



**New Zealand Golf**

# **Handicap System Review Final Report**

**Author: Phil Aickin, March 2014**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The following findings and ultimately our final recommendations are a result of a thorough handicap system review carried out by New Zealand Golf throughout 2013 and the early part of 2014. The review process included consultation with the R&A, Golf Australia and the USGA however principally has been driven by a substantial survey process providing our Golf Clubs and their members the opportunity to contribute. In total 244 Golf Clubs and 9,774 members completed the online survey that formed part of this review process.

The Handicap review document was shared with our Golf Clubs, Districts and members (through [www.golf.co.nz](http://www.golf.co.nz)) in December 2013 and we have since allowed all involved three months to provide feedback. The wealth of information and comments received showed significant support for our current system but there was a consistency in some aspects which have influenced some of the changes presented in this report.

Our playing culture is for all cards to be entered for handicap purposes which include match play and nine hole score cards. Both have been contentious issues.

Our clubs identified that the same people appear to win events and that controlling manipulation is very difficult. We can alleviate the pressure that club staff and handicappers feel in this situation and start using the tournament score section of the handicap formula which we haven't been doing to date.

This USGA system provides handicap committees with the responsibility of making sure that each player has a handicap index reflecting potential ability. This is a modification of the handicap index; however this functionality is not currently available through our DotGolf system and addressing this will be another handy tool for keeping the equitable play we seek.

The portability advantages of golf thanks to the slope number need to be at the forefront of education. We need more information and articles on our website to explain handicapping and our recommendations. We are fortunate to have volunteer course raters but for the system to work at its best we need more training and calibration seminars.

The overall impression from the review is we are providing a good system but with some refinement could be better providing a fairer platform for equitable competition. To achieve that the recommendations were:

1. A system that reacts faster to exceptional scores
2. The ability for Clubs to modify handicaps if they believe it to be necessary
3. The ability for Clubs to identify competition play separately to casual golf
4. More flexibility around the return of match play cards for handicapping
5. The ability to have a nine hole and 18 hole handicap for those that have limited time
6. Accurate course ratings, requiring more training and a search for quality raters
7. Better education around the slope rating and how it is portable
8. Education in regard to an "inactive season"
9. Develop our system so that overseas scores can be entered if played on a course with USGA course ratings and slope numbers.
10. Identify within the system the professionals that have a NZG handicap index.

Following the feedback process the only change to this was in 5 where we now recommend the one handicap.



## INTRODUCTION

As we acknowledged in the press release announcing this review, the purpose of the national handicap system is to make the game more enjoyable by enabling players of differing abilities to compete on an equitable basis.

It is always important in regard to this subject to recognise that there is no perfect system and that for well over a century the handicap system has been the most common debate in clubhouses. As mentioned in the introduction to the CONGU method of handicapping, ***"It is recognized that handicapping, due to the nature of the game of golf with its varying playing conditions, is not an exact operation"***

Golf continues to be the largest participation and membership sport in New Zealand and the handicap system affects close to 115,000 members so it is important that this review process is thorough.

Through the survey we were seeking a clear indication of any issues that players and golf clubs currently perceive or experience with the current system.

Whilst the survey has provided important information, we have consulted with the R & A, the USGA and kept up to date with developments in Australia to assist with what would be the best for our New Zealand golfing culture.

This report includes the complete summary of each survey. For your interest I also attach the 138 comments received from our Golf Clubs, which makes interesting reading. I have used some of these within this paper to justify the findings.

The survey reveals the wide ranging and differing views of our membership as illustrated below.

*I have handicapped over four systems over 30 year period, current one is by far the best, most equitable and comes nearest to coping with the widest variations in weather/course conditions. It rates a player against the target course, not the player health or attitude or mental approach for that day. Don't change it, it works despite the squeals from low handicappers who blame the system for their inability to compete against bogey players.*  
**(Representative, Middlemarch)**

*If it is not broken why try to fix it. Best system we have ever had. Please don't follow Australia it was a cock up last time*  
**(Club Handicapper, Port Chalmers)**

*Under the current system it is too easy for a player to manipulate their handicaps. They can see what is dropping off and what they need to post to keep their handicap the same. Also a lot of players use winter conditions for their handicap to go out.*  
**(Representative, Tai Tapu)**

*.....This system does not work. We must cut peoples hdcp when they play well and if it takes them months to get back out so be it. THIS SYSTEM HAS RUINED COMP GOLF AND YOU NEED TO FIX IT.*  
**(Representative, Templeton)**



## REVIEW PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

Two surveys were prepared and posted on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). A meeting with an R&A representative in February, regular contact with the USGA and keeping informed about the changes and introduction of the new Golf Australia system have all been part of the process.

Every golf club was given the opportunity to complete a survey where we were seeking information relating to the status of their handicap committee, competitions, the return of score cards for handicapping and various questions relating to issues such as equitable stroke control and course rating. We contacted each club through a direct email requesting they complete the survey and in total 244 golf clubs replied. Whilst this only equated to 62% of our clubs, they represented 78% of the 3.176 million score cards entered for handicapping in 2012.

