



Directive for all Rugby Organisations and Participants Match Official Abuse

1. Match Official Abuse (**MO Abuse**) is one of the most significant threats to the integrity of Rugby in Australia. It is an issue our game has been tackling together and as we enter the 2026 season, we are encouraged by a decrease in reported MO Abuse incidents. While this progress is meaningful, the severity of cases being reported is increasing which is an issue we must address.
2. Rugby Australia (**Rugby AU**) has zero tolerance for any form of MO Abuse. It undermines the core values of our sport – **Discipline, Respect, Integrity, Passion and Teamwork** – and causes real harm to our dedicated Match Officials, deterring participation.
3. This Directive recognises the progress our community has made and reaffirms our commitment to going further. Together, we are building a safer, more respectful environment for our Match officials and we call on all members of the Australian Rugby community to collectively **do more** and **do better** to foster a safe and respectful environment for all Match Officials.
4. This Directive is issued for the purposes of rule 92(b) of Rugby AU's [Disciplinary Rules](#) and clause 18.5(a)(vi) of Rugby AU's [Code of Conduct](#). It serves as a clear basis for increasing sanctions in cases of MO Abuse. It also provides guidance for Judicial Committees, Code of Conduct Committees and Complaint Handlers in managing and sanctioning MO Abuse matters.
5. This Directive complements Rugby AU's [Three Strike Policy](#) introduced in 2024, which holds Clubs to account for the abusive behaviour of their participants.
6. Through this Directive, all Participants, Members, Clubs and Rugby Bodies are reminded that increased sanctions will continue to be imposed under the Disciplinary Rules and Code of Conduct for anyone who commits MO Abuse. Strong and consistent sanctions are essential to protecting our Match Officials and to ensuring that everyone in our game understands that this behaviour is not acceptable.
7. Our message is clear; whether you are on the field or on the sidelines - **if you engage in MO Abuse, expect to spend time away from the Game.**

What is MO Abuse?

8. MO Abuse includes any behaviour directed towards a Match Official that violates Rugby's core values of: **Discipline, Respect, Integrity, Passion and Teamwork**. This may involve dissent, harassment, intimidation or verbal or physical abuse. It can occur before, during or after a match and on or off the field.



9. Under this Directive a Match Official includes all officials and administrators of our Game such as Referees, Match Managers, Ground Marshals, Match Day Doctors, Timekeepers and Competition Managers.

The Human Impact

10. Match Officials at every level of Rugby deserve to be, and feel, safe and respected every time they participate. While there has been a decrease in reported cases, MO Abuse continues to account **for over 50% of all reported incidents**. The overall decrease in incidents is encouraging yet the volume and the increasing severity of the cases that remain tells us there is important work still to do.
11. Incidents that cause our Match Officials to feel unsafe or to question whether they want to continue in the game are unacceptable, and they will be treated accordingly. Protecting our Match Officials so that they feel safe, respected and valued every time they participate is a responsibility that we all share, and one we take seriously.
12. The progress we have made is something to be proud of, and we know that together we can continue to **do more** and **do better**. **Without our Match Officials, there is no Game.**

On-field MO Abuse (Disciplinary Rules)

13. Our Judicial Committees play a vital role in upholding the standards our game expects. All cases of on-field MO Abuse must be treated with the utmost seriousness and sanctioned in a manner that reflects the gravity of the conduct and supports a culture of respect.
14. Rugby AU's Disciplinary Rules set out a four-step process for determining sanctions. Appendix 1 of the Rules provides a sanction table that covers a range of MO Abuse including disrespect/dissent, verbal abuse, physical contact, threats, and physical abuse.
15. While every case must be decided on its individual facts, Rugby AU expects that strong and meaningful sanctions will be imposed in all MO Abuse cases. Appropriate sanctions send a clear message to the wider Rugby community that this behaviour will not be tolerated and give individuals every reason to reflect and make better choices.
16. Without limiting the discretion of Judicial or Appeal Committees, Rugby AU strongly recommends the following approach when determining sanctions for MO Abuse under the Disciplinary Rules:
 - a. **Assessing Seriousness (rules 85-88)**: Committees should carefully consider the level of seriousness of the offending conduct and the consequential entry point for sanction. In MO Abuse cases, factors such as the nature of the abuse and the vulnerability of the Match Official are particularly relevant and may increase the level of seriousness.
 - b. **Mitigation (rules 89-91)**: Mitigation should only be applied where clearly justified. Judicial and Appeal Committees must ensure that any reduction in sanction meets the criteria set out in the Disciplinary Rules and aligns with World Rugby guidance. To warrant the full 50% discount, the following elements should generally all be present:
 - A clear admission of the act of Foul Play

- A previously clean disciplinary record
- A meaningful apology directed to the Match Official
- Genuine remorse, demonstrated without attempts to explain away or minimise the behaviour

Even where mitigation is applied, Committees are strongly encouraged to ensure the final sanction remains meaningful and one that genuinely reflects the seriousness of the conduct. A sanction should reinforce that MO Abuse carries real consequences, including time away from the Game.

