

REFEREE CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

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1. PURPOSE

Football Victoria (FV) is committed to maintaining the integrity, impartiality and credibility of football officiating across all levels of the game.

FV recognises that referees are frequently involved in the broader football community as players, coaches, club members, volunteers and supporters. These connections may give rise to actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

The existence of such connections does not necessarily compromise a referee's ability to officiate impartially.

This policy establishes a transparent and proportionate framework for identifying, declaring and managing conflicts of interest while recognising the practical requirements of referee appointments, particularly within community football.

A declared potential or perceived conflict of interest does not automatically prevent a referee from officiating.

FV will assess relevant circumstances on a case-by-case basis and retains the authority to determine whether an appointment is appropriate.

Clubs are reminded of the relevant Rules of Competition (which can be found on the FV website) which contains FV's expectations on participating teams when a neutral, FV appointed Referee is unavailable for a match.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all FV-registered referees and match officials officiating in FV-sanctioned competitions, including community, junior, senior and advanced competitions.

It applies to appointments made directly by FV and fixtures selected or accepted by referees through an approved self-allocation system.

All referees remain responsible for maintaining impartiality, professionalism and compliance with the FV Referee Code of Ethics.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 Actual Conflict of Interest

An actual conflict exists where a referee has a direct personal, familial, financial or organisational interest that compromises their ability to officiate impartially.

3.2 Potential Conflict of Interest

A potential conflict exists where a referee's circumstances, affiliations or relationships could reasonably develop into an actual conflict of interest.

3.3 Perceived Conflict of Interest

A perceived conflict exists where a reasonable and informed person could question a referee's impartiality because of an existing relationship, affiliation or interest, even where no actual bias exists.

3.4 Incidental Connection

An incidental connection is a minor or ordinary association arising from participation in the football community that would not reasonably be expected to influence the referee's impartiality.

4. REFEREE RESPONSIBILITIES

Referees must:

- Perform their duties impartially, honestly and without favouritism.
- Declare relevant ongoing affiliations, relationships or interests that may create an actual, potential or reasonably perceived conflict.
- Ensure their declarations remain accurate and notify FV of material changes.
- Avoid appointments involving direct conflicts of interest unless expressly authorised by FV.
- Comply with any appointment restrictions or directions issued by FV.
- Maintain the highest standards of professionalism regardless of any declared affiliation.

Referees are not required to declare every casual acquaintance or incidental connection developed through participation in football.

However, where a referee is uncertain whether a relationship or affiliation may constitute a relevant conflict, they are encouraged to disclose the circumstances to FV.

5. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Referees must declare relevant ongoing affiliations and relationships through the FV Referee Conflict of Interest Declaration Form.

Declarations may include:

- Clubs with which the referee is registered or actively involved.
- Clubs or teams for which the referee plays, coaches, manages or volunteers.
- Immediate family members involved in participating team
- Close personal relationships with individuals directly involved in a club or team.
- Financial, commercial or organisational interests that may reasonably affect impartiality.
- Other circumstances that could give rise to a significant actual, potential or perceived conflict.

Referees will ordinarily be required to complete a declaration upon registration or renewal and update it where their circumstances materially change.

Submitting a declaration does not automatically restrict a referee from accepting or officiating fixtures.

FV may review any declared relationship and communicate specific restrictions where considered necessary.

6. MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

FV recognises that not all conflicts present the same level of risk.

Conflicts will be assessed proportionately, having regard to the nature of the relationship, the level of competition and the circumstances of the appointment.

6.1 Direct Conflicts of Interest

Referees must not ordinarily officiate matches involving:

- Their own child or immediate family member participating as a player or directly involved coach.
- A team they currently coach, manage or directly administer.
- A team for which they are currently registered as a player.
- A match in which they have a direct financial or other substantial personal interest.

These circumstances will generally require the referee to decline or be removed from the appointment.

Any exception requires express prior authorisation from FV.

6.2 Potential or Perceived Conflicts of Interest

Potential or perceived conflicts may include:

- A referee being registered with a club involved in the fixture without direct involvement in the participating team.
- A referee having previously played for or coached a participating club.
- A referee having friendships or other personal relationships with players, coaches or club officials.
- A referee having indirect family or social connections with a participating club.
- A referee holding a general club membership or volunteer position unrelated to the participating team.

These circumstances do not automatically prohibit a referee from officiating.

FV may permit the appointment where it determines that the circumstances do not present an unacceptable risk to the integrity or perceived impartiality of the match.