The member survey was on [www.golf.co.nz](http://www.golf.co.nz) for over a month, where 9,774 golfers completed a similar survey. Questions relating to ability, format of play and their thoughts on the current handicap system were sought. The results have been very helpful in making decisions for a better system.

In each survey we allowed for comments which varied from a few words to a comprehensive essay on handicapping. This proved to be just as revealing as the hard statistical information provided in the summary of each survey.

The Handicap review document was shared with our Golf Clubs, Districts and members (through [www.golf.co.nz](http://www.golf.co.nz)) in December 2013 and although there was little feedback confirmed that we were on the right track with the recommended changes.

The statistics and comments combined support the changes and improvements in the handicap system that this paper recommends. A full copy of each survey, the questions and the statistical results is included in the appendix to this paper.

## CONSULTATION WITH THE USGA

I have kept the USGA's Scott Hovde, Manager Course Rating and Handicap Education, informed of our review and have raised a number of questions with him.

**Revision dates.** We currently revise every two weeks. With computerization, some think we should have instant changes. What are your thoughts?

*USGA REPLY. We are in the process of evaluating the same thing. There are still some clubs in the US that don't use computers but mail in scoring sheets, but that is probably down to 1% or so. Canada is currently revising on an instant basis, but in reality they have told me that it is very inconsistent, as many clubs only transmit once or twice a month, and updating isn't done on an "instant" basis across the board. The other thing we consider with revisions is that a single score isn't likely to change an Index much, so revising after each score won't drastically improve accuracy...plus with an instant revision, players would then assume their Index is accurate and up-to-date every time they play golf. When in reality a score posted away may not make it back to the player's home club right away, so they would not be playing to a up-to-date Index. Another disadvantage is that incorrectly posted information (scores, ratings, etc.) would instantly change the Index before the Handicap Committee has a chance to review and fix...so a player may have a few days of playing to an incorrect Index.*



**Tournament scores.** This is a part of the system that we have not been using, but may lower the handicap indices of those that continually return exceptional scores in competition. Can you provide information supporting the rationale behind Tournament scores?

*USGA REPLY. The purpose of the automatic reduction for exceptional T-score procedure was to take some of the responsibility away from the clubs in terms of having to review and monitor all competitions and then make a subjective decision on an adjustment. It is definitely not a perfect procedure, but it does identify players who have scores that are highly unlikely relative to their Index. We assume clubs are looking at individuals identified by this procedure and determining if the adjustment is warranted, and whether further action need to take place. Only about 5% of players in the US are reduced by this procedure, so there shouldn't be a large number needing to be reviewed at a given time. So in essence it gives a club some (automatic) protections, but also a way to identify players that they can review, so it really can't hurt to implement the procedure as it can always be reviewed by the club to determine if something needs to be done. It can also take away the subjective nature of an adjustment, so the club can just point to the procedure instead of having to come up with an adjustment that may come across as "personal". Hard to argue that something is unfair when it is spelled out in the System, as opposed to an arbitrary adjustment by a committee.*

**Match Play cards.** We expect every card to be returned, whether in a club match play competition, a 4 ball best ball competition, or an interclub match. Have we been too pedantic?

*USGA REPLY. This is also a point of discussion here at the USGA. We know there are certain rounds/formats that probably don't give us "good data", but our general thought is the more scores the better. If a player plays well in a match, their handicap should be reduced accordingly. The team events is where it starts to get sticky, as it is much easier for a player to manipulate when they have a partner. Our culture here in the US (especially at private clubs) is for many players to play primarily match play, whether one on one, or in a 4-ball. If we didn't accept match play cards, some players would never have a score to post and their handicap wouldn't ever change. Since a handicap is used for both stroke and match play (including team events), using match play scores makes sense. If a player is purposely manipulating, knowing that they are "covered" by a partner on a hole, or will lose a hole in a match (so an even higher score doesn't hurt them), we would assume the club (committee) would address that issue.*



**Casual cards for handicapping?** We ask every player to submit a score for handicapping even if a casual round, as long as the principles of the game have been followed. Our culture also accepts that this is the case as per our survey results. However, as with match play cards, have we been too pedantic?

*USGA REPLY. We do require a score to be posted as long as they follow the "principles" of the ROG (assuming proper procedures are used for holes not played by the ROG). Again, it goes to our belief that the more scores we get the better. Casual rounds can often be the better rounds by a player (lack of pressure?) and not accepting them may give them an inflated handicap. A casual round that is significantly worse than expected or a deliberate attempt to increase a handicap should be addressed by the club (committee).*

**9 Hole score cards?** We now provide 9 hole handicaps to our members, but we only allow a 9 hole handicap or 18, you can't have both. There is reluctance to enter 9 hole cards for the 18 hole handicapper, therefore in your opinion would be best to allow players to have both?

