



**The Board of Golf Australia has resolved to open discussions with the United States Golf Association about adopting the USGA Handicap System in Australia.**

---

## **Q&A re USGA Handicap System in Australia**

***What has the Board actually decided?***

The Board of Golf Australia has resolved to open discussions with the United States Golf Association about adopting the USGA Handicap System in Australia.

***What systems is GA wanting to change?***

The Board wants to replace the Australian Men's Handicapping System and the Australian Women's Handicapping System with the USGA Handicap System.

***Will this result in a single handicapping methodology for both women and men?***

This has been a key imperative for the Board and the answer is yes.

***Does this mean there will be no difference between a men's handicap and a women's handicap?***

The same methodology will be used to calculate men's and women's handicaps, however women's handicaps will relate to women's scores and standards, whilst men's handicaps will relate to men's scores and standards.

***Is this the Slope system?***

The system is called the "USGA Handicap System" however 'Slope' is one of its major components.

***What is a Slope Rating?***

A "Slope Rating" is the USGA's mark that indicates the relative difficulty of a course for players who are not scratch golfers compared to the difficulty of a course for scratch golfers. A Slope Rating is computed from the difference between the Bogey Rating and the USGA Course Rating (NB USGA Course Rating is a defined term – it means the Scratch Course Rating). The lowest Slope Rating is 55 and the highest is 155. A golf course of standard playing difficulty has a Slope Rating of 113.

***What is a Bogey Rating?***

A "Bogey Rating" is the USGA's mark of the evaluation of the playing difficulty of a course for the bogey golfer under normal course and weather conditions. (NB A male "bogey golfer" is a player who has a Course Handicap of approximately 20 on a course of standard difficulty. A female bogey golfer is a player who has a Course Handicap of approximately 24 on a course of standard difficulty.)

***What allowances is GA seeking to have built into the version of the USGA Handicap System that it wishes to implement in Australia?***

- Requiring that all scores returned for handicapping be attested by a marker.
- The 'Equitable Stroke Control' component of the system be amended to use a 'Stableford' type approach.
- Match play scores not to be used for handicapping.
- The Tournament Score procedure of the system not be used.
- Capping the allowed course handicap to the current Australian maximums of 45 for women and 36 for men when playing in competition (the USGA system allows maximum course handicaps of 55.4 for women and 49.9 for men, however this extreme of handicap would only occur when a high handicap golfer decides to play off the championship tees of an extremely difficult course – an unlikely scenario).

***What will the Board do if it is unable to secure these allowances?***

All are seen as desirable variations, not as 'game breaker' issues. The Board will provide to the State Associations a progress report of its discussions with the USGA and as agreed seek updated comment from the State Associations.

It should be noted however that we do not anticipate that the discussions with the USGA will turn up any significant issues as other countries have been able to secure these modifications.

***What are the real costs of moving to the USGA Handicap System?***

Since its formation in 2006, GA has been working through the process of determining whether to commit money to making overdue amendments to our current systems or on implementing a new system. GA weighed up continuing to invest in our unique method against implementing a system that's widely in place around the world, and took the clear view that making a positive investment was the approach best-gearred to the future.

To do otherwise should, and would have been seen by Australian golfers, particularly those in administrative positions, to be dedicating valuable financial and human resources to the task of 're-inventing the wheel', and would likely have prudential ramifications.

Once the system is in place, all research and development costs (which will be ongoing and significant) will all be borne by the USGA. We won't have to worry about trying to 're-invent the wheel', we can instead dedicate those resources to working with the State Associations on developing other components of the game instead.

***Who is going to fund these costs?***

Upon an agreement being reached with the USGA, the Board will clarify to the State Associations the funding strategy relating to the move to the USGA Handicap System. It is only at this point that all relevant regulations and logistical matters relating to the system will be settled. It goes without saying that GA will continue to investigate measures which may economise implementation requirements.

***My club is a Tier 1 Golf Link club. What costs will we incur?***

There is no need for a club using the Tier 1 Golf Link system to incur any costs as a result of Australia moving to the USGA Handicap System. The national system software will make ALL handicap index calculations.

***My club operates a Tier 3 system. What costs will we incur?***

The answer to this question will depend on the functionality currently provided by a club's Tier 3 system. As all handicap calculation software changes will be made at the national software end, we envisage that the changes made by the Tier 3 providers will only need to be relatively minimal. The only sorts of changes that may be required relate to performance of the following types of functions (NB It should be noted that there is no necessity whatsoever for functionality of the following extent to be provided. It will be for each club using a Tier 3 system to assess how sophisticated they wish their system to be.):

- Individualised card printing systems that will print the player's Course Handicap and computerised displays of Course Handicaps.
- Clubs using computerised score card readers will need to be made compliant with Australia's ESC (Equitable Stroke Control) system.
- Competition management systems providing results and 'Competition' Handicaps for a competition field comprising players using different tees.