6.3 Incidental Connections

FV acknowledges that referees, players, coaches and club officials may know one another through schools, workplaces, previous football involvement or general community participation.

Such connections will not ordinarily constitute a disqualifying conflict unless additional circumstances reasonably call the referee's impartiality into question.

7. CASE-BY-CASE ASSESSMENT

When reviewing a declared or identified conflict, FV may consider:

- The nature, closeness and extent of the relationship or affiliation.
- Whether the referee has direct involvement with either participating team.
- Whether the conflict is actual, potential or perceived.
- The level, significance and competitive context of the fixture.
- Whether the referee has previously demonstrated impartiality and professionalism.
- The availability of appropriately qualified alternative match officials.
- The potential consequences for competition integrity and stakeholder confidence.
- Whether reasonable safeguards can sufficiently manage the identified risk.

Referee availability and the operational requirements of community football may be considered as part of the assessment. However, these factors will not independently justify an appointment involving an unacceptable integrity risk.

FV retains sole discretion under this policy to determine whether a referee may continue with an appointment, subject to applicable competition regulations and other binding requirements.

8. SELF-ALLOCATION OF MATCHES

FV recognises that certain community competitions operate through a referee self-allocation system.

Under this system, referees may select available fixtures, subject to applicable eligibility requirements, declarations and any restrictions communicated by FV.

Referees who have completed their required declarations may generally continue to self-allocate fixtures without seeking individual approval for every appointment.

However:

- Referees must not knowingly accept fixtures involving a prohibited direct conflict.
- Referees must comply with any specific restrictions issued by FV.
- FV may review and amend any self-allocated appointment.
- Acceptance of a fixture does not override a referee's obligation to disclose a relevant conflict.
- Where a new or materially different conflict arises, the referee must notify FV as soon as reasonably practicable.

FV reserves the right to remove or reassign referees where an appointment is considered inappropriate.

9. FV AUTHORITY AND DISCRETION

FV may, at its discretion:

- Determine that a declared conflict does not warrant any appointment restriction.
- Approve an appointment subject to specific conditions.
- Restrict a referee from officiating particular teams, clubs, competitions or fixtures.
- Reassign or withdraw an appointment.
- Request additional information concerning a declared or alleged conflict.
- Review or amend a previous determination where circumstances change.

A determination allowing a referee to officiate despite a declared potential or perceived conflict does not constitute acceptance of biased conduct or a reduction in the referee's ethical obligations.

Approval may be reviewed or withdrawn at any time where new information or circumstances justify doing so.

10. COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS

FV may review complaints or information suggesting that a referee has an undisclosed conflict of interest.

The existence of a relationship, affiliation or perceived conflict does not, of itself, establish that a referee has acted improperly or officiated with bias.

Where appropriate, FV may investigate the circumstances and determine whether further action is required.

An allegation or finding of a conflict of interest does not automatically invalidate a match result. Any decision affecting the status or result of a fixture will be determined in accordance with the applicable FV competition regulations and relevant procedures.

11. FAILURE TO DISCLOSE

Referees are responsible for making accurate and timely declarations.

Where a referee fails to disclose a relevant conflict, FV may consider:

- Whether the omission was deliberate or inadvertent.
- The significance of the undisclosed relationship or interest.
- Whether the referee knew or reasonably should have known that disclosure was required.
- Whether the omission affected the integrity of an appointment.
- Whether similar conduct has occurred previously.

FV may respond through education, a direction to update the declaration, appointment restrictions or referral under the applicable disciplinary procedures.

Deliberate concealment or repeated non-compliance may result in more serious action.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORDKEEPING

FV will maintain records of declarations and relevant determinations in accordance with its applicable privacy and records-management requirements.

Information provided by referees will be accessed and used only where reasonably necessary for conflict management, appointment administration, compliance or related legitimate purposes.

FV is not ordinarily required to disclose a referee's personal declaration details to participating clubs or other third parties, except where required or authorised by law or applicable regulations.

13. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REFEREE CODE OF ETHICS

This policy is intended to operate alongside the FV Referee Code of Ethics and other applicable regulations.

Where the Code of Ethics addresses referee conflicts of interest, this policy provides the framework for disclosure, assessment and management.

Any inconsistent provisions should be formally amended to ensure a clear and consistent approach.

Nothing in this policy permits dishonest, biased, discriminatory or otherwise improper officiating.

14. POLICY REVIEW

FV may review this policy periodically to ensure it remains appropriate for the integrity and operational requirements of football competitions across Victoria.

FV may amend declaration requirements, assessment criteria and administrative processes where necessary.