*USGA REPLY. There is definitely an issue when a player has both a 9 and 18 hole handicap, as the 9 hole handicap will be lower than ½ of the 18 hole handicap. A player with a 12.0 Index can easily have a 5.0 or better 9-hole Index (as their best 9's are used instead of overall 18's). If a player plays a fair number of 9-hole rounds, but wants an 18 hole handicap, then not posting the 9-hole rounds would give them an inaccurate handicap. If an 18-hole handicap only plays a few 9-hole rounds in a year, they are likely not going to impact their handicap much (and may not even count if twenty 18-hole rounds are posted between the 9's), but we still want them to be posted. If a player routinely plays both 18-hole and 9-hole rounds, having both handicaps may very well give a more accurate handicap for the specific round they are playing. Using the example above, it is not uncommon for a player to be able to play like a 5.0 for 9-holes, but as a 12.0 for 18-holes, as putting together a good 18-hole score is more difficult than putting together a good 9-hole score.*

Whilst we have been using the USGA handicap system for 13 years, we have not been using it to full capacity, which is contributing to some of the negativity currently. The two main areas that we are not making use of are:

#### 1) Exceptional Tournament scores

A tournament score is a score made in a competition organized and conducted by a committee in charge of the competition. The competition must identify a winner(s) based on a stipulated round(s), and must be played under the principles of the Rules of Golf.

The committee (preferably the Handicap Committee, in consultation with the committee in charge of the competition) must determine in advance if these conditions are met, and announce in advance whether the score must be identified by the letter "T" when posted. Routine events such as regular play days normally are not to be designated as T-scores because they are not significant in the traditions, schedules, formats, and membership of the club.

The formula provides for reductions quickly when exceptional scores are returned.

#### 2) The USGA system allows for the modification of handicap indices, however we can only make a change due to disability or freeze a handicap due to manipulation.



## Section 8-4c Handicap Index Adjustment by Handicap Committee

The Handicap Committee has the responsibility of making certain that each player has a Handicap Index reflecting potential ability. Under the following circumstances, it will be necessary for the Handicap Committee to adjust the player's Handicap Index. However, the following list is not all-inclusive, and a Handicap Committee has the ultimate authority to adjust a Handicap Index under any circumstance that it feels necessary to do so. Before an adjustment becomes effective, the Handicap Committee must give the player an opportunity to explain the circumstances surrounding the proposed adjustment, either in writing or by appearing before the committee. When an adjustment does become effective, it must be identified with the letter M, reflecting that the Handicap Committee has modified the Handicap Index (e.g., 4.9M). (i) Improving Faster Than the System Can React

### GOLF AUSTRALIA (GA) SYSTEM

The GA hybrid system has been reviewed and the major differences between our current system and the Golf Australia system are:

1. We use the best 10 of the most recent 20 cards, Australia use 8.
2. We multiply the average of the best 10 by 96%, Australia multiply the average of their best 8 by 93%
3. They have an anchor in place which restricts a player increasing their handicap by more than 4 strokes beyond their best handicap in the previous 12 month period.
4. GA update handicaps immediately
5. They will have Daily Course Ratings (yet to be implemented)
6. GA handicap players on competition cards, plus any casual round whereby the player has nominated prior to starting the round that it is to count for handicap purposes (yet to be implemented)

Why did GA make the adjustment in 1 & 2?

- 1) When analysing the old incremental change system there was a feeling that it favoured the lower handicap player
- 2) When the same scores were used to analyse the effect of the USGA system there was a belief that it favoured the higher handicap player. GA did not use the tournament score function in running this analysis so this is perhaps not a surprise. That resulted in a reduction to both the number of counting cards and the potential adjustment. i.e. Best 8 of the last 20 and 93%.

We often hear and it is again a regular comment in the survey that our handicaps are too low to compete fairly in Australia. If we remain as with points 1 & 2 above, then our handicaps will naturally be a little higher than the Australians and may alleviate this perception or reality.

There is little support for a live system with daily changes to handicap indexes. There was only one comment supporting this from our Golf Clubs and confirms that the fortnightly rollover is what we should be using.

GA have developed for a January 2014 implementation a way of reducing a players handicap for exceptional scores. This followed consultation with golf club managers. Unlike the USGA tournament score reduction it is not intended to be an automatic reduction but more an option for club's to adopt. They use a table to make what they refer to as a 'Bonus' adjustment. Each has its merits. The GA reduction requires a club handicapper/manager to make an arbitrary decision so treatment of players may differ whereas the USGA tournament score reduction is automatic.



In the final analysis of our surveys, it is evident that our clubs and members would not be in favour of the different components that the Golf Australia system includes.

*The handicap system as it is works well for our members, who have become used to the roll over dates and handicap changes.*

**(Member of the Handicap Committee, Waipawa)**

*Like all systems it operates well when the users cooperate, but sadly there will always be those who try and use the system to their benefit. The fortnightly rollover system works well for Clubs running tournaments and checking handicaps ahead of time. DO NOT CHANGE THIS FOR A LIVE SYSTEM which would be easily manipulated and make for extra work for Clubs.*

**(Representative, Ashburton)**

At this stage there is little support from our membership for the use of an anchor. 26% of golf clubs thought this would be a good addition with nearly 50% not in favour. In the member survey 33% for and 39% against.

GA has introduced an anchor to counter the seasonal conditions that occur in some of their regions. There is some confusion that it has been introduced to control the very small percentage of players that manipulate their handicap. But in reality it was to stop the significant outward movement that occurred for the general player when the winter months arrived. The way we control that in NZ is to educate our course superintendents to shorten the course where and if possible and to also consider an inactive season.

It is my belief that the recommended changes will alleviate the need for such an addition, but we should continue to monitor how it is working in Australia.

