

Complaint, Appeal and Dispute Procedure

Corporate Procedure 001, issue 1, 17 December 2018.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The procedure is available to clients and applicants of For Future Generations Pty Ltd (FFG), and third-party individuals or organizations who perceive a stake in the affairs of FFG and who have reason to question either the actions of FFG itself or the actions of an FFG client with regard to conformance with GECA requirements. The procedure is applicable to any formal decision rendered by FFG or actions taken by a client where such actions are believed to conflict with the terms and/or conditions of the client's engagement with FFG. FFG is responsible for gathering and verifying all necessary information to progress the complaint or appeal to a decision, and for all decisions at all levels of the appeals-handling process. The formal processes outlined in this document should be employed only in the event that less formal measures do not achieve resolution.

2 Definitions

- 2.1 **Complaint:** A written expression of dissatisfaction, other than those types of communication defined in Sections 2.2-2.6, below, by any person or organization, relating to the activities of FFGs' personnel and/or representatives of an FFG client, where a response from FFG is appropriately requested in accordance with the company's [Investigation Process](#).
- 2.2 **Appeal:** A request by a client (certificate holder or certification applicant) for formal reconsideration of any adverse decision made by FFG related to its desired status. Such request will be resolved by FFG in accordance with the company's [Investigation Process](#).
- 2.3 **Dispute:** A Complaint or Appeal that cannot be satisfactorily resolved by FFG through the Investigation Process such that the matter is referred onto an external body (e.g., GECA).
- 2.4 **Stakeholder Comment:** Information and/or opinions regarding a FFG client's conformity with the requirements of applicable GECA standards and scheme rules; expressions of dissatisfaction not substantiated as complaints; and anonymous complaints. Such comments are provided by an individual or group whose interests are affected by the actions of a FFG client or a certification/verification decision rendered by FFG. In the event that a *Stakeholder Comment* requires an investigation, such investigation will normally be conducted in the course of a scheduled assessment rather than through FFG's Investigation Process. Depending upon the nature and severity of the information brought to the attention of FFG through a *Stakeholder Comment*, FFG reserves the right to conduct an unannounced audit or

engage in other investigative actions prior to the next scheduled audit in accordance with the GECA scheme rules. Stakeholders may choose to elevate a *Stakeholder Comment* to a *Complaint* if the issue is not satisfactorily resolved in the course of an assessment.

- 2.5 **Client Feedback:** Specific instances of FFG's clients providing information, preferably written, about aspects (e.g., quality, timeliness, responsiveness) of FFG services. Client Feedback should be duly recorded by FFG staff receiving such feedback and assessed as to whether a response is required. Negative client feedback shall also be forwarded to the FFG Managing Director and may be addressed internally by FFG through the internal corrective action process. Clients may choose to elevate negative feedback to a Complaint if it is not satisfactorily addressed.

3 Availability/Standing

- 3.1 In the case of Complaints against the actions of an FFG client, the complainant should first attempt to resolve the issue with that client prior to requesting that FFG become involved, pursuant to this procedure. In most cases, FFG will notify the certified client in question of the Complaint **within 7 (seven) business days** of the receipt of the complaint. (Except for the circumstances when such information may endanger the client's personnel or interfere with the investigation). FFG shall retain the anonymity of the complainant in relation to the client, if this is requested by the complainant.
- 3.2 In the case of appeals, the appellant must lodge its appeal with FFG against any adverse decision taken by FFG, **within thirty (30) calendar days** after notification of the decision.
- 3.3 Complaints/Appeals should be submitted to:
- For Future Generations: Complaints/Appeals
Office 1, 5-7 Green Street
Healesville, Victoria Australia 3777.
- or
- via e-mail to: complaints@futuregenerations.com.au

4 Complaint/Appeal Investigation Process

- 4.1 To have standing under this procedure, the Complaint/Appeal must include the following information:
- Contact information for the complainant/appellant, including their name (anonymous complaints will not be considered);
 - A clear description of the aggrieved action or basis of the appeal (date, place, nature of action) and which parties or individuals are associated with the action. Each element or aspect of complaint/appeal must be supported with objective evidence.

- An explanation as to how the action is alleged to violate or be inconsistent with a GECA requirement, being as specific as possible with respect to the applicable requirements;
- In the case of complaints against the actions of an FFG client, rather than FFG itself, the complainant's description of efforts taken to resolve the matter directly with that party; and
- A proposal of what actions would, in the opinion of the complainant/appellant, rectify the matter.

