



Q&A. THE WORLD HANDICAP SYSTEM: What will it mean for Australian clubs and golfers?

WHS – World Handicap System

GA – Golf Australia

R&A – Based in St Andrews in Scotland, The R&A is Australia's international governing body for golf

USGA – United States Golf Association

GENERAL

What is the World Handicap System? How many countries will be involved?

The R&A and the USGA have been working together with golf's major handicapping authorities to develop a single World Handicap System for the game. GA is one of the organisations that has been integrally involved. In October 2017 the R&A and USGA issued a formal invitation to GA to adopt the WHS. GA has now accepted this invitation. At this stage it appears very likely that every other major country will also adopt the WHS.

When will the WHS come into effect?

On a global level, the WHS is scheduled to take full effect in January 2020. One theme of feedback that has repeatedly been expressed to GA is that the WHS changes are very positive and that implementation in Australia earlier than 2020 would be preferred by many. As a result, GA is now investigating an earlier roll-out. GA is mindful that extensive involvement of various software providers will be required to bring the WHS changes into effect. Whilst GA is hopeful of an earlier implementation than January 2020, nothing has been confirmed and we will keep the industry updated on any new timelines.

How much handicapping change will be required for Australia's clubs and golfers?

Over the past decade there has been a substantial amount of handicapping change in Australia. GA is pleased that the move to the WHS will involve only minimal further change to the user experience of Australian clubs and golfers.

What will the WHS changes of substance be for Australia's clubs and golfers?

1. *There will be a Hard Cap of 5 strokes as per GA's current regulation. There will also be a Soft Cap at 3 strokes which will be a new regulation for Australia.* The Soft Cap will allow a player normal increases in their GA Handicap unless it increases to 3 strokes above their best GA Handicap from the previous 12-month period. Above this point the GA Handicap will only be permitted to increase by 50% of the calculated amount.
2. *The Daily Handicap calculation will be changed to incorporate the difference between the Scratch Rating and the Par.* This is all that needs to happen to enable 36 Stableford points (or net par) to become the equitable measure of whether a player has played to their handicap, irrespective of the course or set of tees. To determine a WHS Daily Handicap GOLF Link will start by performing the exact same calculation as currently occurs under the existing GA Handicap System. And then it will simply adjust this amount by the difference between the Scratch Rating and the Par.

What other changes will there be for Australia?

There will obviously be changes to technical regulations but the above two regulations will be the only changes of any substance to the user-experience of Australian clubs and golfers.

What factors did the GA Board consider when making its decision to adopt the WHS?

- The WHS will result in just two changes of substance to the user experience of Australian golfers and administrators. These two changes are both considered strong improvements to Australian handicapping. GA's chief statistician is also strongly supportive of both changes.
- Golf is played globally with one set of playing Rules; it makes sense for there to be only one handicap system.
- At this stage it appears very likely that every other major country will adopt the WHS. Given this, the Board believes it is important that GA align its operations with the global standard and with world's best practice. The Board does not believe strong governance is best served by continuing to invest in a stand-alone handicap system when resources could instead be directed to supporting the sustainability of golf clubs and facilities.
- During October-December 2017, GA invited State and Territory Associations, Clubs, Golf Management Australia, and golfers to provide feedback on the WHS. Key takeaways from this consultation period were:
 - Golf NSW, Golf NT, Golf Queensland, GolfSA, Golf Tasmania, Golf Victoria, GolfWA, and the Board of GMA all recommended adoption of the WHS.
 - GA commissioned respected industry consultant GBAS to poll the views of individual golfers. This polling displayed the following sentiments on the WHS. Change to Daily Handicap calculation – 65% strongly in favour, 27% slightly in favour, 6% neutral, 1% opposed. Introduction of Soft Cap – 56% strongly in favour, 26% slightly in favour, 13% neutral, 4% opposed. Should Australia adopt the WHS? – 81% strongly in favour, 13% slightly in favour, 4% neutral, 2% opposed.
 - No clubs advised GA against adopting the WHS.

Will the WHS provide any flexibility for different countries or will every country have to operate under exactly the same set of regulations?

The WHS will consist of a core set of regulations that will be compulsory for all countries. The WHS will also include a very limited set of "menu items" from which each country will be able to choose the options that best align with their own cultural preferences and the way golf is played in that country. (It is worth noting that Australian club golfers play far more competition rounds each year than occurs in any other country in the world.) Examples of menu items Australia will NOT use are: the Most Likely Score regulation, and match play scores for handicapping.

CHANGE TO DAILY HANDICAP CALCULATION

What is the current Australian formula for determining a Daily Handicap?

Daily Handicap = GA Handicap x (Slope Rating ÷ 113)

How will a Daily Handicap be calculated under the WHS?

Under the WHS formula, one simple extra step is added.

- GOLF Link will start by performing the exact same calculation as currently occurs under the existing GA Handicap System. And then it will simply adjust this amount by the difference between the Scratch Rating and the Par.