Prior to our current system we did have a calculation that was used to provide daily course ratings. The proposed Golf Australia format is much more exact and uses sound theories and millions of rounds returned to date to compute a daily rating. The issue that we had previously was the daily rating was determined by the quality of the field which may also exist with the Australian situation. Like our neighbours we have courses affected by coastal breezes which usually pick up during the day, which can still cause anomalies when a round is played early morning yet the conditions are far different in the afternoon. Once again, we should monitor how this is received in Australia and focus on more regular training for our current rating teams.

There are three parts to the GA system for which we have little support, competition cards only, an anchor and daily course ratings.

There has been much research by GA around the introduction of Daily Scratch Ratings (DSR). They have researched this with a very qualified team and it has a lot of merit. However, they do acknowledge that firstly there is no rating system that is 100% accurate. Just like there is no Handicap system that is perfect. They also acknowledge that the US golf culture, as with our own, whereby we put cards in every time we play, makes it a challenging proposition to run accurate DSR's. Due to our culture and the support to retain the one rating as we have now I believe we should follow the lead of the USGA and monitor this introduction in to the GA system, rather than look for a change. The recommendations made to date should not be too difficult for DotGolf to change, however, to introduce DSR and the very complex formulas that are involved will require both time and money.





## **THE R&A and HANDICAPPING**

The R&A are very much in the embryotic stages of a handicap system with nothing in the near future available. They are very interested in the Golf Australia system, but also realize that the USGA system is the most universal and a good place for them to start in regard to any concept. They may be very interested in any changes that we make especially as we are trying to improve the system.

## **NEW ZEALAND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE**

The survey allowed us to gather information relating to our members playing statistics that very much supports the retention of this system with some minor changes.

Q.3 Member survey. We asked each member what best describes the format they usually play.

30%	Enter the scramble and play a 4BBB match
26%	Play single stableford competitions
26%	Play stroke play
12%	Play predominantly match play (interclub/pennants/club match play comps)
6%	are a casual golfer not interested in competing

Q.4 Member survey. Do you think that off your current handicap index you can compete fairly against any other golfer with a handicap index, regardless of whether they are on scratch or 36? Based on the below 3 of every 4 members feel they can currently compete equitably.

13%	Strongly agreed
61%	agree
20%	disagree
5%	strongly disagree

When considering the above and then focusing on how our Golf Clubs run their competitions (Q.7 Club survey) we find:

46%	of clubs only have one division
28%	of clubs have two divisions
26%	of clubs have more than two divisions

Some of the 46% may be because they are a small club and the numbers dictate the one division.

In Q.6 of the Club survey we asked what the average stableford score was that won their weekly scramble.

6%	less than 36 points
46%	36-39 points
47%	40-43 points
2%	more than 44 points

As an average I wonder if 93% of the winning score being between 36-43 points is a reasonable expectation. Through a few changes we can certainly lower this average. Other survey questions provided us with important answers relating to the type of format played, the return of match play cards, the introduction of an anchor, course ratings, equitable stroke control, 9 hole cards for handicapping and the handicap committee. The full results are in the attached papers.

We rely on club's to assist us in maintaining the integrity of the system. They are expected to have a handicap committee or at the least a peer review process, but preferable the former. It was a disappointing statistic to find that only one Club in four has a formal handicap committee.

## CORE NEW ZEALAND ISSUES IDENTIFIED

In assessing all information the following are the main issues that were raised or identified as a result of the survey:

### 1. Handicap indices are not changing fast enough when exceptional scores are returned

A regular comment made by golf club representatives was the suggestion of competition cards only for handicapping. Some mentioned the best five of the last 10 or 20 cards to be used, so that handicaps would change quicker.

*Golfers do not get cut enough for returning good rounds; 40 plus points. There should be at least .3 for every shot under there handicap. People playing 4 or 5 times a week can play well in a few tournaments and still stay on same handicaps.*

**(General Manager, Templeton)**

*By using the best 10 of the last 20 cards entered it does seem that it can take too long for a handicap to fall into line with a players current form - whether it be waxing or waning. This can also be affected by summer or winter conditions. If a player is only entering one card per week then it can actually take some months for any significant change in index, by which time a different season has arrived. For example we commonly see high handicappers scoring extraordinarily well in the summer months only to be (rightly) slashed, however then struggling during the winter. It is an inexact science, however perhaps there might be some merit in at least doing some sort of study on the idea. Thanks*

**(Match Committee Chairman, Charteris Bay)**

*There is no perfect handicap system unfortunately golf relies on the integrity of the player. In a large club such as ours managing issues around potential farming of handicaps could be all consuming. I believe that competition cards may hold the key to real handicap indicators.*

**(General Manager, North Shore)**

### 2. The same players are winning and there is not enough ability to modify handicaps when necessary

The handicap system provides a handicap committee with the empowerment to make adjustments to a player's handicap under certain situations. It is currently not an easy process to make these changes.