- c. **Aggravation (rule 92):** In all cases of MO Abuse – unless the sanction is already at the Maximum of the sanction table – an **increase in sanction must be applied** due to aggravating factors.

This Directive, along with those issued in 2022 and 2023, has clearly and repeatedly placed the Australian Rugby community on notice regarding the seriousness of MO Abuse and the need for stronger deterrence. The progress we have seen is encouraging, but the increasing severity of cases being reported reinforces why this Directive remains as important as ever.

Committees must ensure their sanctions reflect the full gravity of the conduct before them, particularly where behaviour is aggravated, repeated or has caused genuine harm to the individual. As such, the aggravating factor of needing to deter this specific type of offending is always present and must result in an increased sanction in every MO Abuse case.

This increase applies regardless of the initial sanction entry point (even if already in the upper range) and irrespective of whether mitigation has been applied. The extent of the increase should be determined having regard to the seriousness of the conduct itself.

Off-field MO Abuse (Code of Conduct)

17. MO Abuse does not stop at the sideline. All instances of off-field MO Abuse fall under the scope of Rugby AU's Code of Conduct and must be sanctioned in a manner that reflects the impact of the conduct on the individual and our game.
18. Every proven case of MO Abuse must result in a sanction. While each case will be decided on its individual facts, Rugby AU expects that **strong and meaningful sanctions** will be proposed in Breach Notices and imposed by Code of Conduct and Appeal Committees.
19. Without limiting the discretion of Complaint Handlers or Code of Conduct or Appeal Committees, Rugby AU strongly recommends the following approach when determining sanctions for MO Abuse under the Code of Conduct:
 - a. **Assessing the Seriousness (clause 18.4):** given the serious nature of MO Abuse – its impact on the individual, the integrity of the game, and public perception - most MO Abuse cases should be classified as **Mid-Level** or **High-Level Breaches**.
 - b. **Sanction Type (clause 18.3):** To effectively deter MO Abuse, sanctions must include a **period of suspension or exclusion**.

To genuinely protect our Match Officials and drive lasting cultural change, reprimands, warnings, apologies or fines alone are not sufficient. The Code of Conduct must be applied with consistency and resolve, so that our officials and our community, can have confidence that the game stands firmly behind them.

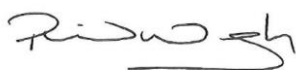
Mitigation may be considered by Complaint Handlers, Code of Conduct and Appeal Committees where clearly warranted. However, Rugby AU's clear expectation is that **any individual found to have engaged in MO Abuse must spend time away from the Game.**

- c. **Length of Sanction:** The duration of any suspension or exclusion must reflect the need to deter both the individual and the broader rugby community. Sanction lengths should be informed by the standards set under the Disciplinary Rules for similar conduct, recognising that MO Abuse is equally harmful whether it occurs on or off the field.

Our Collective Responsibility

- 20. Consistency in sanctioning is fundamental to the integrity of our game and to the confidence our Match Officials place in us. Where sanctions do not appear to reflect a proper application of the Disciplinary Rules or the Code of Conduct, they will be reviewed and may be appealed where appropriate. Rugby AU is committed to fair, consistent and transparent disciplinary outcomes across the game.
- 21. We ask all Member Unions to continue working with us to uphold these standards. Where MO Abuse cases within your jurisdiction may not have been sanctioned in line with this Directive, please refer these to Rugby AU for review. This is how we maintain the consistency and trust our Match Officials deserve.
- 22. We approach the end of the 2026 season with genuine confidence in what our community has achieved and excitement for what lies ahead. Protecting our Match Officials and upholding the core values of our Game is a **shared responsibility**. Let's work together to ensure the individuals who give their time and expertise to officiate our great Game are respected.

Thank you for your continued support.



Phil Waugh
Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer
Rugby Australia

Effective: 1 July 2026