

June 14, 2025

Australian Football League
AFL CEO for illicit drugs Laura Kane
AFL CEO Andrews Dillon
140 Harbour Esplanade
(Melbourne, Australia)
Docklands VIC 3008

Dear Laura and Andrew

Re: our previous submission dated June 12, 2025 regarding Drug Free Australian concerns illegal Drugs policy AFL please find important additional evidence.

Three Strikes and You're... Still Playing? The AFL's Illicit Drug Testing Conundrum

The AFL Illicit Drugs Policy finds itself at a crossroads that could define the integrity of Australian sport for generations to come. With Sport Integrity Australia's chief executive David Sharpe warning that "all Australian sport has reached a crossroad in dealing with illicit drug use, player mental health and wellbeing and criminal infiltration of sport," the spotlight has never burned brighter on the AFL's controversial "three strikes" illicit drug policy.

The Numbers Don't Lie – But They Tell a Troubling Story

The AFL's own figures paint a picture that would make any statistician raise an eyebrow. In 2013, out of 1,998 tests conducted, just 15 players tested positive to illicit substances – a detection rate of merely 0.75%. AFL General Manager Mark Evans declared this policy "continued to be effective," but the mathematics tell a different tale entirely.

Consider this sobering reality: with an estimated 5-10 tests per player annually, a player using illicit substances faces roughly a 1 in 10,000 chance of being detected before facing suspension. That's not deterrence – that's a statistical lottery where the odds overwhelmingly favour continued drug use.

When Protection Becomes Permission

The AFL Illicit Drugs Policy, operational since 2005, runs parallel to the World Anti-Doping Authority protocols but operates under vastly different principles. Where WADA focuses on immediate consequences and fair competition, the AFL's approach relies on a graduated response system that, in practice, creates an almost insurmountable barrier to meaningful intervention.

Under the current system, a player must test positive three separate times before facing serious sanctions. The first detection brings a £5,000 fine and counselling. The second makes their name public with a four-match suspension. Only the third triggers a 12-match suspension that could threaten their career.

But here's the mathematical reality that makes this policy more fiction than deterrent: even with consistent drug use over a decade, a player tested 10 times annually has less than a 1% chance of reaching that crucial third strike.

The Duty of Care Dilemma

Sporting organisations have both legal and ethical responsibilities to protect their athletes' health and safety. This duty of care extends beyond simply having policies on paper – it requires those policies to be effective in practice.

Early intervention has consistently proven more protective against harmful drug use than attempting to minimise damage after serious harm has already occurred. Yet the AFL's current system, with its extraordinarily low detection rates, effectively nullifies the benefits of early identification and intervention.

Dr Peter Harcourt, AFL Medical Director, noted that most players detected in 2013 "reported they accessed illicit substances opportunistically while socialising with friendship groups outside their clubs... almost always after significant alcohol consumption." This insight suggests that many instances of drug use are spontaneous rather than systematic – making the argument for robust, frequent testing even more compelling.

Alternative Models: Learning from Success

The solution isn't rocket science – it's basic probability theory applied with purpose. Hair testing, which can detect drug use for up to three months after consumption, represents a game-changing alternative to current urine testing protocols.

Consider these dramatically different outcomes:

- * Current system: With 10 tests per year at 0.75% detection rate, a player faces minimal risk
- * Enhanced system: Including hair testing at 25% frequency with 10 annual tests pushes cumulative detection probability above 95% within a decade
- * Robust system: Hair testing at 50% frequency virtually guarantees detection within two years

The NRL and international sporting bodies have already demonstrated that higher detection rates don't destroy sport – they protect it.

Beyond Numbers: The Human Cost

The AFL Players' Association's acting CEO Ian Prendergast proudly declared their "the most developed illicit drug policy in world sport," emphasising the medical approach to drug use. Yet development without effectiveness is merely elaborate window dressing.

Luke Ball, AFLPA President, acknowledged that "drugs are a very real issue within society, and that players are not immune to this." This recognition makes the policy's ineffectiveness all the more troubling. If players aren't immune to societal drug issues, they deserve protection systems that actually work.

The Integrity Imperative

Elite sport exists in a unique space where athletes serve as role models for countless young Australians. The integrity of competition, the health of players, and the trust of fans all depend on robust, effective policies that don't just look good in press releases but deliver real protection.

The current AFL approach – whether by design or accident – creates a system where illicit drug use carries virtually no meaningful risk of detection or consequence. This isn't player welfare; it's institutionalised negligence dressed up in medical terminology.

Time for Real Change

Sport Integrity Australia's David Sharpe identified this crossroads moment for Australian sport. The AFL has an opportunity to lead by example, implementing reforms that other codes could follow:

1. Abandon the "three strikes" policy – the most cost-effective reform that immediately increases accountability
2. Introduce comprehensive hair testing – extending detection windows from days to months
3. Increase testing frequency – making regular use genuinely unsustainable
4. Implement immediate, meaningful consequences – ensuring early intervention actually occurs early

The Bottom Line

AFL CEO Andrew Dillon faces a defining moment for his leadership and his sport. The choice is clear: continue with a policy that sounds progressive but protects no one or implement changes that prioritise genuine player welfare and sporting integrity.

The mathematics are unforgiving, the duty of care is unambiguous, and the time for action is now. Australian sport has indeed reached a crossroads – and it's time to choose the path that leads to real protection, not statistical sleight of hand.

The AFL illicit drugs policy isn't protecting players – it's protecting the problem. For the sake of the players, the clubs, and the millions of Australians who look to AFL stars as role models, it's time to change the game plan entirely.

Because when the house odds are rigged against detection, everyone loses – except the drugs.

(Source: WRD News <<https://wrdnews.org/afl-illicit-drugs-policy/>>)