*The club still needs the ability to manually adjust a person's handicap whereby they feel a players ability or form would justify doing so. Presently this option is not available to a club.*

**(General Manager, Titirangi)**

*The system is not responsive to improving golfers. In my experience their skill level improves more rapidly than the handicapping system can accommodate and they end up playing off too high a handicap for too long a time. Exceptional scores should bring about quick reductions in handicaps but their influence is watered down by the averaging process which effectively makes each score only a tenth as effective*

**(Representative, Riverton)**

**3. There is a dislike for match play cards being entered, based on the erratic assessment of the 'most likely score' concept. There was also regular mention of how different the approach can be to playing match play**

*I feel that the entry of match play cards should not be mandatory, as often the scores entered for holes conceded before the ball is holed are not always done to the level prescribed in the manuals and advisory notes – sometimes they are entered as the maximum allowed for the hole, sometimes adding 2 shots to the number of strokes taken to the point of concession, even if the putt is a very short one.*

**(Club handicapper, Mahunga)**

*Match play cards could be optional – match play is affected when gimmes apply and also at the end of matches when scores are assessed or players lose interest.....some players putt out rather than going straight to the next hole losing the match play strategy of forcing putts at the end of the game.*

**(Member of the Handicap Committee, Lincoln)**

*It is widely felt that match play cards should not be included in handicap indices calculation due to the nature of the game (playing the player not specifically the course) and also the amount of estimating or guessing a score on a hole when it has been conceded (any putt can be made or missed - so it is only a guess!)*

**(Club handicapper, Tahuna)**

**4. There was little support for the return of 9 hole score cards for those with an 18 hole handicap**

Statistically this was the part of the handicap system that had the least support. In regard to 9 hole score cards being returned:

23% of members believed all 9 hole score cards should be entered  
8% of members believed some 9 hole cards should be entered

However following a closer scrutiny and the recommendation of just the one handicap for our members we will need to tackle this with good rationale and research results to educate our members that returning all 9 hole scores for handicapping is required.

*9 Hole cards for 18 hole handicaps - would like to see this deleted from the system. Our Club runs Twilight Golf (9 holes) where the average stableford score would be higher than normally expected had the same player competed over 18 holes. Therefore, we see these cards as adversely affecting members handicaps, especially when 2 abnormally good scores are added together thus making a rather false score.*

**(Member of the Handicap Committee, Rangiora)**

*At our club we have had many negative comments regarding the system which requires 18 hole players to submit 9 hole cards for handicapping. This occurs during summer Twilight and Business League. It has a negative impact on our players as our back and front nine are deemed to have different degrees of difficulty*

**(Club Manager, Hastings)**

**5. Players showed a lack of understanding in regard to how the slope number works, with many using that to compare their course with others.**

*The co-relation between Slope & Course Rating can be confusing and appear wrong. I.E. Our Blue Slope is 118, CR 70 Par 71 & Black Slope is 116, CR 71.4 Par 70*

**(Director of Golf, Sherwood Park)**



*The system depends on the correct assessment of the difficulty of one's golf course. This assessment needs much tuning! (When it becomes common knowledge that players from a particular club are 99% sure to win at any competition outside of their own course, something is wrong)*

**(Club Handicapper , Waikaka)**

*I am of the opinion that the slope rating system needs overhauling. Too many courses are rated far more difficult than they play and others too easy. Perhaps the criteria applied to assessing the slope rating needs changing.*

**(Club Handicapper, Pegasus)**

**6. Whilst nearly 60% of Clubs believe their course rating is in line with other Clubs in their District, there is a need for more training for our volunteer course raters**

The accuracy and consistency in course rating is vital and the mention of course and slope ratings and their confusion is regular in the survey. I have been responsible for the training of our raters for the last decade and have concluded that we need to train and support these volunteers more.

**7. There are score cards being returned for handicapping during seasons when the playing conditions are not truly reflective of the way the course was assessed which severely affects handicaps**

Earlier this year we provided approval for four clubs in the Hawkes Bay to have an "inactive season" meaning score cards could not be returned for handicapping. We need to educate clubs that this is an option in extreme conditions.

*We do have very dry summer conditions and very wet winter conditions, which causes a great variance in handicaps but this is the same for all members and all clubs in our area. A lot of people don't like their handicaps going out so far in the winter but it is the same for everyone. This means we do get some exceptional scores when we come into the summer season with winter handicaps but again, it's the same for everyone.*

**(Club handicapper, Tairua)**

**8. There is a lack of information on our website in regard to handicapping**

In reviewing the USGA website you can find a mass of information in regard to handicapping which we should include on our site.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS & FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As the national body we need to provide the most equitable playing environment possible. We have a golf culture that accepts the requirement to provide as much information as possible, so that playing abilities are fairly represented by handicap indices. We have the evidence that that should be maintained.

Our survey results show a significant support for our current system, but having considered the statistics, the feedback and core issues as well as the GA system we believe the following solutions and recommendations are considered.

### **1) A system that reacts faster to exceptional scores**

By triggering the tournament score calculations within the formula, this will be achieved. The main reason why this has not been part of handicap indices calculations is that it is not easy to explain so we will need to educate members and have an example on our website. I have also had discussions with the Hong Kong Golf Association who have used the USGA system, including the tournament score calculation, for some years. They believe the tournament score calculation helps to address those golfers that seem to win regularly through controlling their handicap index. I have included an example (Appendix 1) of how the exceptional tournament score concept works. For national consistency we will need to be very clear on what events meet the requirement of being tagged as 'tournament scores'. The GA option is not automatic and a simple table exists to make a bonus reduction so the same is achieved. The reduction occurs by inserting eight artificial scores which become part of the latest 20 scores. Dot Golf are ready now to trial this new calculation.

