



# March 2011 Handicapping Focus Groups & Forums – REPORT

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## SETTING THE SCENE

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### About the Sessions

- In March 2011, Golf Australia convened a series of handicapping focus groups and forums.
- Focus Groups – Each focus group was attended by 8-12 club officials (note: some District Association officials attended; a small number of State Association officials attended as observers).
- Forums – Approximately 40 club general managers attended the Golf Management Victoria forum. Each of GA's Member Associations (ie the six state associations and Golf NT) was invited to have their President/Chairman and CEO attend the State Forum.
- The following attended all sessions:
  - Kevin O'Connor, Senior Director, Handicap, GHIN, Regional Affairs and Information Systems (USGA)
  - Stephen Pitt, CEO (GA)
  - Simon Magdulski, Manager – Rules & Handicapping (GA)
  - GA's independent facilitator Martin Sheppard
- GA's Handicapping & Rules Committee Chairman, John Hopkins, attended the GMV Forum and State Forum. The GA Board attended the State Forum.
- The various sessions were intended to serve as a mechanism to:
  - Allow attendees to provide an outline of the varying golf cultures from club to club around Australia.
  - Receive feedback on proposed changes to the handicap system, as well as on those changes already made.
  - Collect feedback on general handicap system matters as well as the thoughts of clubs on the challenges they face on-the-ground in administering any handicap-related side of their club operation.
  - Allow each component of GA's constituency to clearly outline what they want the national handicap system to actually do in practical terms.
- The discussions did not focus on the more technical points of handicapping regulations; instead they focussed on the practical experiences of clubs.
- Detailed agendas were distributed to each attendee prior to their respective session.
- Each attendee was invited to submit an Opinion & Comments Form after having attended their respective session. This enabled them to provide written comments after having had the benefit of hearing the detailed views and experiences of the various other attendees. The following written comment was typical of the reaction

from many attendees: *“Forum excellent. Think it gave greater understanding to some people of the complexity of the issues. Also showed some people that what happens in their paddock isn’t necessarily reflective of what happens at other clubs with greater/smaller numbers and with harder/easier courses.”*

### **Schedule of Sessions**

- Golf Management Victoria Forum – PM Friday 11 March
- Focus Group of Victorian Affiliated Social & ‘League’ Club Officials – AM Sunday 13 March
- Focus Group of Victorian Regional/Country Club Officials – PM Sunday 13 March
- Focus Group of Queensland Regional/Country Club Officials – AM Monday 14 March
- Focus Group of Queensland Metropolitan/Resort Club Officials (incl. NT official) – PM Monday 14 March
- Focus Group of New South Wales Women Club Officials – AM Tuesday 15 March
- Focus Group of New South Wales Metropolitan & Regional Club Officials (incl. SA & Tas officials) – PM Tuesday 15 March
- State Association Forum – Thursday 17 March
- GA/USGA Review Meetings – Late PM Thursday 17 March & Friday 18 March
- *Note: WA clubs were invited to have a representative attend a focus group session.*

### **GA Statement Regarding Development of New Australian Handicap System**

After hearing the various commentary from Australian club officials, the USGA has committed to assisting GA wherever desired with a view to developing the best handicap system for the Australian culture.

It is now clear we will be developing a new handicap system to reflect the Australian environment, rather than adopting the USGA system. The new Australian Handicap System will include Slope Indexing. It will also include the regulation which requires the conversion of Stroke rounds into Stableford scores for the purposes of entry into a player’s handicap record. (Note: GA is fine-tuning the ‘best 10 of 20’ handicap calculation method.) The USGA has expressed its willingness to be involved in the development of components that will not be used in the USA. Being able to tap into their resources and experience will be of real value to GA as we go about this process.

### **Note Regarding Attendee Comments Listed Within this Document**

- Attendee comments listed within this document are reflective of the common themes that were expressed.
- Such themes were not necessarily agreed by all attendees.
- Such themes may be reflective of a minority view. They are contained within this document to record that the theme was expressed.
- It was not an intended purpose of the sessions to hold a vote on each expressed view. The intent was to facilitate discussion of various views and to achieve greater awareness of the diversity of viewpoints held by GA’s constituents.
- Not all expressed views are contained within this report. To do so would significantly increase the report’s size. This report is intended as a summary of themes that were expressed.

