3. Determining the grading of Classifiable Offences

(b)(i)(B) the absence of injury does not preclude the classification of Impact as Low, Medium, High or Severe
(b)(i)(C) the potential to cause injury must also be factored into the determination of Impact, particularly in the following cases:
(1) intentional strikes, such as those with a swinging clenched fist, raised forearm or elbow;
(2) high bumps, particularly with significant head contact and/or momentum;
(3) any head-high contact with a Player who has their head over the ball, particularly when contact is made from an opponent approaching from a front-on position;
(4) forceful round-arm swings that make head-high contact to a Player in a marking contest, ruck contest or when tackling;
(5) any contact that occurs when the other Person should not reasonably expect or is not reasonably prepared for contact (i.e contact off the ball)
(6) any dangerous tackle

(c)(i) High Contact is not limited to contact to the head and includes contact to the top of the shoulders.

(c)(vii) Contact will be classified as High, to the Groin, or in the case of females only, to the Chest, where a Person's head, groin or chest makes contact with another Person or object such as the fence or the ground as a result of the actions of the offending Person. By way of example, should a Person tackle another Person around the waist and as a result of the tackle, the tackled Person's head makes forceful contact with the fence or the ground the Contact in these circumstances would be classified as High, even though the tackle was to the body.

(e) The Controlling Body and the Tribunal can inquire and receive information as to the nature and extent of any injury suffered by a Person in relation to a Reportable Offence. The nature and extent of injury may be a relevant factor in determining the level of Impact, Contact and in some instances, the nature of the Conduct.

Auditory Offences Grading Matrix

Receiver	Conduct	Volume	Base Sanction	Early Guilty Plea
Umpire	Threatening	Any	6 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	5
	High-level	Loud	5	4
		Medium or Low	4	3
	Medium / Low-level	Loud	3	2
		Medium or Low	2	1
Other Person	Threatening	Loud	4 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	3
		Medium or Low	3	2
	High-level	Low	3	2
		Medium or Low	2	1
	Medium / Low-level	Loud	2	1
		Medium or Low	1	Reprimand

6(c) Interpretive provisions of Auditory Offences

6(c)(B) Threatening language means language that conveys an intention to cause bodily harm or cause someone to feel vulnerable or at risk.

6(c)(C) High-level and Medium/Low-level Abusive, Obscene or Insulting language includes rude, shocking or offensive language which may abuse, insult or offend any person or group.
In relation to the grading of an auditory offence, the following factors will be considered:

1. The nature of the language
2. The tone of the language
3. The extent of aggression in the language
4. The actual or potential hurt caused by the language
5. The body language of the offending Person