### **2) The ability for Clubs to modify handicaps if they believe it to be necessary**

This requires some development within the current DotGolf system but empowers the Club to make changes without having to gain NZG approval. It is also authorized within the USGA system. If players are improving faster than the handicap formula allows then it is appropriate for the clubs handicap committee to make a change. I have discussed this option with Colin Trim, Golf Operations Manager at North Shore Golf Club, and he believes it would be an excellent tool for him to be able to tweak handicaps when there is enough proof that players have been manipulating their handicap.

### **3) The ability for Clubs to identify competition play separately to casual golf**

Clubs tag the important events to accept tournament scores. This can happen immediately and we would provide a recommendation of the events that would qualify. Any formal competition where a winner is declared should qualify and within some clubs their Saturday scramble may be competitive enough to be identified for tournament score calculations. The GA system is based on competition cards only something we don't recommend however we are adding importance to tournament scores by using the tournament score function.

### **4) More flexibility around the return of match play cards for handicapping**

We provide a recommendation to Clubs advising that some matches are exempt from the return of handicap cards.

Originally we did not want to sit on the fence with our approach to match play cards therefore we have taken a firm position that every match play card must be entered. Having corresponded with the USGA on this topic, they have been surprised with this approach, but are having a closer look at this requirement as per their reply recently. We have agreed that the more information the better, but a list of events where it is not compulsory for match play cards to be returned may look like this:

- All international, inter district and interclub match play competition (excluding handicap match play)
- All national and provincial match play championships
- Club match play championship



Our survey confirms that 61% of members are happy for match play cards to be entered which is significant support. Adding a few exclusions may increase this further.

**5) Only the ONE Handicap rather than the option of 9 or 18 hole**

We initially recommended that players be able to hold both a 9 hole and an 18 hole handicap. Following feedback this provided not only an opportunity for manipulation but also a developmental software challenge. Golf Australia only offers the one handicap and we believe that we should return to the same situation. Golf Clubs can still offer a 9 hole membership category however the handicap, by combining two 9 hole scores, is the same as every other players.

Although one of the most negative responses within the survey was to do with nine hole score cards being returned for the 18 hole handicapper we need to show the research behind why this works and educate our members.

**6) Accurate course ratings, requiring more training and a search for quality raters**

We know the system relies on accuracy and consistency within the course rating procedure. This is the best system available and used by 64 countries worldwide. There is enough support to continue with the one course rating, but we need more regular training and younger volunteers.

DotGolf now have close to 50 million rounds in their system and we are currently able to view a course variance chart based on scores returned relative to the course rating. Whilst it is not possible to determine a fair course rating from this data, we should consider how we can use this further to identify course rating anomalies.

**7) Better education around the slope rating and how it is portable**

This is certainly an area that we can improve. Through our website and direct emails to Clubs we have enough resource that we can provide.

**8) Education in regard to an “inactive” season**

It was evident in 2013 due to our extreme summer that winning scores were exceptional. We need to educate and inform our clubs that declaring an inactive season, where golf is played yet cards aren't entered for handicapping, is an option. This also applies in the very wet winters. We could provide a guide for District consistency.

## NEXT STEPS

Our framework in recent months has been:

<b>December 2013</b>	The handicap Review document circulated to all Golf Clubs, Districts and posted on <a href="http://www.golf.co.nz">www.golf.co.nz</a>
<b>January - March</b>	Allowed time for feedback
<b>March</b>	The Final recommendations circulated to the NZG Board
<b>April 23</b>	Board to finalise changes made to the system
<b>May</b>	All information on changes sent to Clubs
<b>1 June 2014</b>	Implementation of any changes

Phil Aickin  
Golf Manager  
**New Zealand Golf**

## EXPLANATION OF THE TOURNAMENT SCORE CALCULATIONS



The main change in calculating handicaps is in regards to Tournament scores. As touched on by the USGA it alleviates the Club Committee making a decision on an arbitrary adjustment. Below I explain how this works:

### USE OF TOURNAMENT SCORES

A player firstly requires two or more eligible tournament scores. For the calculation to have an effect there must be two tournament scores where the player has played at least 3.0 better than their handicap index.

The tournament scores used to calculate any adjustment are either rounds within the last 12 months, or part of the 20 score history.

#### Scenario

A player has a Handicap index of 17.3. There are 3 tournament scores in their record from play at Manawatu Golf Club. An 82, 83 and 85. Course Rating 71.2, slope 123.

Using the normal handicap differential formula, these equate to:

#### Step One

$$82 - (82 - 71.2) \times 113 / 123 = 9.9$$

$$83 - (83 - 71.2) \times 113 / 123 = 10.8$$

$$85 - (85 - 71.2) \times 113 / 123 = 12.7$$

#### Step Two

The 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest tournament score is subtracted from the handicap index.

$$17.3 - 10.8 = 6.5$$

If this result is 3 or greater, then an adjustment of the handicap index occurs.