***My club isn't on Golf Link. What costs will we incur?***

There is no need for current non-Golf Link clubs to incur any costs as a result of moving to the USGA Handicap System. However, all current non-Golf Link clubs will be strongly encouraged to join the national handicap computerised system at this time in order to make their competition administration requirements increasingly simple. All a club needs to operate under the national handicap computerised system is a computer with internet access.

- The computer does not need to be located on the club premises.
- A different computer can be used each time some administrative work is required.
- People of all ages currently operate the Golf Link system.
- Many people with virtually no computer skills currently manage their club's Golf Link requirements.

***What training resources will GA provide for State Associations?***

Upon an agreement being reached between GA and the USGA, training resources will be provided by GA to the State Associations for use in intra-state training. These resources will be constructed in conjunction with the USGA and will be reflective of the exact regulations to apply in Australia. Resources are likely to include a PowerPoint presentation together with any other items likely to be of use in the Australian context.

***GA has a very close affiliation with The R&A. Does The R&A have a view on GA's intent to adopt the USGA Handicap System?***

Whilst The R&A doesn't have a handicap system, GA has continued to provide it with updates to ensure it has been comfortable with developments in GA's review process. It should also be noted that the vast majority of countries currently using the USGA Handicap System are the delegate of The R&A as the governing body of golf in their country. GA is fully committed to continuing to grow its relationship with The R&A wherever possible.

***What is a Handicap Index?***

Under the USGA system, a player has what is called a Handicap Index (which is similar to the exact Australian Handicap a player in Australia would currently hold). A player's Handicap Index will serve as their official handicap reference point at every course at which they play.

### ***What is a Course Handicap?***

The handicap figure a player actually plays off is likely to vary at each course and from each rated set of tees – this figure will be known as the player's Course Handicap. The player will access their Course Handicap from an easily understood table that will be provided to all clubs once their course has been rated. These tables are in poster format which will be displayed in a prominent position.

### ***What are the major differences between the USGA Handicap System and the existing Australian systems?***

- Firstly, even if each course has an accurate Course Rating, non-expert players naturally develop higher handicaps at difficult courses than they develop at easier courses. This fact creates a fundamental problem with respect to the 'portability' of handicaps. The 'Slope' System provides a solution to this problem. A golfer using the USGA 'Slope' System converts their Handicap Index to a Course Handicap that is higher on more difficult courses, and lower on easier courses. For example, a player may play off 16 on an easy course and 21 on a difficult course.
- Secondly, the USGA Handicap Index is calculated from a rolling sample of the player's previous 20 scores. The calculation process involves averaging the best 10 of these 20 scores. The floating sample process is better-g geared to producing a more contemporary handicap and one that better indicates a player's potential than is achieved by the incremental adjustment method currently used in the Australian systems. Currently in Australia (where an outward increase can only occur in increments of 0.1), outward corrections take place at a rate that is far too slow and unfair on the player who has one 'lucky' round.
- Thirdly, the USGA system doesn't have a daily rating component. It is correct that the difficulty of a specific golf course may vary due to changes in weather, climate, and course set-up. The problem has always been in arriving at a system which enjoys golf community-wide confidence and that will reliably produce ratings that are reflective of the actual difficulty of a golf course.

By its nature, there will always be unavoidable problems associated with using a statistical method to measure course difficulty. And GA's experience and continued feedback on CCR over a long period of time is that the benefits are unfortunately outweighed by the drawbacks. At the end of the day, the average golfer is still prone to lack faith in the concept of the daily course rating being determined by the performance of the field.

Perhaps the most significant factor though is the small-field issue. Women's competitions and country competitions are especially prone to having fields that are not large enough for a proper CCR to be applied to them. As a result they are in reality governed by a separate course rating system, and GA doesn't believe this is an acceptable outcome.

***Why are we changing to the USGA Handicap System?***

The GA Board has adopted the H&CR Committee recommendation because the USGA System clearly best achieves each of the following:

- The agreed purposes for a handicapping system for Australian golfers.
- The establishment of a unified single handicapping methodology for all Australian golfers, male and female.
- The objectives for the future development of golf in Australia – providing flexibility and opportunity.
- The provision of a current and fair handicap that reflects a player's potential, rather than only competition performance.
- Cost effectiveness and functionality (by virtue of becoming part of a leading international development standard).

***When will we start to use the USGA Handicap System?***

All Australian golf courses will need to have USGA Scratch and Bogey Ratings assessed before the USGA Handicap System can become fully operational in Australia. All course ratings are scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011.

***Do all components of the USGA Handicap System need to be implemented at the one time?***

No. At this stage GA is not ruling anything in or out and will maintain as an option the possibility of incrementally introducing those components of the USGA Handicap System that are not reliant on the completion of the Course Rating roll-out. Any such incremental changes will only be done in a cost-effective manner and with a view to allowing Australian golfers to begin to experience the benefits of the USGA Handicap System.