4.2 Upon receipt of a Complaint or Appeal, the FFG Managing Director (or designee) will undertake the following actions:

- Register the complaint with GECA;
- Open a Complaint/Appeal file in which all materials and correspondence associated with the Complaint/Appeal will be maintained;
- Acknowledge receipt of the Complaint/Appeal **within five (5) business days**, informing the complainant/appellant that its Complaint/Appeal is being reviewed for standing;
- Provide a written response to the complainant/appellant **within 14 business days of receipt** of the Complaint/Appeal, informing complainant/appellant as to whether or not the Complaint/Appeal qualifies for investigation under this procedure, and outlining the investigation process and the recourse available to the complainant/appellant;
- Should the Complaint/Appeal qualify for an investigation, select an individual to investigate who is independent of the:
 - certification evaluation at issue; and
 - associated certification decision.
- In addition, personnel (including those acting in a managerial capacity) who have provided consultancy for a client, or been employed by a client, shall not be used by GMC to review or approve the resolution of a Complaint or Appeal for that client within three years following the end of the consultancy or employment.

4.3 The assigned investigator will undertake the following tasks:

- Solicit and collect any additional information necessary to investigate the Complaint/Appeal. The investigation will be based primarily upon written documentary evidence supplied by the complainant/appellant. It is the complainant's /appellant's burden to establish that there has been an action taken in contravention of a requirement. Typically, the investigator will augment the documentary evidence submitted by the complainant/appellant with telephone and email interviews. The investigator, if authorized by the FFG Managing Director (or designee), may elect to conduct a field inspection to augment the documentary evidence.

- Prepare a written report in which the inspector's findings and recommendations are presented. Under normal circumstances, the report will be completed **within 90 days of receipt** of the Complaint/Appeal.
- Submit the report to the FFG Managing Director (or designee).
- When applicable, a progress report will be sent to the complainant/appellant.

4.4 The FFG Managing Director will then:

If necessary, forward the report to the FFG Legal Advisor for review and consultation.

Render a decision as to the proposed disposition of the Complaint/Appeal, including actions such as:

- Denial of the Complaint/Appeal;
- Reversal of the action that is the focus of the Complaint/Appeal; or
- Issuance of non-conformity reports (NCR), corrective action requests (CAR) and/or recommendations aimed at rectifying the situation.

Note: the person rendering the decision must be independent from the evaluation process related to the Complaint or Appeal.

Inform in writing the complainant/appellant and other relevant parties (e.g., certificate holder, relevant external parties) of the disposition of the Complaint/Appeal and, where appropriate, provide the report, or a summary thereof, to all parties along with the final decision. The response to Complaints and Appeals shall be provided in the same language that is used in the public summary certification report, or the language used shall be agreed with the complainant.

Inform the complainant/appellant in writing that the Complaint/Appeal is deemed closed, or resolved, by FFG.

- 4.5 If the complainant/appellant accepts the proposed decision or action, then the decision or action is carried out and recorded.
- 4.6 If the issue has not been resolved through the full implementation of FFG's own procedures, or if the complainant/appellant disagrees with the conclusions reached by FFG and/ or is dissatisfied by the way FFG handled the Complaint, the complainant/appellant will be offered the opportunity to refer their complaint to GECA as the ultimate step.
- 4.7 The Managing Director (or designee) is responsible for monitoring the progress of open Complaints and Appeals until all reasonable internal and external options of recourse are exhausted or the complainant/appellant is satisfied. In the event that no response is received from the complainant/appellant within three months after the last communication, the Complaint/Appeal will be deemed closed.
- 4.8 FFG shall ensure that decisions on Complaints/Appeals do not result in any discriminatory actions against the claimant/appellant.



5 Confidentiality

- 5.1 Personally identifiable information concerning the complainant is available only where needed for the purposes of addressing the Complaint within the organization and is actively protected from disclosure except to those Parties directly involved, unless the client or complainant expressly consents to its disclosure.

6 Costs of Investigation

- 6.1 While FFG is committed to the principle of broad access to the assessment process, including but not limited to this procedure, undue costs associated with investigating a Complaint/Appeal cannot be borne by FFG. Depending on the nature of the Complaint/Appeal, FFG reserves the right to charge a fee to cover at least a portion of the costs of the investigation. Such fees will only be considered in situations where the time required to investigate the Complaint/Appeal is expected to be substantial.
- 6.2 For Complaints against the actions of a certificate holder, FFG reserves the contractual right to charge that party for time and expenses incurred in investigating the Complaint. Failure to agree to pay these additional charges or to otherwise cooperate in the investigation of the Complaint can be grounds for termination of Certificate of Conformance or loss of verification/validation status.
- 6.3 FFG is dedicated to duly considering substantive Complaints from any party that is committed to the long-term goals of FFG. However, if this procedure is being employed by a "vexatious litigant" for reasons in conflict with the long-term goals of FFG, FFG reserves the right to turn the matter immediately over to GECA for further disposition or, as appropriate, to reject the Complaint as without merit.