### **Statistical Analysis**

GA recently commissioned a statistical analysis of handicap and competition trends under both the Old Handicap System and the New Handicap System. Interim findings of the analysis were presented and referenced during the forums and focus group sessions.

The key findings of the statistical analysis are:

- The scores required to win competitions, or to win prizes (eg balls) in competitions, vary depending on the field size.
- Under the New System, the low marker finds it harder to compete as the field size increases. Under the New System, the field size value at which a low marker is disadvantaged is about 50 for men, and 100 for women. Low markers do still compete and are winning competitions in very high field sizes, but as the field size increases the bias becomes more and more unfavourable for the low markers and favourable for the high markers.
- Under the New System the most frequent winning score for field sizes of between 6 and 10 is 37 points. As the field size increases this steadily rises to 43 points.
- Under the Old System, there was a significant advantage to the low markers, which actually grew with field size.
- Under the Old System, the high markers were disadvantaged so they won far fewer competitions than their representation in the field. Many of them were chronically playing at handicap levels far in excess of their playing handicaps. Essentially this was due to the uneven way that differentials were applied. Handicaps for high markers only “eased out” by 0.1 stroke for a poor round, no matter how poor, but they were tightened far more quickly if the player had the occasional good round.
- Has there been any ‘settling down’ in the period since the New System was introduced on 9 April 2010? No, there is no significant variation between the month-on-month distribution of handicaps in the months following the introduction of the New System.

Further work is still being performed on the report. **The completed report and an executive summary will be posted on the GA website on Thursday 19 May (go to “Rules & Handicapping”, then “Handicapping & Course Rating”, then “News & Communications”).**

### **Upcoming Survey of All Clubs**

The next GA Board meeting will take place on 5 May. At this meeting the Board will consider a proposal to sign off on the bulk of the components to be included in the completed new handicap system. Advice of the decisions taken by the GA Board at this meeting will be included in the communication to all Australian clubs scheduled for Thursday 19 May.

The experience of the focus group and forum sessions underlined the diverse range of views that exist in a couple of areas. As a result, GA is keen to collect further feedback on these specific areas so as to ensure we are fully across all viewpoints. (These areas are noted within this report.) GA is not looking to hold a vote on these items. We are however aware that there exists a great diversity of Australian clubs, club environments, and competition and administrative challenges and we are keen to ensure significant factors are not overlooked in our decision-making process.

Details of how to participate in the survey (which should only take approximately ten minutes) will be communicated to all clubs on Wednesday 27 April.

**DISTINCT THEMES**  
**TO EMERGE ON**  
**DISCUSSION POINTS**  
**DURING FORUMS &**  
**FOCUS GROUP**  
**SESSIONS**

The remainder of this report provides a summary of the feedback and commentary provided by the attendees of the various focus groups and forums.

# 1. FIRST PRINCIPLES

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It is GA's intent to attach to the Australian Handicap System a set of guiding "First Principles". **The following list of First Principles was put to each forum and focus group session as a starting point for discussion and comment:**

The handicap system ***should*** achieve each of the following:

- (a) Be primarily tailored for competition golf and afford each player in the field a reasonable expectation of winning or placing well if that player plays [significantly/reasonably] better than their handicap.
- (b) A player's handicap should reflect their potential on a day they have played well rather than be a calculation based on a score in the middle of their scoring range.
- (c) The calculation of a handicap should take into account the degree of difficulty the course may present on or during the day of the competition.
- (d) The calculation of a handicap should be sufficiently flexible to be consistently calculated irrespective of the size of the competition field.
- (e) The handicap system should not place an unreasonable burden on any club in order for proper administration to be achieved.

