

COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE PORT LINCOLN RACING CLUB



To be read in conjunction with the PLRC's Complaints Handling Policy

1 Purpose and Scope

Port Lincoln Racing Club provides a range of services and infrastructure to the racing industry and extended community. The Club is committed to the provision of quality service to customers and regards complaints as an opportunity to improve facilities, practices and procedures, as well as resolve the matter.

The Club will maintain a procedure on complaints about the actions of the Club, employees of the Club, or other persons acting on behalf of the Club.

This Complaints Handling Procedure commences at the point that a complaint is received and covers processes for

- resolving complaints
- using complaint investigations to directly inform service improvements

The aim of this procedure, which is available on the Club's website, is to ensure complainants receive a fair, consistent and structured process when staff and Board are managing complaints about actions of the Club or its employees or representatives. This procedure does not apply to matters that do not fall within the Club's jurisdiction. These types of issues will be referred to other agencies.

1.1 Responsibility

This procedure applies to all the Club staff who may be involved in receiving or processing a complaint in the course of their work.

Staff will act reasonably and transparently, demonstrate good customer service, undertake their responsibilities in a proficient manner and use their judgement where necessary to ensure an outcome in line with the Club's Complaints Policy.

1.2 Legislation & Policy

Complaints Policy

Customer Service Policy

Codes of Conduct - Committee, Employees, Industry people

Internal Review of the Club Decisions Procedure

Whistleblowers Policy

Fraud & Corruption Policy

1.3 Definitions

An **Employee** is any person who is employed by the Club, but also includes any contractors, volunteers, trainees, work experience students and consultants undertaking work for, or on behalf of the Club whether they are working in a full-time, part-time or casual capacity.

Business Day means a day when the Club is normally open for business.

The Club defines a **complaint** as:

An expression of dissatisfaction with a product or service delivered by the Club or its representatives that has failed to reach the standard stated, implied or expected. This includes complaints about a service that has been, or should have been delivered.

Where the Club has failed to meet the normal standards for a service which has been, or should have been, delivered this procedure applies.

1.4 General Notes

The Club also receives service requests and feedback across all areas of operations and clarification may be necessary to make the distinction for the purposes of this procedure.

A **Request for Service** is an application to have the Club or its representative take some form of action to provide a Club service.

Feedback can take the form of comments, both positive and negative, about services provided by the Club without necessarily requiring a corrective action, change of services or formal review of a decision. Feedback may, however, influence future service reviews and delivery methods.

Communication with the complainant is an important ongoing process while undertaking the actions necessary to resolve a complaint. When immediate resolution is not possible, the complainant must be regularly kept informed of progress, either by email, letter or in person.

1.5 Principles Underlying the Procedure

This policy is based on five principles, which will be fundamental in the way the Club approaches complaint handling. They are:

- Fairness: treating complainants fairly, requires impartiality, confidentiality and transparency at all stages of the process
- Accessibility: to be accessible there must be clear public awareness about the Club's policy and a range of contact options
- Responsiveness: this will be achieved by providing sufficient resources, well trained staff and review and improvement of the systems
- Efficiency: complaints will be resolved as quickly as possible, while ensuring that they are dealt with at a level that reflects their appropriate level of complexity
- Integration: of different areas of the Club where the complaint overlaps functional responsibilities

2 Relevant Documentation

Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling*;
Ombudsman South Australia, *Good Practice Guide*;
Australian Standard ISO 10002-2006, Customer satisfaction –guidelines for complaint handling in organisations.

3 Records Management

All documents, notes, photographs and correspondence must be retained and stored in accordance with the Club's Records Management protocols.

All complaints must be recorded in the Club's records management system in such a way that the information can also be analysed for service improvement opportunities.

4 Procedure

The Club welcomes complaints as a way of improving its services and programs as well as providing an opportunity to put things right. The following steps are to be followed by staff to ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively:

- Acknowledge complaints promptly
- Assess the complaint - simple problems may not need to be investigated
- Conduct an investigation where one is warranted
- Respond to the complainant via the appropriate channel – in person, phone, email etc
- Follow up any customer service concerns with parties involved
- Consider whether there are systemic issues which need correction
- Action any changes required

4.1 Assisting with the lodgement of a complaint

It is essential that no one is excluded from lodging a complaint because of any difficulties they may have representing themselves. All staff are expected to offer assistance where appropriate and provide it on request, including assistance in documenting the complaint in writing when circumstances warrant.

