

**DISCIPLINARY & ETHICS COMMITTEE OF FOOTBALL AUSTRALIA**  
**DETERMINATION IN THE FOLLOWING MATTER:**

Player and club	Teresa Morrissey, Central Coast Mariners
Alleged offence	Clauses 2.2(g), 5 and 2.14 of National Code of Conduct and Ethics
Date of offence	21 August 2024
Date of Disciplinary Notice	7 April 2025
Basis the matter is before the Disciplinary Committee	Clause 6.1(a) Judicial Bodies By-Law
Date of Hearing	27 August 2025
Date of Determination	2 September 2025
Disciplinary Committee Members	Lachlan Gyles SC (Chair) Chris Harold Ben Jones

**A. INTRODUCTION AND JURISDICTION**

1. Teresa Morrissey ('the **Player**') brings this Appeal in respect of a sanction imposed by Football Australia for a breach of the National Code of Conduct and Ethics ('the **Code**') arising from the Player on 21 August 2024 having committed various driving offences, including driving with a suspended licence and driving with the presence of an illicit substance, namely Cannabis.
2. On 10 March 2025, the Player pleaded guilty to those charges and was disqualified from driving for six months and given a \$650 fine. The Player was also sanctioned by the Central Coast Mariners by way of a fine comprising half a week's salary being \$361.20.
3. In addition, on 15 August 2025 Football Australia ('**FA**') notified the Player of its determination to impose a suspension of three matches, two of which were to be served by the Player in the first two A League women's matches for the 2025/2026 season, and one match to be suspended for the duration of that season.
4. It is against the imposition of this sanction by FA that the Player brings this Appeal to the Disciplinary and Ethics Committee ('**Committee**').
5. In respect of jurisdiction, the parties first accept that the Committee has jurisdiction to deal with the Application; second, they agree that the Application is to be heard *de novo*; and third, that the only matter for determination is the issue of the appropriate sanction to be imposed by reason of the Player's breach of the Code. That is, the Player accepts that her conduct on 21 August 2024 constituted a breach of the Code. Further, so far as the question as to whether

any suspension should be served in Women's A League ('**ALW**') matches as contended for by FA, or in State National Premier League ('**NPL**') matches, the parties accept that the Committee has jurisdiction to order that any suspension be served in either, or both, of such matches.

6. The Committee finds that these concessions have been properly made as regards jurisdiction, and shall proceed on the basis that it will hear the matter afresh and form its own view as to the appropriate sanction in respect of the offending conduct.

### **The Competing Positions**

7. Mr Griscti, Judiciary Counsel, contends that the sanction imposed by FA was reasonable and necessary in the circumstances and submits that the Committee should impose the same sanction.

8. The alternative relief which Mr Kane on behalf of the Player seeks is as follows:

5. *An order that in substitution for the Sanctions imposed by the Respondent, that in relation to the Applicant having engaged in the Relevant Conduct (as defined in the Applicant's 7 July 2025 response to the Respondent's show cause notice), the Committee:*

- (a) *Determines in all of the circumstances to impose no penalty; or*
- (b) *If the Committee determines that to impose no penalty as prayed for in order 5(a) would amount to an insufficient penalty in the circumstances, that the Committee imposes a penalty in the form of a reprimand, warning and/or caution, as the Committee seeks fit; or*
- (c) *If the Committee determines that to impose the penalty specified in order 5(b) would amount to an insufficient penalty in the circumstances, that the Committee imposes a penalty in the form of a suspension from participating in not more than two Matches (as defined), where those Matches are the regular season Matches that the Applicant would be eligible to participate in for Box Hill United in the National Premier League Victoria Women's Competition.*

### **B. THE HEARING**

9. The Committee heard the matter on an expedited basis by audiovisual link on 27 August 2025. Mr Griscti was Judiciary Counsel for FA and Mr Kane appeared for the Player, who was also present. The material before FA which formed the basis of the original decision was put before the Committee without objection and both written and oral submissions were made on behalf of each of the parties at the hearing.
10. At the conclusion of the hearing, and following deliberations, the Committee announced its Decision and now provides these written reasons, noting the

requirement of the A-Leagues Disciplinary Regulations that such reasons must be in the “shortest form reasonably practicable: Clause 22.3 (c)”

