SFNL Social Media Policy

1. Background and Purpose

Communication through social media is rapidly evolving and with every tweet, wall post or blog entry that relates to the Southern Football Netball League ("SFNL") exposes the SFNL to reputation risk and all individuals at club, SFNL administration and umpire level are also exposed to the personal risks that arise from anti-social, inappropriate or illegal behaviour in the use of social media.

Because of the risks arising from the use of social media there is a need for an official SFNL Social Media policy (the "Policy"). This Policy is effective for all clubs, including players, coaches, committee members and support staff, for all staff and board members of the SFNL and SFNL umpires (together the "SFNL members"). It covers the creation or contributing to blogs, social networks (Facebook etc), virtual worlds or any other kind of social media.

It should be noted that this Policy is not being put in place to stop the use of social media. In fact the SFNL is engaged in social media platforms such as Facebook, via a Facebook group setup for SFNL Fans, and with a Twitter account @SouthernFL that posts match scores. Some SFNL teams are making use of social media platforms and many individual SFNL members use the platforms for personal use.

The purpose of this Policy is to inform the members of the risks, provide guidelines and list the penalties for the improper use of social media.

The Board of the SFNL expects all its members to understand and follow this Policy. Failure to do so could put your future membership of the SFNL at risk. This policy will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge – therefore it is imperative that all members regularly monitor this Policy to ensure they are up-to-date.

2. Overarching Principles

This Policy is written in so that it is consistent with the SFNL Vision Statement, as follows:

"The SFNL is acclaimed for its quality management and delivery of community based sport reflecting the needs, values and aspirations of the community we serve. The health and social benefits enjoyed by the SFNL community are highly valued."

3. Guidelines

Social Media is an extension of the media so the guidelines set for the SFNL apply when commenting on SFNL issues.

The following guidelines should be recognised when using social media platforms:

- All comments are to be considered public the same as comments to the media.
- Protect the brand and reputation of the SFNL when making comments on social media platforms. Understand the viral nature of social networks as a small misstep can be magnified.

- Be respectful and courteous in all social network communications.
- Ensure all photos or videos posted on social networks are in line with the values of your club and the SFNL brand.
- Be transparent; make sure people know who you are when sharing information on social networks.
- The SFNL should be notified of all accounts and platforms setup on behalf of or for SFNL member clubs.

If you participate in social media, please follow the following principles:

- Negative comments will not reflect well on the brand of your club. Conversely, positive social media contribution enhances your brand.
- Stick to your area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what's going on at your club or the SFNL
- Post meaningful and at all times respectful comments in other words, no spam and no remarks that can be deemed as offensive or disrespectful
- Always pause and think before posting
- When disagreeing with other's opinions, keep it appropriate and polite
- Do not use social media platforms to post remarks that can be deemed hurtful to another member of the SFNL and members of the wider football / netball community under the auspices of the AFL / Netball Australia.
- Cyber bullying via social media outlets will not be tolerated under any circumstances and any breach will be treated accordingly. Please note if in serious breach the relevant authorities will be contacted to deal with the matter.
- Do not use social media outlets as a means of making derogatory comments regarding the management, coaching, welfare, player concerns or issues with the SFNL or club.

4. Cyber bullying

The SFNL Board views bullying on any level as extremely serious. Cyber bullying falls under this category. The Board will ensure that there is follow up of complaints of bullying, harassment, intimidation and victimisation by any and all members.

Current legislation determines cyber bullying as an intentional, repeated behaviour by an individual or group to cause distress or undue pressure to others using technology and social media outlets.

The SFNL deems that cyber bullying can occur via:

- Email
- Chat room exchanges
- Discussion groups or forums
- Instant messaging
- Social networking sites such as Facebook, My Space etc
- Mobile phone use text and picture messaging, video clips etc.
- Any new technology platforms as they are developed (eg. interactive DTV).

Failure to adhere to this Policy could see possible suspension, cancelling of SFNL membership and the passing of serious cases to the appropriate authorities.

Recent changes to the Victorian Crimes Act now mean that repeated acts of bullying are now classified in Victoria under the criminal offence of stalking.

In theory, if not in practice, bullying – in this case cyber bullying – is now punishable by a maximum term of 10 years imprisonment

5. Procedure

SFNL members who feel that they have been the victim of such misuses of electronic or social media should save and store the offending material on their computer, mobile phone or other device. They should then print a copy of the material and immediately report the incident to the relevant club or SFNL representative.

All reports of cyber bullying and other technology misuses will be investigated fully in accordance with SFNL Rules and may result in notification to the police where the SFNL or club is legally obliged to do so.

If the SFNL executive receives a complaint about an online issue, the allegations will be forwarded to the relevant SFNL investigations officer. If there is evidence, charges will be laid and the complaint will proceed to the SFNL's Independent Tribunal, exactly the same as if the investigation related to physical violence or other reportable offence.

6. Penalties

Any proven charges will automatically lead to a minimum of a two (2) match suspension for a registered player. In deciding the final penalty, consideration will be given to the seriousness of the act, the impact of the victim, the impact of the club/SFNL and the prior good history or otherwise of the player. Players charged with these types of offences for a second or subsequent time and where a suspension has been previously imposed will face deregistration.

Any player presented before the tribunal for the first or subsequent time on a cyber bullying offence must be aware that the penalties available to the tribunal members will cover the complete range including deregistration.

In the case of a non playing club member being proved to have engaged in harassment or bullying, the club employing, engaging or otherwise associated with the person at the time of the conduct will be deemed to be vicariously liable for the conduct of the person and will pay to the SFNL a penalty to be determined by the league.

7. Correction on Social Media

Timing of the correction of a Social Media entry is critical. In some cases a person may inadvertently make a post erroneously due to a device auto-correct feature. This may change the context and meaning of the post and turn something meant to be unoffensive into something offensive. Alternatively a post may be very quickly reconsidered as bad taste moments after sending.

Delete, Retract and Replace your post immediately in either instance.

If you make a mistake in the cyber world admit it. If you have posted a comment that can be deemed inappropriate remove it and apologise for it – be upfront and quick with your correction.

Pause – if you are about to publish a comment about the SFNL and/or its members – don't shrug it off and hit send. Pause, Reflect and Think – what you type is your responsibility, so be sure.

Policy paper prepared by Darren Scammell, Chair of the SFNL Governance and Sustainability Committee 23 December 2011.