

AUGUST 9, 2023

**Countering Online Abuse In Motorsport**



---

## Countering Online Abuse

### The Pervasive Issue In The Modern Digital Age

---

#### Introduction

The Australian Motorsport Council (“**AMC**”), is the united advocacy body representing Australia’s motorsport Federations with authority and delegated responsibilities to control, regulate and manage mainstream Australian Motorsport from the International Motorsport Federations – **FIA**<sup>i</sup> and **FIM**<sup>ii</sup>.

Motorcycling Australia is recognised by Sport Australia as the National Sporting Organisation (“**NSO**”) for 2-wheel motorsport. Motorsport Australia is recognised by Sport Australia as the NSO for 4-wheel motorsport. Both federations receive funding support from Sport Australia.

Karting Australia, the Australian National Drag Racing Association and Speedway Australia govern the specific divisions of 4-wheel motorsport – Karting, Drag Racing and Speedway under authorisation of the General Assembly of the FIA through formal agreements of delegation of sporting power and general authority to control, regulate, supervise administer and promote their respective division of 4-wheel motorsport from Motorsport Australia.

The five federations are the only motorsport Sporting Organisations recognised by the Federal Government<sup>iii</sup> as the “**Authorised Sanctioning Bodies**” of land based motorsport.

#### About This Position Statement

The Australian Motorsport Council and its constituent members - Motorsport Australia, Motorcycling Australia, Karting Australia, ANDRA, and Speedway Australia, acknowledge the urgent need to address the growing issue of online abuse and hate speech in sports.

As responsible governing bodies in the motorsport community, we firmly believe in fostering an environment that promotes inclusivity, respect, and fair play. Online hate speech not only tarnishes the spirit of sportsmanship but also has severe consequences on the mental well-being of participants, volunteers, officials, and fans alike.

We recognise that this challenge extends beyond national borders and affects the entire global sports ecosystem. By aligning ourselves with the FIA's and the FIM's **United Against Online Abuse** campaign, we aim to contribute to a larger collective effort to eradicate hate speech from sports worldwide.

Together, with a shared vision and collaborative approach, we can create a safe and respectful motorsport community that upholds the values of fair play, sportsmanship, and inclusivity. As leaders in the field, we will continue to promote the positive values of motorsport and be at the forefront of the fight against online hate speech.

## Our Pledge

We, the Australian Motorsport Council and its constituent members, commit to the following principles:

### 1. Uphold and Promote Best Practices:

We will actively work towards the prevention, spread, and removal of online hate speech in all its forms within the motorsport community. This will involve enforcing a zero-tolerance policy towards hate speech on official motorsport channels, websites, and social media platforms.

We will also encourage and support our member organisations and affiliated clubs to adopt similar practices within their domains.

### 2. Maintain Open Dialogue with Stakeholders:

We recognise that countering online hate speech requires a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders. We will engage in open and regular dialogues with participants, volunteers, officials, fans, online platforms, technology businesses, government, and regulatory bodies.

This approach will foster a deeper understanding of the issue, identify effective solutions, and ensure that everyone's concerns and experiences are heard and addressed.

### 3. Share Knowledge and Research:

We will actively seek out and share knowledge and research on online hate speech in motorsport to better comprehend its impact and develop effective strategies to combat it. By collaborating with academic institutions, research organisations, and fellow sporting bodies, we can strengthen our collective efforts to eradicate the harmful effects of hate speech in motorsport and keep the sport a safe and inclusive space for all.

### 4. Foster a Collaborative Approach:

To make substantial progress in countering online hate speech, we believe in the power of collective action.

We will actively collaborate with other sporting bodies, online platforms, technology businesses, government, and regulatory bodies to create a united front against online hate speech. Transparent communication and joint initiatives will be promoted to create a positive and inclusive sports environment that resists the harmful effects of hate speech in motorsport.

## **Online abuse has become a pervasive issue in the modern digital age**

Online abuse has become a pervasive issue in the modern digital age, and it can have significant negative effects on sports and its participants including the following.

### **Mental Health Impact**

Online abuse can have a profound impact on the mental well-being of participants and officials. Receiving hate speech, threats, or derogatory comments can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and self-doubt. Constant exposure to such negativity can erode the person's confidence and enthusiasm for their sport, affecting their performance on and off the track.

### **Performance Decline**

The mental toll of online abuse can translate into a decline in an athlete and official's performance. They may become distracted, lose focus, and struggle to concentrate on their training and competition. This performance decline can perpetuate a vicious cycle of more abuse, further exacerbating their mental health and confidence.

### **Deterrence and Disincentive**

The prevalence of online abuse in motorsports can deter talented individuals from participating in their chosen motorsport discipline or pursuing a professional career in motorsport. Potential drivers, riders, and Officials may fear the exposure to online abuse and choose to opt-out of our sports altogether, leading to a loss of diversity and talent in the sporting community.

### **Team Dynamics and Morale**

Online abuse does not only target individual drivers and riders but also extends to teams, officials, and even fans. Negative comments and harassment towards teams and their members can impact team dynamics, camaraderie, and morale, potentially affecting their performance as a cohesive unit.

### **Damage to Sports Image**

The prevalence of hate speech and online abuse in sports can harm the overall image of the sport and its organisations. Sponsors and partners may reconsider their association with sports that have a reputation for tolerating or failing to address online abuse effectively.