### **FA Submissions**

11. Judiciary Counsel refers to the “drug driving offence” the subject of the guilty plea by the Player on 10 March 2025 and the conviction and disqualification from driving as constituting misconduct for the purpose of Clause 2.1 of the Code namely a breach of Clause 2.2(g) and 2.14. He submits that the Therapeutic Use Exemption (‘TUE’) which the Player had for cannabis had expired by that time, and in any event prohibited the Player from driving under the influence of the drug. He also refers to the reporting of the case in the local press which included statements that it was the second occasion the Player had attended before a court for drug driving, and also that she was referred to as an A League Player with the Mariners.
12. Judiciary Counsel then submits that the weight and gravity of the conduct, the court sanction, the publicity, the need for general deterrence and to protect the reputation of football, requires that a suspension be imposed of three A League matches, with one match suspended. It is submitted that this is consistent with and sits comfortably with the sanctions delivered by the D&EC in the *Payne* and *Sail* Appeal, particularly paragraphs 84 and 85 of that Determination. He asserts, that, as a general policy, A League players should not be able to circumvent sanctions by the serving them in lower level competitions.

### **Player’s Submissions**

13. The following section is not intended to be exhaustive, and the absence of reference to any particular submission made either orally or in writing on behalf of the Player does not mean that the Committee did not take it into account, however the primary submissions made on sanction by the Player are as follows:
  - (a) At the date of offending in August 2024, the Player was not a contracted ALW player, but rather was registered as an amateur player for Macarthur Rams.
  - (b) To the extent that Clause 2.14 of the Code is relied upon, that Clause, properly construed, relates to the time of the Player either committing or being charged with a criminal offence, rather than at the later time that the person is convicted of an offence by the Criminal Court;
  - (c) To the extent that Clause 2.2 (g) of the Code is relied upon FA has not advanced evidence that the alleged conduct has in fact brought FA into disrepute, the totality of that evidence being an article in the Central Coast Express Advocate;
  - (d) To the extent that it is said that the conduct **may** bring the FA into disrepute, the breach would be at the low end in terms of seriousness, and ought to be treated as such;

- (e) By way of comparison, the charges and media in respect of the conduct by Sam Kerr, which brought no sanction by FA, is inconsistent with the way that the FA treated the Player and there should be a consistency of approach, particularly where the conduct of Sam Kerr was widely reported and known;
  - (f) The fact that the cannabis which the Player had used was medically prescribed cannabis, for chronic pain;
  - (g) That FA delayed unnecessarily between 14 April 2025 and June 2025 bringing about a situation where the Player was named by the Mariners to participate in the final series, and where FA adduces no evidence that the Player being named in the squad for those matches drew any adverse publicity;
  - (h) A delay by FA between 7 July 2025 and 15 August 2025 in making the determination which would have given the Player the opportunity to serve matches in the NPL in Victoria in earlier rounds.
14. The Player on that basis submits that the Committee is not obliged to issue a sanction and ought not do so. Alternatively, it is submitted that a reprimand, warning or caution, fine or order for community and social work would be sufficient and appropriate in the circumstances.
  15. Finally, it is submitted that if the Committee considers that a suspension is warranted, then it should be the next matches that the Player is scheduled to play in, which are State NPL matches, rather than AWL matches.
  16. Mr Kane also in his submissions draws attention to a letter from the Player expressing significant contrition and genuine remorse for her conduct, and to the character references attesting to her outstanding character, integrity, passion for football. The fact that the Player will go to Perth Glory for the 2025/2026 AWL season and try to prove herself in that new environment is also said to be a reason why the Committee would not suspend her from playing a game in that AWL season.

### **Consideration**

17. The purpose of the Code is to be promote and strengthen the reputation of Football in Australia by establishing a standard of conduct expected from all constituents. In addition, it seeks to deter conduct that could impair public confidence in the safe, fair, honest and ethical conduct of matches and competitions or in the integrity and good character of Football and its participants (Clause 1(a)).
18. The Code further makes clear that each person bound by it must strive to enhance and protect the reputation of football, noting that professional players particularly are the public face of football in Australia and are therefore subject to greater scrutiny and behavioural standards as set out in the Code. It has been referred to in other similar authorities that to play professional football in Australia is a privilege not a right.

