

OQ Conference 2006
Handling confrontation at events
Paper 1
By Rob Simson

Background: Over the past two years several clubs have experienced angry confrontation at events from members of the community who, (rightly or wrongly) have found reason to complain about the orienteering activities taking place. Incident I am aware of have involved:

- A bush care worker complaining about trampling through the bush care rehabilitation site.
- A nearby neighbour complaining about early morning noise opposite her residence
- A forest neighbour claiming runners had no right to be off-track and were running on her land (Her boundary with the mapped area is unfenced)
- A ranger being unaware of the event and concerned that closed for rehabilitation signs are being ignored.
- A forest walker complaining about school students being in the forest and going off track (and later taking one of our controls)

Since we cannot expect that such incidents won't happen in the future the TFO committee believes that OQ should have a protocol and procedure for dealing with such incidents and that this should be conveyed to clubs and event organisers. It is also likely that the complainant may become so aggressive as to take some physical action, even wielding some kind of weapon. Hence the following protocol is a suggestion for adoption by OQ.

Proposed OQ protocol for handling confrontation incidents:

1. The Organiser should have a copy of any agreement or permit arranged with the landowner/ land manager and this should be on display or readily available.
2. Those confronted should not engage in any debate about the issue themselves, but should immediately refer the matter on to the organiser, and if he/she is unavailable to the controller, club president, or the most appropriate OQ or club official present at the event. From then on this one person should deal with the matter unless he or she asks for advice or assistance. (This person will be referred to as the OQ representative in subsequent clauses).
3. The OQ representative should declare his status on behalf of the..... club or OQ and draw attention to any written agreement (see point1)
4. The OQ representative should **request identification** of the complainant, what is their authority for raising the issue, and ask them to desist from any aggressive behaviour and spell out **the specific nature of their complaint**. (All this should be recorded on a form OQ could provide to clubs.)
5. The OQ representative should respond in the terms of:
 - (i) The authority, permit, landowner agreement under which the event is being held.
 - (ii) The environmental code under which we act at all events and throughout the year to spell areas and limit usage of sites.
 - (iii) The willingness to listen and take note of legitimate concerns.
 - (iv) Willingness to visit, with the complainant, a specific site or sites that may be associated with the nature of the complaint.
 - (v) A willingness to discuss the matter with the landowner/land manager to see how the problem might be avoided in the future.
 - (vi) Our desire to maintain good relations with members of the community while continuing to promote the health, educational and recreational benefits of our sport.
6. The organiser should follow up with a report to the landowner/land manager by telephone, in writing or in person and file an incident report with OQ.