### **Cyberbullying and Youth Sports**

Online abuse is particularly concerning in youth sports. Young participants are more vulnerable to the psychological impacts of cyberbullying and may be ill-equipped to cope with such negative online experiences. This can lead to lasting emotional scars and may even push young participants away from sports altogether.

### **Loss of Trust and Credibility**

When sports organisations fail to adequately address online abuse and protect their participants, it can lead to a loss of trust and credibility among stakeholders, including participants, fans, sponsors, and regulatory bodies. Such loss of trust can be challenging to recover from and may hinder future growth and development.

Online abuse poses a significant threat to the well-being of participants and the integrity of sports as a whole. Sports organisations, regulatory bodies, online platforms, and the broader community must work together to combat this issue and create a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for participants to thrive and continue contributing positively to the world of sports.

## Combatting Online Abuse

Combatting online abuse in motorsport requires a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders, including sports organisations, participants, fans, online platforms, and regulatory bodies. Here are ten effective ways to address and combat online abuse in motorsport:

### Develop Clear Anti-Abuse Policies

Motorsport organisations should establish comprehensive anti-abuse policies that explicitly condemn online hate speech and harassment. These policies should outline the consequences for offenders and emphasise the commitment to creating a positive and respectful online environment.

### Education and Awareness Campaigns

Launch educational initiatives to raise awareness about the harmful impact of online abuse on participants and the entire motorsport community. Promote responsible online behaviour, emphasising the importance of respecting others' dignity and promoting inclusivity.

### Empower Participants and Officials

Empower participants and officials to report instances of online abuse they experience or witness. Establish confidential reporting channels and ensure that complaints are taken seriously and addressed promptly.

### Collaboration with Social Media Platforms

Motorsport organisations should work closely with social media platforms to improve reporting mechanisms and accelerate the removal of abusive content.

### Monitoring and Moderation

Invest in resources for active monitoring and moderation of online platforms. Having dedicated teams to monitor and address abusive content can help maintain a positive online environment.

### Positive Social Media Engagement

Encourage positive social media engagement among fans and participants. Highlight instances of good sportsmanship, fair play, and positive interactions to promote a culture of respect and inclusivity.

### Media Training for Participants

Provide media training to participants and officials, helping them navigate the online world and handle potential abuse. Teach them how to respond positively to criticism and avoid engaging with trolls.

### Community Building

Foster a strong and supportive online community around motorsport. Engage fans in positive discussions, Q&A sessions, and interactive content, creating a sense of belonging and discouraging abusive behaviour.

### Promote Offline Events and Interaction

Encourage fans and participants to engage in offline events, where personal connections can be established. Humanising participants and fans to one another can reduce the tendency for online abuse.

### Collaboration with Law Enforcement

Work closely with law enforcement agencies to address severe cases of online abuse that may require legal intervention. Encourage victims to report instances of harassment to the appropriate authorities.

Success will require a collaborative effort from everyone involved to make a meaningful impact on combating online abuse in motorsport. We must create a culture of online respect, where participants, fans, and stakeholders can engage positively and enjoy motorsport without fear of abuse or harassment. It will require a concerted effort from all involved to build a safer and more inclusive online environment for motorsport enthusiasts nationally and worldwide.

## Conclusion

Countering online abuse in the modern digital age is an urgent imperative that demands unwavering attention from the motorsport community. The AMC and its constituent members, united in purpose, commit wholeheartedly to this critical cause.

We fully support the FIA and the FIM's **United Against Online Abuse** campaign, we embrace the power of collective action, collaborating with fellow sporting bodies, governments, and regulatory institutions to build a global coalition. Together, we will shape a digital landscape that promotes empathy, kindness, and mutual support for all involved in motorsport.

Our position statement stands as a testament to our dedication in upholding the values of respect, inclusivity, and fair play in motorsport. By pledging to uphold best practices, engage in open dialogues, share knowledge, and foster collaboration, we aim to create a powerful force against the scourge of online hate speech.

Mental health and well-being are paramount, and we are committed to nurturing an environment where participants, volunteers, officials, and fans can flourish. By raising awareness and educating stakeholders about the impact of online abuse, we pave the way for positive change and resilience in the face of adversity.

Transparency and accountability guide our path forward. Collaborating with online platforms, technology businesses, and government bodies, we will hold perpetrators accountable, ensuring swift removal of abusive content and restoring the digital space as a bastion of positivity.

The AMC leads with conviction, exemplifying the values we hold dear. Together with the entire motorsport community, we ignite a movement that transcends boundaries, inspiring others to join in our shared endeavour.

As we conclude this statement, we extend a resolute call to action. Let us stand united, dismantling the barriers of online abuse and forging an environment where motorsport thrives as a symbol of unity and respect. With determination in our hearts, we stride confidently towards a future where sportsmanship triumphs over hate, and the spirit of motorsport soars to new heights.

---

<sup>i</sup> FIA means the Federation Internationale de 'l Automobile a member of the IOC Recognised International Sports Federations (ARISF).

<sup>ii</sup> FIM means the Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme a member of the IOC Recognised International Sports Federations (ARISF).

<sup>iii</sup> Reference to the Federal Government shall mean some or all of the entities established by the Australian Government by legislation - Australian Sport Commission, Sport Integrity Australia and the National Sports Tribunal.