- EXAMPLE 1. A player's current Daily Handicap for a set of tees is 15, the Scratch Rating is 72, and the par is 70 (ie the course is rated to be 2 shots harder than its par).
- Because the course is rated to be 2 shots harder than its par, the player gets an extra 2 shots added to their Daily Handicap, so their WHS Daily Handicap becomes: $15 + 2 = 17$.
- If the player has 36 points off their new WHS Daily Handicap of 17, they have played to their handicap (under the existing GA method, the player would have needed 34 points to play to their handicap). Under the WHS method the score is now able to be directly compared with a score returned from any other set of tees – without the need for any adjustment.
- EXAMPLE 2. Now let's adjust Example 1 slightly by changing the Scratch Rating to 68, with the same par of 70. The course is now rated 2 strokes easier than its par so the player has 2 shots deducted from their current Daily Handicap. Their WHS Daily Handicap becomes: $15 \text{ minus } 2 = 13$. If the player has 36 points off their new WHS Daily Handicap of 13, they have played to their handicap (under the existing GA method, the player would have needed 38 points to play to their handicap).
- And again, the score will now be able to be directly compared with a score returned from any other set of tees – without the need for any adjustment.
- For the mathematicians, the full formula is: $\text{Daily Handicap} = (\text{GA Handicap} \times \text{Slope Rating} \div 113) + \text{Scratch Rating} \text{ minus Par}$

What extra work will be required of clubs and golfers when this change is made?

None at all. Golfers and clubs will not have to perform the calculation themselves. It will be done for them by all software. It will also be factored into the Daily Handicap look-up charts GA produces for all clubs.

Is the new method for calculating a Daily Handicap a part of any current handicap system?

The new method has been a popular component of the handicap system used by European countries for almost 20 years. (The European Golf Association Handicap System has included Slope throughout this time.)

So the 'Scratch Rating minus Par' adjustment will be a part of the new global standard for determining a Daily Handicap. Is this a new handicapping formula?

No. It is already a part of every handicap system. However all handicap systems, except the European system, currently apply the adjustment at a different point in the handicapping process. The adjustment is currently made to the player's score at the point where it is processed for handicapping and added to the player's handicap record. So it is already effectively used to determine the golfer's REAL playing handicap, but not in a visible way. The R&A and USGA believe it is better to move the adjustment into the golfer's Daily Handicap.

Why do the R&A and USGA believe the change to the Daily Handicap calculation will make handicapping simpler, fairer and more intuitive?

- This is all that needs to happen to enable 36 Stableford points (or net par) to become the equitable measure of whether a player has played to their handicap, irrespective of the course or set of tees. Many people struggle (for various reasons) with the idea that they are playing against the Scratch Rating and not against the par. Par is the far more visible value – it is what people play against in Stableford and Par competitions. It is what a pro's score is displayed against in televised golf. The WHS method will make handicapping more simple and intuitive for the regular golfer by providing a Daily Handicap that allows them to equitably play against the par of the course. Have you ever had a new golfer, or someone with not much handicapping knowledge, ask you: "So, if I have 36 points, will that mean I've played to my handicap?" And has their view that golf is a complex sport been confirmed when you've answered: "well, it kind of depends on the Scratch Rating and the par....."?

- Mixed-gender and multi-tee competitions are important to GA and to many clubs because they provide golfers with a more diverse range of playing options and club engagement opportunities. These competitions have clear participation benefits. However the feedback from clubs is that the existing score adjustment process for these competitions is complex, misunderstood, and often rejected. The proposed change to the Daily Handicap calculation will eliminate the complexity from these competitions.
- GA currently encounters problems with clubs that have Scratch Ratings higher than their pars. The practical feedback from some clubs is that players do not get/accept that their handicap never increases even though their best scores are no better than about 32 points. Many clubs find it difficult to have their members readily accept that when their Scratch Rating is higher than the par, GOLF Link treats a score as being better than what the player wrote on their score card.

So this change will result in a golfer getting more handicap strokes on a difficult course than they get on a less difficult course? But doesn't Slope already give a player all the strokes they need?

No! Slope only provides fairer handicaps when all competitors play from the same set of tees. When Slope was first introduced in Australia in 2014, there was a common public misunderstanding that it would provide fair handicaps for multi-tee competitions. And for many people this misunderstanding has continued which is fair enough because even for handicapping experts this can be a tricky issue.

There are actually two difficulty ratings in Australian handicapping that work in concert with each other – the Slope Rating and the Scratch Rating. But whilst the Slope Rating influences a player's Daily Handicap, the Scratch Rating currently does not. Currently a player's score is adjusted against the Scratch Rating AFTER it has been returned and uploaded to GOLF Link. And because it only happens at the GOLF Link stage, trying to compare the actual scores from different sets of tees is like comparing apples with oranges.

Take any two players with different GA Handicaps – all Slope is designed to do is to provide a fair difference between the Daily Handicaps that are calculated for them. On an easy course, the less-skilled player's Daily Handicap might be 20 strokes more than the skilled player's Daily Handicap. However on a difficult course the difference between the Daily Handicaps of the two players might expand out to 26 strokes (because the skilled player is better able to accommodate the increased difficulty). In other words, the Slope Rating determines whether the scale of handicaps should be expanded or contracted. But it doesn't provide any information on whether either player has actually played to their handicap – this is the job of the Scratch Rating. What the Scratch Rating does is it creates a scale for comparing the difficulty of all Australian courses. By factoring the Scratch Rating into the calculation of the Daily Handicap it will see all Daily Handicaps have an equalised starting point, irrespective of the course being played.