If necessary, where possible arrange access to interpreters, aids or advocates to ensure that a complainant is treated equitably.

4.2 Receiving a complaint

A person can make a complaint in a number of ways:

- In person to a PLRC employee, manager or board member
- Telephone
- Email
- Letter
- Visit the Club's Administration Office
- Complete and return the appropriate form on the PLRC website

4.2.1 Written complaints

All written complaints, whether received by letter, standard form, the Club's website or email are to be forwarded to the Administration Manager for registration and assignment.

Where a complainant presents at the Administration Office it is the responsibility of the staff member present to determine whether the matter can be dealt with immediately. (If yes, see 4.4.) If not, the complainant should be encouraged to put the complaint in writing and assisted, where necessary, by a staff member of the Club.

4.2.2 Verbal Complaints

Verbal complaints received by the Club must be recorded and forwarded to the Administration Manager who will liaise with the service area to which the complaint relates.

Record comprehensive details of the complaint, including

- Date and time of call / or complaint in person
- Complaint taken by
- Complainant's Name
- Complainant's email address
- Complainant's contact phone number
- If calling on behalf of another, full contact details for that person
- Document issues and allegations as reported
- Record who the complaint was assigned to (e.g. Bar Manager, Curator, Chairman etc.)

Verbal complaints may also be received by staff in the course of their work. All staff are expected to resolve, reassign or report these complaints as appropriate, including ensuring that they are properly recorded for future analysis.

4.2.3 Anonymous Complaints

It can be difficult to effectively deal with an anonymous complaint. When taking details of a complaint, encourage the customer to provide their identity in order for their complaint to be fully assessed and processed.

Anonymous complaints must still be logged and addressed by the service area involved in order to identify possible areas for service improvement.

4.2.4 Assignment of Complaints

Assignment of the complaint will include determining who will investigate and at what level the complaint should be dealt with in the first instance. Wherever possible complaints will be handled independently of the original decision-maker or officer involved in the matter that is the subject of the complaint.

4.3 Responsibilities of all staff when handling complaints

The Club expects that the complaint handling system will be fair to the complainant, the Club and any person against whom a complaint is made. The rules of fairness, reasonableness and unbiased decision-making should be applied and all parties involved should be given the opportunity to respond to any issues raised.

To this end staff are expected to:

- Treat complaints seriously and complainants with sensitivity, respect and courtesy
- Give the complainant an opportunity to have their complaint dealt with by a staff member/ Board member not previously involved in the matter
- Ensure all conflicts of interest are disclosed and acted upon
- Judge complaints on their merits and facts, after obtaining and considering all relevant information
- Give equal treatment to all people
- Ensure an appropriate and timely remedy is provided where the complaint is substantiated
- Provide all parties with clear reasons as to why any actions have / have not been taken
- Inform complainant of any further avenues of review

Being responsive to complainants reflects the Club's commitment to quality service and can prevent the escalation of complaints. Complaints are to be dealt with quickly, transparently and within established timelines:

- Advise complainants of the process to be followed and approximately how long it will take to deal with the complaint
- Keep them informed of progress and the reasons for any delays
- Resolve or make further enquiries as soon as practicably possible
- Where a complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, explain the decision clearly and offer any possible alternative actions or review opportunities

The Club must handle complaint information according to procedure and the identity of complainants will be made known only to those who need to consider or know about the complaint and will not be revealed to any other person or made public, except where required by law. Confidentiality is not to be used as an excuse to avoid dealing with a complaint.

Information gathered during the complaint process will only be:

- Used in order to deal with and resolve the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from a complaint
- Shared with the Club staff & Board on a need to know basis
- Disclosed only in accordance with legal requirements and after consultation with person affected.

Information may be disclosed publicly in a de-identified format for annual reporting, training and other purposes required by legislation.

4.3.1 Responsibility of Board Members when handling complaints

If a complaint cannot be resolved immediately, the Clubs Board members are to forward customer complaints to the Chairperson and/ or Administration Manager for action.

