

AFL Statement – Laws of the Game 2014

The AFL today wrote to all clubs to advise the AFL Commission had considered a number of matters around the Laws of the Game for the 2014 Toyota AFL Premiership Season, with the key focus on player safety and long-term health.

AFL General Manager Football Operations Mark Evans said the Commission had approved a number of changes to current interpretations of the Laws as follows to further protect players from head and serious lower leg injuries:

- - **Rough Conduct, Head Clashes** – A player electing to bump will be cited for rough conduct if contact comes via a head clash, and players will be instructed a head clash should be reasonably foreseen when bumping.
- - **Forceful Contact Below Knees** – A free kick to be paid where a player makes forceful contact below the knees or acts in a manner likely to cause injury, even if contact does not occur.
- - **High Contact** – Changes to discourage players from seeking to draw forceful high contact.

Mr Evans said the AFL's Football Department had been guided by widespread industry consultation with Clubs, the AFLPA, AFL Coaches Association, AFL Medical Officers, key industry groups and fan research, along with the recent club summit on the Laws last month at the Gold Coast, before making its recommendations to the Commission.

"The AFL's long-term commitment is to both keep the game safe to play and great to watch by protecting the traditional highlights of our indigenous game that separate it from all other sports," Mr Evans said.

"From our research, the number one guiding principle for fans is that the game should remain a physically tough and contested game with body contact, however nearly three quarters of fans agree that player welfare should be at the heart of the Laws.

In regard to the alterations around interpretations of various parts of the Laws, Mr Evans said further detail on each point was as follows:

Rough conduct – Head clashes in bumps – The Tribunal Guidelines and DVD will be amended to provide for a player to be cited for Rough Conduct, where in the bumping of an opponent he causes forceful contact to be made to his opponents head or neck – *even if that contact is caused by a clash of heads*. Umpires will be instructed to award free kicks and report players for rough conduct where necessary. In recent years the Tribunal DVD has proposed that a clash of heads when one player elects to bump an opponent should be regarded as having been caused by circumstances outside of the control of the player which could not reasonably be foreseen. The 2014 guidelines will reinforce to players their duty of care when they elect to bump an opponent, and that a clash of heads is an action that could reasonably be foreseen.

Forceful contact below the knees – This rule was introduced in 2013 to reduce the likelihood of lower leg injury from forceful contact below the knees. In 2014 a free kick will be paid for

- - **Forceful** contact below the knees, or
- - **Conduct in a manner likely to cause injury** – even if there is no contact or the contact is not forceful

The second part of this interpretation allows a free kick to be paid against a reckless action, even if an opponent has evaded the contact. This is similar in nature to interpretation of kicking in a dangerous manner where a free kick can be paid regardless of whether contact has occurred.

High contact – Players leading with the head – The aim is to discourage players from seeking to draw forceful head high contact. To discourage players, the following changes have been approved:

- - A player who drives his head into a stationary or near stationary player shall be regarded as having had prior opportunity. If legally tackled following this he will be required to legally dispose of the ball or he will be penalised
- - Where a player ducks into a tackle and is the cause of high contact the umpire will call play on.

“These amendments are in keeping with the AFL’s strong stance to protect against head injury,” Mr Evans said.

Mr Evans said the Commission had also approved a change to the wording of Law 15.4.5 (d), to provide greater clarity for the player who was seeking to contest the ball in marking contests, and to allow a greater measure of physicality between opponents.

The Laws has been amended to read that prohibited contact and a free kick will be paid against a player when he ‘... *unduly* pushes, bumps, blocks or holds ...’ in a marking contest.

“The change to the Law, with the introduction of the use of the word ‘unduly’ to define prohibited contact, is to allow players to use their bodies and reward the player whose genuine objective is to contest a mark,” Mr Evans said.

“A change to the Laws of the Game can only be put forward to the Commission once it has been determined there is a real and proven need for any change, and we must then provide a clear reference point for the AFL Umpiring Department,” Evans said.

“The Club consultation and Laws Summit feedback indicated strong support for marking players to be allowed the opportunity to use their body when protecting their position in the marking contest and allowing the controlling umpire the discretion to determine whether the force imparted by players within a marking contest is excessive and warrants a free kick.

“There will still be expectation that players demonstrate they are legitimately attempting to mark the ball, but players can use their body to protect space so long as those actions are incidental to the marking contest.

Free kicks will continue to be paid in marking contests where a player unduly pushes, bumps, blocks or holds their opponent in a marking contest or forcibly or prematurely removes an opponent from the marking contest,” he said.

A number of other interpretation or match-day procedure changes were also formalised:

Protected area – Hands in the air – The strict interpretation of ‘hands in the air’ within the protected area and a 50-metre penalty against the defending team will be modified so that the controlling umpire will have the discretion to determine whether a player within the protected area has delayed or impacted the player in possession of the football.

Interchange – Players may not deliberately delay their entry to the Playing Surface when interchanging, or teams will face a financial sanction. Teams will be allowed to correct an interchange breach, without any free kick penalty, by a player returning to the interchange box, if corrected immediately and without affecting play or another player. Officials will be instructed to continue to award a free kick plus 50-metre penalty to be paid where 19 players are on the field and participating in play.

On-field officials –The AFL has sought to limit both the number of occasions and the length of time that team officials may enter the field of play. The financial sanctions against clubs will be increased where it is found that medical staff are used to deliver coaching messages. The number of trainers permitted to enter the field has been reduced from six to four, with a fifth trainer allowed to enter the field only the case of stretcher incidents. Runners will be restricted in their time on the playing surface and reduced from two runners to one runner per club.

In August, the AFL Commission approved a cap on interchange rotations for the next two years across the 2014 and 2015 Toyota AFL Premiership Seasons of 120 rotations per match, plus any changes made at quarter breaks and the use of the substitute.

The interchange cap will not have any quarter by quarter restrictions, with the use of the interchange numbers per match to be managed as each club sees fit across the entirety of a game.

The Laws Committee comprises: Mark Evans (Chairman), Kevin Bartlett, Joel Bowden, Brett Burton, Rodney Eade, Tom Harley, Leigh Matthews, Michael Sexton and Beau Waters.