



2019 widespread changes to the Rules of Golf

The R&A and the United States Golf Association have announced a large number of changes to the Rules of Golf to come into effect on 1 January 2019. (Please visit the following page of the Golf Australia website for details – www.golf.org.au/newrules.)

This represents the most substantial Rules overhaul since 1984. Due to the amount of reform, this modernisation of the Rules is likely to require at least some degree of change by every Australian golf club.

A. Rules publications to be released between now and 1/1/2019

1. **Players' Edition of the Rules of Golf.** This is the new default Rules publication that will be provided to every golfer. [Delivery is scheduled for approximately 10-14 September.]
2. **Rule books.** Each club will be provided with a small supply of the full Rule books – from 2019 onwards, the new Rule book will be more for the use of administrators/officials. [Delivery is scheduled for approximately 10-14 September.]
3. **Official Guide to the Rules of Golf.** (Note: This publication will include various information – including any content that would previously have been included in the Decisions book.) The Official Guide is a compendium that contains: the full Rules, Interpretations (which is the new name for Decisions), Committee Procedures (see also item B6 below), and Modified Rules for Players with Disabilities. Information on ordering will soon be sent to clubs. [Availability in Australia is anticipated from mid-November.]

B. Rules resources to be released between now and 1/1/2019

1. **Webpage of short videos – www.golf.org.au/newrules.** These videos are a very helpful resource. We encourage you to bring this page (or specific videos on this page), to the attention of your members. [Already available.]
2. **A2-size posters for every club.** [3 copies of a poster on the Rules changes will be sent to every club in early September.]
3. **DL-size flyer for every club member.** [A copy will be printed for each Australian golf club member. These flyers will arrive at your club with its supply of Players' Editions and Rule books – see items A1 and A2.]
4. **R&A-produced PowerPoint presentation on the new Rules.** For those clubs wishing to provide information sessions to their members, this resource should be ideal – it will be designed specifically for presentation by club officials. [Scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September via the R&A and Golf Australia websites.]
5. **R&A "Committee Toolkit" feature.** To be accessible via the R&A and Golf Australia websites. As part of the toolkit, there will be a Local Rules "creator" which will allow committees to select the Model Local Rules they need to create the Local Rules sheet for their course and to pass on to their score card printer. This feature will include advice on local rules that can be deleted because the local rule has been shifted into the Rules of Golf. [The R&A advises this will be at least partially functional by the week of 10-14 September.]

6. **Committee Procedures.** This is a new web-based resource that will be available from the R&A and Golf Australia websites. (The information will also be available via the Rules app – see item B8.) It will contain guidance on local rules, course marking, competition conditions, etc. [It is scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September.]
7. **R&A online Rules seminar (basic level).** This is called ‘Rules Academy’. It is an additional tool available to clubs wishing to provide seminar options for their members. [Availability is scheduled for mid to late October via the R&A and Golf Australia websites.]
8. **Rules of Golf app.** [The 2019 version is scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September.]
9. **Updated ‘Sand Green Local Rules’.** [Scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September via the Golf Australia website.]
10. **‘Rules Essentials’.** As we draw closer to implementation (beginning of November or slightly after) The R&A plans to roll out a campaign focussing on the essentials that golfers need to know about the new Rules ahead of 1/1/2019. More information on this campaign will be provided in the coming months.
11. **Additional measures.** In addition, GA is investigating various other means to communicate information directly to golfers (eg website, email, etc).

C. Other matters for your club to consider or be aware of

1. Scorecard ordering

- When ordering scorecards clubs should be mindful that at least some of your local rules will change on 1/1/2019. Note: There will be no requirement for clubs to stop using any pre-2019 scorecards come 1/1/2019. Supplies of old scorecards can continue to be used until they have been exhausted (provided players in competitions operate under 2019compliant local rules).
- The R&A “Committee Toolkit” feature (see item B5) will include a Local Rules “creator” which will allow committees to select the Model Local Rules they need to create the Local Rules sheet for their course and to pass on to their score card printer. [The R&A advises this will be at least partially functional by the week of 10-14 September.]

2. Whether to use the new stroke-and-distance local rule

- Significant issues with pace of play can result from players needing to take stroke-and distance relief for a ball that is out of bounds or cannot be found when a provisional ball has not been played. As a result, The R&A has made available a new stroke-and distance Local Rule. The purpose of this new Local Rule is to allow a Committee to provide an extra relief option that will allow a player to play on without returning to the location of the previous stroke.
- This option allows the player to drop in a large area between the point where the ball is estimated to have come to rest or gone out of bounds and the edge of the fairway that is not nearer the hole.
- The player gets two penalty strokes when using this relief option, so the relief is comparable to what could have been achieved if the player had taken stroke-and distance relief.
- The Local Rule is appropriate for general play where golfers are playing casual rounds or playing their own competitions. The Local Rule is not appropriate for competitions limited to highly-skilled players (that is, professional competitions and elite amateur competitions). Clubs may choose to operate it only on a specific hole or holes. For holes with features that make it unusually difficult to establish a relief option, a club may choose to use dropping zones in addition to the new stroke-and-distance local rule option.