4.4 Frontline Resolution of a Complaint

All staff are empowered to handle complaints in the first instance and it is preferable that they are dealt with promptly at the initial point of contact and at the appropriate staffing level. Dealing with a complaint at this level can include referral to another staff member or Board member who has had no involvement in the matter.

4.4.1 Understanding Complainants

Make contact with the complainant as soon as possible and arrange to meet if necessary, to fully understand the concerns. How the first contact with a complainant is handled is extremely important.

When people complain they want to:

- Feel safe and secure
- Be listened to without interruption
- Be heard but not judged
- Have their point of view understood and acknowledged

- Be treated as an individual, with respect and courtesy
- Be provided with an explanation
- Be thanked for taking the time to provide feedback
- Be given an apology
- Have corrective action taken as soon as possible
- Make sure the problem never happens again

Even when the outcome is not what they want, people should feel that they have been treated decently and that the process has been fair.

Sometimes resolving the complaint involves:

- Giving more information (within reason and without disclosing confidential information)
- Providing an explanation
- Providing a service or goods of an appropriate value as compensation
- Suggesting an alternate solution
- Expressing empathy and understanding where there is no solution
- Giving an apology, regardless of rights or wrongs, to acknowledge that the complainant feels aggrieved, without passing judgement on the nature of the grievance or alluding to any likely outcome

4.4.2 Transfer Required

If it is necessary to refer the matter to another staff member or Board member, ensure that this person is fully briefed and able to make a decision. Having their complaint transferred can be frustrating for the complainant, so ensure that they do not have to explain everything again.

Advise the complainant of the reason for the transfer of responsibility and explain the process and approximate timeframes which will be followed.

Ensure that the complaint has been logged and updated before transferring.

4.4.3 When to immediately transfer a complaint

There are also other complaint procedures which apply to particular types of complaints. If the complaint would be more properly dealt with by another process this should be explained to the complainant at the outset. For example:

- Ombudsman
- Insurance claims
- Decisions made under legislation (eg intoxication of patrons etc.)
- Police

Ensure that the complainant has sufficient information to initiate the alternative process.

There are some types of complaints which must be automatically transferred to the Board. These include:

- Complaints about a decision of the Board
- Complaints in relation to a Board Member or the Chief Executive Officer or a person filling this role (eg Administration Manager)

- Where the problem is clearly outside of the staff member's delegation or area of expertise
- Complaints alleging fraud, corruption or other criminal behaviour, which should be referred to SAPOL
- Complaints involving an allegation of serious or controversial conduct by a staff member where disciplinary action is a possible outcome

Ensure that the complaint is documented and lodged in the Club's records management system, or request immediate assistance from a senior staff member or Board member for this, depending on the circumstances and nature of the complaint.

4.5 Handling Complaints at a Senior Level

A complaint should be directed to a more senior staff member (eg Administration Manager) in the Club, where circumstances indicate that the complaint would be more appropriately handled at a higher level. Examples include where the complaint:

- ranges across more than one service area within the Club
- concerns a contractor or consultant
- alleges improper conduct by a staff member
- has a high degree of complexity
- if a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or handling of the complaint at the frontline level

In the great majority of cases, complaints should be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties at this level.

4.5.1 Process of assigning a senior staff member

As a matter of good practice, complaints should be escalated to the appropriate manager/senior staff member of the areas to which the complaint is directed, provided that person has not been involved in the matter that is the subject of the complaint and is able to bring an objective mind to the resolution of the complaint.

All complaints that cannot be resolved by senior staff must be referred to the Chairperson of the Board for determination of the next course of action. The referral should occur promptly and the complainant should understand the process and expected timeline for the next course of action.

Document your involvement to date in the complaints handling system.

4.5.2 Deciding how to proceed

Each complaint must be assessed to determine its nature, how it should be dealt with, when it should be dealt with, who should be involved and whether further information or investigation is required.

The first step is to assess the nature of the complaint, as not all complaints require investigation. Many complaints involve communication problems or misunderstandings that can be resolved informally by talking to the complainant or discussion between the parties, or through other processes such as mediation.

Certain types of investigations are subject to particular legislative requirements. In these cases, the assessment of the complaint and the nature of the investigation must be undertaken in light of the relevant legislative framework.

Determine what course of action is most appropriate in the particular circumstances.