#### Step Three

Average the two lowest tournament scores

$$9.9 + 10.8 = 10.35$$

#### Step Four

Subtract that average from the handicap index.

$$17.3 - 10.35 = 6.95 \text{ (rounded up to 7)}$$

The result of 7 is then taken to the Handicap Reduction Table. The information is that we have 3 eligible tournament scores and the best two scores average 7.0 below their handicap. The table figure we find is 5.

$$17.3 - 5.0 = \text{a Handicap Index of } 12.3$$



## APPENDIX 2

### FEEDBACK RECEIVED AS OF END OF FEBRUARY 2014



This has been a long process and we provided our Clubs and Districts the opportunity to provide feedback to the recommendations that we have identified. It is therefore very disappointing that we have only eight responses; Two from Districts, Five from Golf Clubs and the final submission a reply from DotGolf which covers the technology perspective.

1. A system that reacts faster to exceptional scores

Handicap Index not changing fast enough. Support the T score being included but obviously needs some consistency in what events this covers.

***Judi McCarthy, Handicap Convenor, Picton GC***

DotGolf developed this in the past but was never implemented. We would like to do some tests around this before implementation. On the surface this seems like a logical step to take

***DotGolf***

2. The ability for Clubs to modify handicaps if they believe it to be necessary

This is quite tricky when dealing with club Personalities .. We used NZG a few years back and this was much better for us.

***Judi McCarthy, Handicap Convenor, Picton GC***

The way USGA does it is the same as we do it currently, but it is only available to NZG. Extending this to the Golf Clubs seems like a logical step providing the handicap committees are fully aware of rules around modifications of handicaps. We would extend the functionality within the DotGolf Live system to provide access to this area for the golf clubs.

***DotGolf***

3. The ability for Clubs to identify competition play separately to casual golf

Only competition cards counting would make it easier but it would affect say 5 – 6% who only play non-competitive rounds

***Judi McCarthy, Handicap Convenor, Picton GC***

Currently Clubs have the ability to set up competitions within the DotGolf system with the name of the competition being printed on the scorecard. They are also given a scorecard number that could be aligned to the specific competition. If a player enters that competition, then a Tournament (T) scorecard is returned and input for handicapping purposes with a notation "T" beside the adjusted score in the player's handicap record. Any score in the handicapping record that does not have a "T" beside it is therefore deemed to be a casual round score. Clubs would therefore have the ability to identify competition scorecards as opposed to casual golf.

***Women's and Men's Handicap & Course Rating Committee, Auckland Golf***

4. More flexibility around the return of match play cards for handicapping

Agree with some flexibility regarding match play cards and like the ones you mentioned in the review. We would also like to include team events such as 4BBB being excluded .

***Judi McCarthy, Handicap Convenor, Picton GC***

Any decision on which match play cards qualify for handicapping should be a “yes” or “no” – not “optional”. There is general agreement that 4BBB match play cards should not be returned for handicapping purposes, but there are differences of opinion within our Club whether general match play cards should be returned or not. Believe NZ Golf’s intention of not including inter district, interclub match play competitions is for gross based competitions only. Any handicap match play cards should remain (eg handicap pennants)

***Michael Wood, General Manager, Titirangi GC***

No software change required

***DotGolf***

5. The ability to have a nine hole and 18 hole handicap for those that have limited time

Agree with having either a 9hole or 18 hole handicap. Not both at once. Also would like to see the use of 9 hole cards for 18hole handicaps deleted. This may have the effect of promoting 9hole golf a little more

***Judi McCarthy, Handicap Convenor, Picton GC***

DotGolf should have the ability to print 9 hole scorecards for 18 hole players especially for competitions such as Twilight Golf. However, these scorecards should not be used for handicapping purposes nor should they be held in the system awaiting another 9 hole scorecard, be it from the same course, same nine holes or a different 9 holes from a different course. The only exception to this is when a 9 hole player returns a scorecard for handicapping purposes after completing the 9 holes.

***Women’s and Men’s Handicap & Course Rating Committee, Auckland Golf***

This proposed change seems to be the most significant, and there are the following points that we would like considered. The proposed 9 hole and 18 hole handicap would require a significant change for the handicapping system, in addition to other DotGolf systems in the current marketplace. We must also consider how this would affect 3<sup>rd</sup> party golf solution providers such as Golf Manager and Autoscore. Notwithstanding this – these changes could be made, but a possible (and preferred) alternative is detailed below:

The argument of whether golfers play better on the front 9 versus back 9 is very subjective. Given we can already accommodate 9 hole scores as part of the handicapping system for 18 handicapped golfers, we are not sure whether this warrants such a significant change to handicapping? People with limited time can still play 9 holes with an 18 hole handicap.