19. It is important for the Committee to keep those aims and objectives firmly in mind when considering the appropriate sanction to be applied in this matter, as to which it has a wide discretion. In that respect, it is clear that general deterrence being a discouragement from other players from engaging in this conduct is an important consideration, as is the need to protect the reputation of football in Australia.
20. The Committee accepts the submission of Judiciary Counsel that anything short of a suspension of the Player is insufficient. The conduct was objectively serious and needs to have consequences. To not suspend the Player would create a dangerous precedent going forward in relation to similar conduct and whilst we accept that the Player is genuinely remorseful, general deterrence is an important consideration for the Committee and the Committee takes the view that a suspension is necessary to properly protect the image and reputation of the game of football in Australia.
21. The fact that Sam Kerr may not have been sanctioned in respect of conduct which took place in the UK, and which did not lead to a conviction, is not considered to be a material matter for the Committee. It prefers to deal with this matter on its own merits.
22. The next issue which arises is the number of games for which the Player will be suspended, and whether such games as contended for by Judiciary Counsel, ought only to be able to be served in the ALW.
23. First in relation to the number of games, the Committee would start at a period of suspension in relation to this type of conduct at something in the order of six matches. From that one would need to then consider any mitigating factors which would justify a reduction of that figure. In the present case there are a number. First the Player pleaded guilty to the offence and has accepted that such conduct is a breach of the Code. She has also shown genuine remorse and contrition and the Committee accepts that she has learnt from her mistake and has gone about seeking to turn her life around and give herself the best chance of becoming a professional footballer. It is also important that the drugs which she consumed had been prescribed for her for chronic pain. Whilst it is clear that this did not permit her to drive with drugs in her system, it is a very different position from someone taking recreational drugs obtained illegally.
24. For those reasons the Committee believes that in the particular circumstances of this case, that the number of matches for the suspension should be three, one of which should be suspended. That is, the same number of matches as was the subject of the FA sanction.
25. The final issue which needs to be determined is whether, as contended for by FA, the matches should be served in the ALW competition or whether they can be served in the Victorian NPL, the competition in which the player is currently engaged for Box Hill United.
26. Judiciary Counsel submitted that the Player was "essentially an A League Player" and that the publicity which followed on from the conduct described her as such.

He also pointed to the fact that at the time of her pleading guilty to the traffic offence, she had been contracted to the Mariners and had been sanctioned by the club. He submitted that it would be consistent with the earlier decisions of the Committee that Code breaches for A League players by way of suspensions should be served in the A League not in other competitions.

27. Mr Kane submitted that whilst the Player has been selected in A League squads, she is yet to play an A League game. He submitted that at the time of the conduct, the Player had been a contracted player with the Macarthur Rams in the NSW NPL for about 16 months. He pointed out that she is not a professional player and works very hard outside of football to earn an income. He says that she has recently signed a contract with Perth Glory and will soon go there to fulfil a dream of becoming an ALW player.
28. The Committee does not accept that, for the purpose of considering which games ought to be able to be used to serve the relevant suspension, the Player should be categorised as an ALW player. The Committee finds that the Player is essentially an NPL Player with aspirations of playing in the ALW and becoming a professional player, as she did not have a history of being contracted to an A League club for any sustained or continual period. This is consistent with her experience, and as is common among players in the women's game in Australia, most of whom even playing at the professional level will spend part of their year playing in the state competitions. It is very different from the men's game where an A League player will generally play all his football for his contracted A League Club. In addition, the events giving rise to the suspension did not occur during the ALW season.
29. The Committee is satisfied that this appeal is not one in which there is suspicion of attempting to circumvent a suspension in the country's premier competition by serving the suspension in the NPL. The timeline and resulting facts confirm otherwise.
30. The Committee therefore has little difficulty in finding that the two match non-suspended sentence can be served in the Victorian NPL over the next two weekends. The suspended match will stay in place for a year and if the Player commits a breach of the Code, she will be suspended from the next match for whichever Club she is playing for, whether an A League Club or an NPL Club, in addition to whatever sanction is imposed in respect of the later breach.
31. A fortunate consequence of the outcome is that the Player is able to go to Perth Glory with a clean slate and to seek to fulfil her aim of becoming a regular A League Women's Player, particularly having regard to the changes she has made to her lifestyle and to her commitment to the game.
32. The Committee therefore determines that the Player is to serve a three match suspension for her breach of the Code of Conduct on 21 August 2024, to be served as follows;

- (a) Two matches to be served by way of the next two games of Box Hill United in the NPL Victorian Women's Competition on 30 August 2025 and over the weekend of 5-7 September 2025, respectively; and
- (b) The third match is to be suspended for 12 months from today, to be served if the Player breaches the Code of Conduct during that period, in addition to any sanction otherwise imposed for that breach, the match to be the next match in which the Player would be playing for her then current Club.

Lachlan Gyles SC, Disciplinary & Ethics Committee Chair

**2 September 2025**