Related comments & feedback from the focus group and forum attendees was as follows:

- In item (a), "reasonably" should be adopted in favour of "significantly".
- In item (a), people do not necessarily have an "expectation" of winning, instead they want a "chance" of winning.
- In item (a), change "reasonable" to "fair and reasonable".
- The term "potential" in item (b) is difficult to define. No better suggestions were put forward.
- In item (b), there was a desire for "score in the middle of their scoring range" to be better worded.
- In item (b), current form should have a strong influence in determining the handicap figure as "potential" is very difficult to assess.
- There was a small proportion of attendees who specifically expressed that scores in the middle of the scoring range should be used, not one-off 'outliers'.
- There were varying views on item (c). As a result, GA has decided to invite all Australian clubs to provide a view on this.
- The data indicates item (d) may be unrealisable without introducing significant complexity to the handicap system.
- Further to various commentary, a 6<sup>th</sup> principle has been added: "(f) The golf community must have confidence in the handicap system."
- Item (e) is very important. A few attendees indicated GA should be mindful of those clubs not on GOLF Link.
- Ideally, more recent form could be given a greater weighting in instances where a player only plays occasionally.
- Incorporate an explicit statement to the effect that an aim is to allow all players to compete on an equal footing.

- The First Principles should be accompanied by a statement to the following effect:  
“The Australian Handicap System is based on the assumption that every player will endeavour to make the best score they can at each hole and in every round they play and that they will report every eligible round for handicapping purposes, regardless of where the round was played. Players who fail to meet this requirement are effectively operating outside the System. At the discretion of the player’s club, the player may have their handicap otherwise re-assessed or withdrawn.”
- Two players in a handicap match should have an equal chance of winning.
- There was a small proportion of attendees (more women than men) who specifically expressed that men and women should operate under the same handicap system.

**2. THE FOLLOWING QUESTION WAS ASKED: “IN AUSTRALIA, ONE OF THE MAIN PURPOSES OF OFFICIAL HANDICAPS IS TO ENABLE ‘FAIR’ COMPETITION AMONGST THOSE WHO COMPETE IN CLUB-ADMINISTERED HANDICAP COMPETITIONS. WHAT ARE THE OTHER MAIN PURPOSES OF A HANDICAP IN AUSTRALIA? HOW IMPORTANT ARE THESE OTHER PURPOSES RELATIVE TO THE PURPOSE OF FACILITATING CLUB-ADMINISTERED HANDICAP COMPETITIONS?”**

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Related comments & feedback from the focus group and forum attendees were as follows:

- Some attendees thought the below factors to be as important as enabling ‘fair’ competition amongst those who compete in club administered competitions. Most attendees however felt that enabling ‘fair’ competition amongst those who compete in club-administered handicap competitions to be the dominant consideration.
- The other purposes of official handicaps that were put forward were:
  - Allows players of all levels to compete (whether formally or socially) together. Golf is extremely rare in this respect. This factor is one of golf’s prime attributes.
  - To serve as an individual player’s own performance yardstick.
  - To facilitate ‘friendly’ competition or wagering between players playing socially.
  - To foster and enhance engagement in the game by all players (including for players of advancing age for whom social engagement is critical, and also for players who are new to the game).
  - To serve as a team selection tool or tool for tracking the development of a prospective elite player.
  - To allow handicap competitions conducted by District Associations, State Associations, corporate groups, etc.
  - To act as a condition of entry.
  - To discriminate between players when entries exceed capacity (ie handicap ballot).
  - Allows fields to be split into grades.
  - Allow for the many side-bets that occur in conjunction with the club-administered competition (note: this is a significant part of the fabric of many clubs, more so for males).
  - To allow for formal or informal handicap competition between players from different countries.
  - To indicate to a player their expectation of a score when they walk onto any course (ie portability).

- The privilege granted to a player of holding a handicap can serve as an effective disciplinary tool. By suspending a player's handicap, a player can be far more effectively punished than can be achieved for example by a small monetary fine.
- Status symbol or "bragging rights" (ie there is a status attached to holding a low handicap, or to holding a lower handicap than those held by your mates).
- To serve as an inducement to join a club.
- A strong proportion of golfers do not have the winning of an event at the forefront of their mind. Most club golfers compete against their own ability and are very satisfied with "breaking" their handicap.