Can you provide some examples of Daily Handicap calculations under both the new and old methods?

ABC Golf Club

- Member X's GA Handicap is 1.8
- Member Y's GA Handicap is 29.6
- White tees (5721 metres)
 - Scratch Rating 70
 - Par 72
 - Slope 122
- Black tees (6357 metres)
 - Scratch Rating 73
 - Par 72
 - Slope 128

DAILY HANDICAPS USING CURRENT G.A. HANDICAP SYSTEM METHOD

- White tees
 - Member X: 2
 - Member Y: 32
 - Both players: 38 points required to play to handicap.
- Black tees
 - Member X: 2
 - Member Y: 34
 - Both players: 35 points required to play to handicap

DAILY HANDICAPS USING NEW WORLD HANDICAP SYSTEM METHOD

- White tees
 - Member X: 0
 - Member Y: 30
 - Both players: 36 points required to play to handicap
- Black tees
 - Member X: 3
 - Member Y: 35
 - Both players: 36 points required to play to handicap

Is there a statistical downside to this change?

No. GA's chief statistician strongly supports this change.

Will there be any downside at all to this change?

Whether or not there is any downside depends on personal preference. Under the WHS method, when a player moves from forward tees to back tees at a course their Daily Handicap will shift by a greater amount than it does under the current GA Handicap System method (the example above provides a demonstration). Some people may potentially prefer very low movement in their Daily Handicap, whereas other people will prefer a transparent and equitable handicap allocation that enables direct comparison with all other scores without need for adjustment.

Will the WHS include a statistical daily rating system similar to DSR?

Yes. If an unusually low proportion of competitors in a field play to their handicap then scores used for handicapping will be improved. If an unusually high proportion of competitors in a field play to their handicap then scores used for handicapping will be downgraded.

THE NEW SOFT CAP REGULATION

What is the new Soft Cap regulation?

There will be a Hard Cap of 5 strokes as per GA's current regulation. There will also be a Soft Cap at 3 strokes which will be a new regulation for Australia. The Soft Cap will allow a player normal increases in their GA Handicap unless it increases to 3 strokes above their best GA Handicap from the previous 12-month period. Above this point the GA Handicap will only be permitted to increase by 50% of the calculated amount.

- Identify each player's best GA Handicap within the trailing 12-month period (this is the "Anchor Point").
- Allow unrestrained increases in a player's GA Handicap in accordance with the '8 of 20' calculation – up to the point where their GA Handicap is calculated to be more than 3.0 strokes higher than the Anchor Point.

- Where the '8 of 20' calculation is greater than 3 strokes above the Anchor Point, the GA Handicap is calculated to be: $\text{GA Handicap} = \text{Anchor Point} + 3 + 50\%$ of the amount above the 3-stroke buffer.
- There will be an additional 'absolute' Cap of 5 strokes.

Can you provide some examples?

- EXAMPLE 1: A player's '8 of 20' calculation is 15.2. Their best GA Handicap within the trailing 12-month period is 11.2. Their GA Handicap is 14.7 (ie $11.2 + 3 + (50\% \text{ of } 1)$).
- EXAMPLE 2: A player's '8 of 20' calculation is 17.2. Their best GA Handicap within the trailing 12-month period is 11.2. Their GA Handicap is 15.7 (ie $11.2 + 3 + (50\% \text{ of } 3)$).

What proportion of players will be impacted by the new Soft Cap regulation?

Modelling indicates that the Soft Cap will impact up to 20% of the total number of handicap calculations performed by GOLF Link each year. The introduction of the Soft Cap will reduce the percentage of players impacted by the Hard Cap from 5% down to less than 1.5% – so less players will experience the frustration of receiving no handicap increases during a prolonged run of poor form.

What is GA's view of the new Soft Cap regulation?

GA has been aware for some time that our existing system produces a competitive advantage to the inconsistent player over the consistent player and we have been looking for a way to soften this outcome. The Soft Cap will improve this situation and will improve the equity of Australian handicapping. GA believes the Soft Cap represents a distinct improvement to Australian handicapping.

How do the R&A and USGA describe the objectives of the Soft Cap and Hard Cap?

"The Soft Cap and Hard Cap will work together to eliminate the capacity for extreme upward movement of a GA Handicap within a specified period of time. This has the effect that a temporary loss of form does not cause a player's GA Handicap to move too far from a level which is consistent with their underlying potential.

This limitation also acts as an anti-abuse safeguard. Medical condition or injuries aside, underlying potential usually does not decline particularly rapidly due to a series of poor scores." (Note: Clubs will always retain the capacity to increase a player's GA Handicap to accommodate the impact of medical conditions, injuries, or other exceptional circumstances.)