Issues to consider in the assessment of a complaint include:

- the need and requirement of immediate action
- how serious the complaint is and the significance it has for the complainant and for the Club
- complexity
- whether it indicates the existence of a systemic problem
- whether an alternative and satisfactory means of remedy is available
- whether the parties are agreeable to informal resolution of the complaint
- whether the complaint is trivial, frivolous or without merit
- the time that has elapsed between event and complaint

If an investigation is not warranted, contact the complainant to provide a formal response or propose other actions.

Document all actions in the complaints handling system.

4.5.3 Undertaking an investigation

When planning an investigation, gathering evidence and making a decision each step should be documented and assessed. Every effort should be made to finalise the complaint at club level. See section 4.7 Remedies below.

Ensure that the complainant receives regular updates about the progress of the investigation and a formal response including reasons for the decision.

Document all actions in the complaints record management system.

4.6 Internal review

Internal review of a Club decision is available. However, this process may also be used in relation to more serious situations which require an immediate, high level response, such as a complaint about a decision of the Administration Manager or a resolution of the Club. [see The Club's Internal Review Procedure]

4.7 Remedies

Where a complaint is considered justified, the next step is to determine an appropriate remedy or response to the complaint. By working to address the complaint, the Club is making a commitment to meeting the complainant's needs, improving internal processes, maintaining its reputation and preventing further complaints.

An apology which is not an acceptance of liability is normally appropriate. Other remedies offered should be fair and reasonable for both the Club and the complainant. The range of possible outcomes includes:

- an explanation
- an apology
- mediation
- an admission of fault
- a change in decision
- a change to policy, procedure or practice
- a correction of misleading records
- financial compensation, including a refund of any fees
- the waiving of a debt
- the remission of a penalty
- protection to the complainant
- disciplinary action
- referral of a matter to an external agency for further investigation or prosecution

The remedy or response may be just one, or a combination of these actions. The chosen remedy needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service and, take into account of what people are looking for when they complain. In most cases remedies other than compensation will satisfy a complainant. Compensation is therefore a final option and will apply only in cases where the loss or suffering is considered substantial.

All recommendations for financial compensation must be referred to the Chairperson of the Board. Ideally, remedies should be implemented as soon as possible. In cases where a remedy is provided to a complainant, it may also be necessary to provide a remedy to other people similarly affected, even if they have not made a complaint.

If an apology is required the best course of action is to apologise promptly and advise the complainant that appropriate action will be taken to ensure the problem is not repeated.

4.8 Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

All complaints received by the Club are treated seriously. However, there may be occasions when the conduct of a complainant is unreasonable, resulting in a decision to take no further action on a complaint. This may take the form of unreasonable persistence, unreasonable demands, lack of cooperation, argumentative or threatening behaviour. What can be termed 'unreasonable' will vary depending on a number of factors and the Club aims to manage these situations in a fair and equitable manner.

Where a complainant's behaviour consumes an unwarranted amount of the Club resources or impedes the investigation of their complaint, a decision may be made to apply restrictions on contact with the person. Before making any decision to restrict contact, the complainant will be warned that, if the specified behaviour(s) or actions continue, restrictions may be applied.

Any decision to suspend action on a complaint will be made by the Board and will be communicated in writing to the complainant.

4.9 Service Improvement

Learning from complaints is a powerful way of helping to improve the Club's processes and procedures and increase trust among the people who use the Club services. The Club therefore should have systems to:

- record, analyse and report on the outcomes of complaints and remedies and
- apply the information to improve facilities, procedures and/or customer service

Part of a remedy may be to ensure that changes are made to policies, procedures, systems, staff training or all of these, to ensure that inadequate administration or poor service is not repeated. It is important to ensure that lessons learnt are put into practice.

4.9.1 Review and evaluation

In order to ensure the Club continues to provide the best possible complaints handling service for its customers, this policy will be subject to periodic evaluation and review.

4.9.2 Further information

This policy and the Complaints Management Procedure will be available for inspection at the Club administration offices during ordinary business hours and available to be downloaded, free of charge, from the Club's website: www.portlincolnracingclub.com.au

This procedure was endorsed by the PLRC Board to take effect on 16th April 2019. Thereafter it will be reviewed annually. The next date of review is April 2020.