### **3. THE FOLLOWING QUESTION WAS ASKED: “PROVIDE AN OUTLINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOLF CLUB CULTURE, AND THE TYPES OF ‘ON-THE-GROUND’ CHALLENGES FACED BY CLUBS IN ADMINISTERING ANY HANDICAP-RELATED SIDE OF THEIR CLUB OPERATION.”**

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Related comments & feedback from the focus group and forum attendees were as follows:

- Australian clubs invariably have a strong handicap competition culture (note: Kevin O’Connor commented that on the basis of the reports he’d heard in the various formal sessions, he felt Australia’s club-administered handicap competition culture is clearly more evident than in the US). Anecdotally, Australia is very unusual in world golf in that it has a high proportion of club-administered handicap competitions with fields of greater than 100 players (note: this is more of a men’s than a women’s characteristic). Many Australian clubs will typically have fields of far greater than 100 players.
- Strong side-bet culture is a part of the fabric of many clubs (more so amongst males than females although there was limited female reporting of this). These side-bets may involve only the group of players in a specific time-slot, or upwards of fifty players all having ‘1-dollar’ bets with every other individual in the group. They can be a significant post-game talking point with bragging-rights at stake. The importance of this factor is to the extent that if golfers lose faith in the handicap system and diminish their involvement in side-bets, the fabric of the club actually suffers.
- It was reported that regional golfers tend to be less competitive than their metropolitan cousins. The suggestion was not that regional golfers don’t play in competitions, but rather that the social aspect of the experience was more pronounced in regional areas.
- It was repeatedly reported that whilst men generally like to see their handicap reducing, their primary concern is that their handicap will allow them to return a Stableford score in the mid-30s. The concern is not so much that the score will enable them to win, but that they feel engaged in the competition. From the women’s perspective, the repeated reporting was that engagement in the competition was generally not as important as having a handicap that the individual feels is not ‘too high’ (taking into consideration their ability). The repeated reporting was that women more so than men are prone to get embarrassed by their handicap increasing, whereas for men the prime consideration is to feel as though they are a ‘part of the competition’.
- High-marker women can be intimidated by stroke events to the extent that fields for stroke events will be less than for Stableford or Par events.
- It was repeatedly reported that having some novelty events in a women’s calendar is very popular. Part of the attraction of these novelty events is that the competitors know their handicap can not increase. As a result, the USGA Handicap System requirement to use all four-ball and novelty event scores for handicapping (including the poor scores), was a notable concern for women. (Note: GA has decided this change will now definitely not occur.)

- The typical (but not universally-held) theme was that men tend not to be as keen as women on four-ball, novelty, or team events generally, although four-ball events for men were more popular in some Queensland clubs. In NSW, four-ball competitions played in conjunction with singles events are popular.
- Some regional clubs reported that an important part of their culture is the carnival days they hold (approximately three per year where players will travel as far as approximately 200kms to attend). These days are very significant revenue raisers for clubs. Players will not play in these days if they do not feel their handicaps are portable and competitive.
- It was repeatedly reported that there is a cultural expectation that handicaps should reduce more quickly than they increase. It was also repeatedly reported that there is a cultural expectation that a very good score should result in a handicap reduction.
- It is critical to the fabric of events that competitors have faith in the legitimacy of the winner's handicap, and/or that effective checks are in place.
- Manipulation of handicaps is seen as a significant concern although the actual amount of manipulation is exaggerated.
- There is absolutely no tolerance whatsoever in Australia for the handicap manipulator.
- A discussion in one of the focus groups revolved around 'burglars'. One strong view reflective of a number of other comments was as follows: "I noted that many comments made by the attendees at my focus session referred to burglars and they were worried that some parts of the second package of changes might make their life easier. I disagree with this. They will find a way to get around any system and if we put in a whole bunch of stop-gaps to cater for this small minority, we'll end up tripping over ourselves and creating an unnecessarily complex system. As long as we have the power to take action against a player who plays significantly better in key events, then this is the best solution to the burglar issue."
- Many clubs do not process cards from visiting players – they either return them by email or mail, or rely on the player to advise their club of the score.
- Some clubs have introduced novelty events, or events of less than 18 holes, to cater for high markers or players new to the game.
- Some clubs reported conducting "ball competitions" on every day of the week. These have proved popular. Players not in designated 'formal competition' time slots may enter the "ball competition" even if the other players in their group do not.
- 'Gimmes' and 'Mulligans' are considered to be foreign to the Australian golf culture.
- There is typically a very strong volunteer culture and reliance on volunteers in Australian clubs. Challenges arise if potential volunteers perceive their tasks to be getting too onerous.
- Many clubs report a strong long-standing culture of competitions being split into handicap 'grades'.
- The use of technology is becoming more widespread and ingrained in Australian golf clubs, both for club administrations and also for the members themselves.
- Where a round is not to be used for handicap purposes, the playing experience has a distinctly different feel to it.

