



GolfAustralia

A REPORT INTO
PACE OF PLAY
AT AUSTRALIAN GOLF CLUBS

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study sought to understand the true extent of the pace of play issue in golf in Australia. It also sought to understand the causes, the degree of importance the industry attaches to the issue, what impacts slow play may be having on facility financial outcomes, and what administrators believe are the most effective strategies to combat pace of play challenges.

This study has found that:



A strong relationship exists between clubs with higher member numbers and their level of concern about pace of play.



A strong relationship exists between clubs with higher competition rounds and their level of concern about pace of play.



A strong relationship exists between clubs with a more difficult golf course (measured by the respective Slope Rating) and their level of concern about pace of play.

Whilst these relationships exist, pace of play does not however present problems to all clubs, with 75% of clubs (representing approximately two thirds of the total national membership) reporting they are generally unaffected by this issue. For the 25% of clubs (representing one third of the total national membership) that are, club administrators overwhelmingly feel that it is behavioural factors within the control of the individual golfer that are largely the cause of the problem. Examples include golfers not being ready to play when it is their turn, pre-shot routines, not calling groups through etc.

However consumer behaviours, when compared to course set-up and operational actions, are far more challenging to impact or change for the long term.

So what should be the primary focus for a club? The way in which the product is presented to the customer or the manner in which the customer is consuming the product?

In a generic business, management would likely direct at least equal resources towards the former to achieve improved outcomes rather than directing the strong majority of resources towards changing consumer behaviour.

Whilst the concept of 'ready golf' addresses the customer and their behaviour, and those who have adopted it have achieved some improved outcomes, clubs with concerns about slow play should be equally encouraged to also focus on how they are presenting the product.

The report does suggest that some clubs have demonstrated a willingness to be flexible in the way they present the product (via measures such as thinning roughs and clearing out some landing areas) however the findings also indicate that international, national and state bodies have much scope to generate a greater awareness of the impact on pace of play of course management factors. The outcome of this would be to arm clubs with knowledge of a comprehensive suite of options. With this in mind we note with keen interest that The R&A has just announced it is to hold an industry forum later this year where it will invite contributions from a range of organisations in golf on addressing pace of play and explore the key areas of player behaviour, management approaches and golf course issues. This forum will also discuss the findings of The R&A's recent global pace of play survey of golfers and the findings of the Golf Australia Report into Pace of Play at Australian Golf Clubs.

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (CONT)

OTHER KEY FINDINGS

OTHER KEY SPECIFIC FINDINGS AS CONTAINED WITHIN THIS REPORT ARE SUMMARISED HERE:

25% of clubs, representing approximately one third of total club membership numbers, have a serious level of concern regarding pace of play evident in male events, with only 16% sharing the same view within female events.

The weighted average time for a competition round of golf (taking into account the proportion that each competition event is played) at surveyed clubs is 4 hours 16 minutes.

Par events are the fastest event type, with an average time of 4 hours 12 minutes. Stableford are slightly slower at 4 hours 15 minutes, while Stroke (including Medal) events take an average of 4 hours 29 minutes to complete.

Golf administrators believe that the two most prominent general factors affecting pace of play are both behavioural factors of the individual golfer, those being golfer expectations (feeling entitled to play at their own pace) and golfer awareness / abilities. Course design, course set-up and play management procedures are understood by clubs to have the least impact on pace of play.

Club administrators believe that pace of play is not an issue with regard to on-going club performance and the appeal of joining a club.

For club administrators with a higher level of concern, there is increased concern regarding membership satisfaction though concern does not extend to member retention and the attraction of new members.

For club administrators with a high concern for pace of play, the main actions undertaken to improve pace of play include the promotion of 'ready golf' (84%), thinning roughs (73%), penalising slow play offenders (76%), clearing out areas adjacent to playing areas, thus preventing five minute ball searches (62%) and using friendlier hole-locations (64%).

The percentage of clubs who have promoted 'ready golf' increases to 87% at clubs where administrators have a high concern for pace of play and 90% at busier clubs (i.e. annual competition rounds above 15,000 & playing members in excess of 600).

Of the clubs who have promoted 'ready golf', 94% of clubs have enjoyed some degree of success with 25% reporting 'satisfying success.'