- Events such as corporate days will generally be well-suited to this new Local Rule option. However, it would be permissible for it to be adopted for use in any club competition.
- More detailed guidance on the new stroke-and-distance Local Rule will be available upon the release of the Committee Procedures resource (see item B6). [The Committee Procedures resource is scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September.]

3. *Whether to mark any new 'penalty areas'*

- The Rules for 'penalty areas' (currently called 'water hazards') will be relaxed.
- Under the new Rules, red and yellow-marked penalty areas may cover areas of desert, jungle, rough that is deep and thick, etc..
- As is currently the case with red and yellow hazards, penalty areas under the new Rules must still be clearly and accurately marked or defined.
- Committees will now have the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red so that lateral relief is always allowed (but they may still mark penalty areas as yellow where they consider it appropriate). Under the 2019 Rules The R&A encourages committees to mark most penalty areas red to give players the additional option of lateral relief. However, where part of the challenge of the hole is to carry over a penalty area such as a stream that crosses the front of the putting green and there is a good chance that a ball that carries over the stream could fall back into it, the committee can decide to mark the penalty area as yellow.
- More detailed guidance on penalty areas will be available upon the release of the Committee Procedures resource (see item B6). [The Committee Procedures resource is scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September.]

4. *Whether to bring into effect a Code of Conduct for on-course activity with penalties that apply to a player's competition score*

- Under the new Rules, committees are given authority to adopt their own code of player conduct and to set penalties for a breach of the standards in that code.
- A code of conduct will be able to provide for the application of any of the following penalties: warning, 1 stroke, 2 strokes (in Stableford or Par or stroke play), loss of hole (in match play), disqualification.
- Examples of the type of player activity that may attract penalties under this new code of conduct capability include: failure to rake bunkers, failure to repair divots, failure to repair ball damage on a green, failure to adhere to required dress standards, etc..
- Detailed guidance will be available upon the release of the Committee Procedures resource (see item B6). [The Committee Procedures resource is scheduled to become available during the week of 10-14 September.]

5. *New permission under the Rules to officially return scores digitally.* Under the existing Rules, the only permitted method for a player to officially return a competition score to the committee is on a paper (or cardboard) scorecard. From 1 January 2019, the Rules will allow committees to provide players with a digital submission option (or options) for the official return of scores.

- It will be acceptable under the Rules for committees to permit each competitor to choose whether they submit their score digitally or on a paper scorecard. It will also be acceptable for committees to choose to accept paper scorecards only.
- Clubs with Tier 3 handicap & competition management software should await advice from their provider on the potential availability of functionality to support digital score submission. We anticipate this advice will be provided in the coming weeks. It will not be mandatory for Tier 3 providers to offer digital score submission functionality to their clients.

- Digital score submission functionality will not be available by 1/1/2019 to clubs who use the Tier 1 GOLF Link system. Clubs using the Tier 1 GOLF Link system should await advice from GA on the possible future availability of Tier 1 digital score submission functionality – or should investigate upgrading to a Tier 3 system.
6. ***Introduction of new stroke play format – Maximum Hole Score.*** Under the existing Rules of Golf, a competitor in a stroke play competition (ie medal play competition) is required to hole out on every hole or they will be disqualified. ‘Maximum Score’ stroke play is an official new competition format that will be available to clubs from 1 January 2019 in addition to regular stroke play.
- Under this new format a club will be permitted to set its own maximum score for a hole (eg 10, or 2 x par of hole, or net quadruple bogey, etc). If a player doesn’t finish a hole, or has more than the maximum score, they must be credited for competition purposes with whatever the committee has set as the maximum score (for handicapping purposes the player would be credited with whatever their Stableford score would have been for that hole).
 - It will not be mandatory for Tier 3 providers to offer functionality to support the new ‘Maximum Score’ competition format. At this stage it is unclear how attractive this option will be to Australian golf clubs. That said, a few clubs have already expressed an interest to GA in this new format – principally with a view to trying to make medal play days a more attractive proposition for beginners and other high-handicap players.
 - Clubs with Tier 3 handicap & competition management software should await advice from their provider on the potential availability of functionality to support the new ‘Maximum Score’ competition format. We anticipate this advice will be provided in the coming weeks. It will not be mandatory for Tier 3 providers to offer ‘Maximum Score’ functionality to their clients.
 - ‘Maximum Score’ functionality will not be available to clubs who use the Tier 1 GOLF Link system.
7. ***Scratch Ratings and Slope Ratings.*** For the sake of clarification, we advise that we do not anticipate making any changes to your Scratch Ratings and/or Slope Ratings in 2018 or early 2019 as a result of the changed Rules. Beyond early 2019, Golf Australia and State Associations will continue to monitor score data. We will also be mindful of any club feedback or data analysis.

Further communications will be provided between now and 1/1/2019. These communications will include notifications as the items listed above become available.