## **4. PROVIDE COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON RECENT HANDICAP SYSTEM CHANGES. ALSO PROVIDE COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON CHANGES THAT HAD BEEN PROPOSED FOR INTRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA.**

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### **Best 10 of 20 Handicap Calculation Method**

- There has been much feedback describing a notable shift in the patterns of scores required to win/place in club competitions. This feedback also suggests that in a notable proportion of cases, a score in the vicinity of six below the player's handicap is required to win any sort of prize in a competition with a large field. This makes the low marker's task very challenging.
- There appears to be two significant reactions to the move to the 'Best 10 of 20' handicap calculation method as follows:
  1. It appears that generally players feel that in isolation their handicaps are a truer reflection of their recent form.
  2. There appears to be a growing concern regarding the shift in the patterns of scores required to win/place in club competitions.

### **Variable Course Ratings**

- Daily & Intra-Daily Rating – Many clubs have expressed concern at the removal of the daily rating component of the old system. On the other hand, many clubs have expressed support of this move.
- Seasonal Changes to the Permanent Rating – Some clubs suggested between summer and winter there can be a 4-6 stroke average disparity due to changes from wet conditions with no roll to summer conditions with extreme roll. (The slowness issue is more prone to occur on poor drainage courses in both metropolitan and regional areas.) The issue is greater on regional courses which feature very few obstacles and hence where the only challenge is length.

### **Frequency of Handicap Revision**

- The very strong theme is that handicaps should be updated immediately a score has been submitted to GOLF *Link*.

### **Most Likely Score**

- Australian golfers are generally very pedantic about handicap issues. This is due largely to the importance of the handicap in competitions. As a result they want to avoid systems that are more open to manipulation or interpretation.
- In the Australian golf culture, there is a perception amongst many that a score is not 'real' unless it reflects the number of strokes taken to hole a ball. As a result, a score based on an estimate is perceived to be of a lesser value. As such a score is not of

the same 'quality' of other scores in the handicap record, it has the potential to distort the handicap. The theme re this was strong.

- There is a suggestion particularly from the more 'traditional' clubs that accepting only scores from completed holes is more in keeping with the values and culture of Australian golf and the golf values that these clubs seek to teach to their younger members.
- There have been views expressed suggesting that Most Likely Score is contrary to the Rules of Golf. Whilst this is not accurate, it is nonetheless a widespread concern.
- Problem of achieving universal compliance in clubs (ie some clubs had seemingly decided they would 'refuse' to effect such a regulation).
- A strong theme was that in many cases the determination of a Most Likely Score would have been too reliant on judgement calls. This would have made reasonably-consistent application across all clubs and players very difficult to achieve. This was considered by clubs to be a notable problem (this is in the context of handicaps being viewed in Australia as quite precise instruments whose objective is to determine competition winners/place-getters where scoring is also very precise).
- The various MLS-related concerns fed into the strong view that match play rounds should not be handicapped.
- A strong theme was that Most Likely Score would notably add to the administrative workload required of clubs re the handicapping management of four-ball competitions.
- It was also felt that conducting 'fun' events such as team three-balls, team four-balls, bisques) would notably add to the administrative workload required of clubs. The prospect of the extra workload would likely lead to less of these 'fun' events being scheduled.

#### **Use of All Types of Score Where the Player is Playing Their Own Ball Generally Within the Rules**

- On novelty days, the additional scoring/handicapping obligations were perceived to likely lead to a reduction of the 'fun' spirit being sought. (In some cases, particularly with women's fields, players are keen to play a game that does not have handicapping ramifications – and this can be one of the current attractions for women in playing four-ball competitions, ie they know their handicap can not increase.)
- The feeling with novelty competitions is that they are not as good a handicapping tool as the many other rounds of competition most golfers will play. Players are trying to achieve a team score which is very different to achieving an individual score.
- With solo scores, Australians perceive the player to be practicing – a solo round is not considered in Australia to be 'real' golf.
- That a score from a solo round could be used for handicapping prompts concerns from Australians given that the handicap in Australia is primarily an instrument for determining competition results. (Such an outcome would appear inconsistent with the requirement that the competition score itself be attested.)