Something else to consider is how Australia do their handicapping – where there is no such thing as a 9 hole handicap. DotGolf has reviewed this, and agree this approach has its advantages over our current dual 9/18 handicap system in NZ:

- Since we now accept 9 hole cards for 18 hole handicappers, there is no reason any more to be a 9 hole handicap member. When the handicap system began, 18 holes handicapped golfers could not submit 9 hole cards, which was why the 9 hole handicap was so important. Now 9 hole cards can be submitted, this should be reviewed whether necessary
- Having no 9 hole handicaps does not prevent clubs from offering 9 hole memberships. Such a membership would purely mean members of such categories can only play 9 holes. 9 hole scores would contribute to form an 18 hole handicap in the form of combined scores

- 9 hole handicappers continually face problems when visiting other clubs to play golf. For example – if a 9 hole handicapper visits a club and wants to play (and pay) for 18 holes – there are current system limitations preventing them from doing this easily:
    - 9 hole members cannot submit scores for 18 holes – therefore they cannot print an 18 hole card and enter an 18 hole card for handicapping
    - This forces clubs to print 2 x 9 hole cards which is annoying;
      - a) for the club to print 2 cards front and back, and
      - b) for the golfer to have 2 cards for 1 round of golf
- It also forces the clubs to create weird 18 hole green fees (for 9 hole golf) to allow them to correctly allocate the 18 hole green fee to a 9 hole card round.

This entire process is inefficient and clumsy

Like Australia, we could also consider how strokes are allocated when an 18 hole handicapper plays 9 holes. E.g. Rather than simply halving the handicap, and rounding to get a 9 hole handicap, the system can automatically determine how many strokes the player should receive on either front/back 9 depending on the normal 18 hole strokes. For courses where the front 9 plays significantly differently to the back 9 (easier or harder) – this would more correctly allocate strokes across each 9 holes.

e.g. 15 handicap player

- Playing the front 9 (which is easier based on stroke allocation) will play off 6
- Playing the back 9 (harder) will play off 9

***DotGolf***

#### 6. Accurate course ratings, requiring more training and a search for quality raters

More attention should be given to recognising the playing length of courses rather than the measured length especially in seasons of extreme weather. Adjustments could be made to course ratings for seasonal conditions as is necessary for certain courses, that is, not all courses would need adjustments due to the type of playing surfaces or grasses e.g. no adjustment necessary for say Royal Auckland because of the couch fairways as opposed to Maungakiekie where there is extreme run on the golf ball due to reduced grass covering and contours of fairways.

***Women's and Men's Handicap & Course Rating Committee, Auckland Golf***

No software change required

***DotGolf***

#### 7. Better education around the slope rating and how it is portable

There should be an emphasis on educating Club personnel on the Handicapping and Course Rating system. Whilst Club personnel act in good faith when changing hole designs, reducing rough height, reducing or lengthening hole measurements, changing green speeds etc., etc., they are often ignorant of the fact these changes have on the course and slope ratings.

***Women's and Men's Handicap & Course Rating Committee, Auckland Golf***



Of the items you will be aware of my opinion on this and the relative difficulties of courses so education and accurate ratings are vital as I know for certain that players rate the difficulty of a course by its course rating.

***Ian Litchfield, General Manager, Pukekohe GC***

No software change required

***DotGolf***

8. Education in regard to an “inactive season”

Up to clubs affected – Simply don’t enter scores for the inactive season, or we could, for clubs affected, disable the various score entry controls for the inactive season?

***DotGolf***

**ADDITIONAL & GENERAL COMMENTS**

Congratulations on a fine and thoroughly researched report.

***Cheers, Grant Lewis, General Manager, Canterbury Golf***

Our Golf Committee considered the report at its February meeting and agrees with the recommendations that have been put forward. Like a lot of people we believe the existing system is very good and only requires tweaking. The ability for clubs to identify competition play separately from casual golf is very relevant and something we support, likewise clubs being able to modify handicaps if deemed necessary – this could open the odd can of worms or two. Anyway we look forward to the final outcomes when released.

***John Freer, General Manager, Boulcott’s Farm Heritage Golf Club***

Having read and considered the report Omanu Golf Club endorses the proposed solutions and recommendations outlined on pages 14 & 15. We believe these are practical solutions to take at this time with ongoing monitoring occurring across the various systems.

***Barry Plank, Manager, Omanu Golf Club***

Also any scores over 5/6 years should be discarded please. We have some players still clinging to the lowest club handicap and they haven’t entered a card for 10 years.

***Judi McCarthy, Handicap Convenor, Picton GC***

We generally believe that the current handicapping system and slope rating is a good system.

Fortnightly update of handicaps should stay

Daily scratch rating is not practicable and should not be pursued.

***Michael Wood, General Manager, Titirangi GC***

Consideration should be given to weekly roll over of handicap indices in order for the indices to be current. Clubs would need to agree to this recommendation after considering any cost increases that would be incurred by them from DotGolf.

It is recommended that, in any one calendar year, the maximum a player can increase his or her handicap index be capped at 4 shots. The only exception to this, and by approval of NZ Golf on the recommendation of the player’s Club Handicap Committee, is if a player is returning to the game after a lay off for health reasons, or, exceptional circumstances.

***Women’s and Men’s Handicap & Course Rating Committee, Auckland Golf***



We have tried multiple fields before and have really got into the habit of having one. We also have had an issue with the value of gross prizes relative to net and stableford ones. One way around this is to go to 2 or 3 fields when a large total field is in action. We will see what, if any, reaction we get.

In terms of the 8 recommendations we are pretty relaxed that all of them are implemented and look forward to the changes.

***Ian Litchfield, General Manager, Pukekohe GC***