### **Use of All Scores Returned in Social Rounds**

- One theme was that as there are a significant number of competitions held in Australian club golf, Australians already have plenty of opportunity to return scores for handicapping.
- Another theme was that the nature of a person's mindset in social rounds is liable to make the scores returned in such rounds un-representative of what they would do in a competition round and hence could distort the competition handicap.
- Yet another theme was that given the primary purpose of a handicap in Australia is to participate in club competitions, use of all non-competition scores has the potential to make handicap manipulation too easy.
- Many clubs suggested the increased workload would've been significant.
  - Volunteer-based club administrations – impact on capacity to continue to attract volunteers in an increasingly challenging climate.
  - Professional staff-based administrations – added costs. (Perhaps the clearest example of this concern was from clubs who outsource their competition management to an operator which charges per card processed – a general feeling is that the number of cards processed within a given period will double from an already significant base.)
- Concern re capacity of clubs to seek compliance of all players returning all non-competition scores. It would either be 'too hard' for most players to return all scores, or some players would resist strongly a requirement to return all scores. This would create friction with those club staff who seek complicity. As a result, the likely outcome would be the operation of a regulation that is poorly respected.
- Incapacity of players under such a regulation to go out and engage in a social, non-handicapped game of golf.
- A solid proportion of attendees felt that limited use of social scores would be very beneficial as it would allow for the provision of enhanced member opportunities. Some attendees felt social scores should not be used for handicapping at all.

### **Handicap Committees**

- General acceptance that there should be a committee within a club that is charged with ensuring the national handicap system is properly applied within that club. However, clubs should not have to form a separate committee for this purpose. Clubs should also have the flexibility to structure any such committee as they wish.

### **Simplification of Method for Extending Score for Round of 9-17 Holes Into 18-Hole Score (ie Allocating Net Par to Each Unplayed Hole)**

- One theme was that allocating net par for each unplayed hole was too generous.
- Another theme was that the simpler method made administration far easier.
- Some clubs felt that the current method was fine.
- A limited number of clubs felt that anything less than 18 holes should not be used for handicapping.

## 5. GOLF AUSTRALIA POSED A SERIES OF QUESTIONS TO THE ATTENDEES OF THE VARIOUS FORUMS AND FOCUS GROUPS. FEEDBACK AND COMMENTARY IS PROVIDED BELOW.

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**(a) Do you feel the 'old handicap system' adjusted handicaps quickly enough or too quickly (up and down)? Do you feel the 'new handicap system' adjusts handicaps quickly enough or too quickly (up and down)? Do you feel we need a balance somewhere between the two?**

- The general theme was that there should be a balance between the two.
- The general theme was that the old system took too long to adjust outwards.
- The general theme was that the new system allows players to shift outwards too quickly.
- The general theme was that the handicap system should allow for more rapid downward adjustments than outward adjustments.

**(b) Do you feel social cards should be used for handicap purposes? If so, do you feel the handicap system should allow an individual club the flexibility to not accept any social cards from their members? If social cards are to be used, do you feel a maximum of say 12 should be used each year? Do you feel players should have to nominate in advance of playing that a social round is to be handicapped?**

- There were varying views on this item. As a result, GA has decided to invite all Australian clubs to provide a view.

**(c) Do you feel that a player's handicap should adjust immediately a score has been processed, or that handicaps should only adjust, for example, every two weeks?**

- There was a very strong and near universal view that the handicap should adjust immediately a score has been processed through GOLF *Link*.

**(d) Do you feel the Australian Handicap System should include some form of adjustment to account for the degree of difficulty the course may present on or during the day of the competition? If so, do you feel this would need to be an improvement on the old CCR regulations; or do you feel CCR worked well?**

- There were varying views on this item. As a result, GA has decided to invite all Australian clubs to provide a view.

**(e) Approximately what net score do you feel should win a major competition in your club for each of the following forms of play – Stroke, Stableford, Par.**

- The average view is that a net score of approximately 4 better than the course rating should win a competition in all of the above forms of play.

**(f) Do you feel extended dryness or wetness at your course will result in average scores shifting by approximately two or more strokes from what is 'normal'?**

- This was considered to be the case and a notable issue in a small proportion of clubs.

## 6. OTHER COMMENTS/REQUESTS REGARDING THE AUSTRALIAN HANDICAP SYSTEM (INCLUDING IN RELATION TO SUPPORT RESOURCES)

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- Some attendees requested that enhanced guidelines and support be developed by GA to assist those committees looking to apply the section of the Australian Handicap System that is used to reassess a player's handicap.
- Some attendees commented on the current number of initial cards required to allocate an official women's or men's handicap (3). There were varying views on this item. As a result, GA has decided to invite all Australian clubs to provide a view.
- Currently there is no maximum value for differentials (ie the values in the 'Played To' column on [www.golflink.com.au](http://www.golflink.com.au)). If someone has a very poor round and 'Plays To' a handicap of 65 (for example), this is the 'Played To' value that is registered in the player's handicap record. Some attendees requested that a regulation be introduced to limit the amount that a 'Played To' value can take. These limits could be for example 40 for men and 50 for women.
- Some attendees suggested that GOLF *Link* and/or the handicap system should have some way of identifying a player whose handicap has been largely inactive during the past year (or other similar period of time).
- Some attendees felt the new system should be given time to 'settle down' before any tweaking is considered.
- Some attendees reported that a limited proportion of low markers were now less likely to participate in competitions due to the perception they were no longer able to achieve the sort of scores required to be competitive.
- Comments made by some attendees indicate that whilst the handicap should be a measure of form rather than ability (due to the difficulty in measuring ability), it would be beneficial for the handicap system to contain some sort of anchor. The purpose of the anchor would be to prevent a player who is experiencing an unusually poor run of form from having their handicap slide out too severely. Such an anchor would only affect a very small proportion of handicaps.
- Some attendees suggested that if social cards are to be used, GOLF *Link* should provide some way of distinguishing them from a competition card.
- One theme was that the system should be focussed on managing the handicaps of golfers who play regularly. Those less regular golfers could then have special conditions applied to them but the system should be designed to work for the majority first and foremost.
- Some attendees suggested the capacity of clubs to make arbitrary decisions should be minimised. Other attendees suggested flexibility is important due to the great diversity of Australian clubs, club environments, and competition and administrative challenges.
- Some attendees suggested the course rating regulations as they affect sand greens should be considered further by GA.
- Some attendees noted that players who don't play often will have scores in their most recent 20 that date back a number of years. As a result, such scores are not a great indication of recent form.

- A very common theme is that handicaps across Australia do not currently exhibit enough 'fairness'.
- Some attendees noted that only a small proportion of club members play away from their Home Club. As a result, the benefits of Slope Indexing may not be as significant as some people perceive. (Kevin O'Connor commented that some people do generally appear to have unrealistic expectations of what Slope Indexing will actually achieve.)
- Some small clubs reported difficulties in receiving communications from GA.
- Some attendees reported a desire to see some upgrading of the GOLF *Link* Tier 1 system with a view to making it more user-friendly.
- Affiliated social and 'league' clubs reported they were very keen to see the introduction of Slope Indexing.
- Some attendees suggested different percentages of handicap should be used for different types of play (eg Stroke, Stableford, Par).
- A common theme was that before GA starts work on the implementation of the final Australian Handicap System, it should know comprehensively what that system will comprise. However, some immediate tweaking of the current handicap calculation method would be very desirable.
- A common theme was that clubs want to be kept updated regarding major developments. Clubs are also eager for confirmation of those components that are to be included in the final system.
- There has long been a general lack of understanding of many handicap system regulations. This could be addressed by the national body investing more time into developing simple and effective education and resource tools.
- A comment reflective of a number of other views was as follows: "I think the process is as important as the outcome with this. By engaging and making people feel a part of the process the implementation will be much easier. This was probably neglected to date. Having said that, this change is difficult and I may not agree with every decision and every aspect of the system when it is fully implemented, but I will be a supporter as the general concept is far superior to what we had. I am in agreement with some of the others that the other changes need to be kept to one more change and this would be done at the end with the introduction of Slope Indexing. Bound to be a challenging time educating the members, but with plenty of notice it can be achieved."