

Sharks Feared Doping Before Sports Scientist Left

An email trail linking the four sacked members of the football department of the Sharks reveals they feared possible doping breaches at the club at least two months before sports scientist, Stephen Dank, was told to leave, on May 29, 2011.

Hard copies of emails, dating from March 2011, which linked football manager Darren Mooney, club doctor David Givney, physiotherapist Konrad Schultz and trainer Mark Noakes show they could have informed the Cronulla board much earlier about the possible use of performance enhancing drugs at the club and the trail included a warning from a doctor at another [National Rugby League](#) club. The NRL confirmed information obtained by the Deloitte Forensic and funded by the NRL has been sent to ASADA.

The team conducted their own inquiry that resulted in the sacking of the four staff and the standing down of coach Shane Flanagan because of the failure of management practices. Flanagan has subsequently been reinstated after hard-copy evidence suggested that he was not a part of the email trail. He was also reinstated as the Cronulla board clearly sees him as a mentor who can offer sound advice to the 14 Sharks players being investigated by ASADA. The emails, however, suggested that the four sacked members of the football department could have acted sooner against Dank and trainer Trent Elkin.

Flanagan is signed for a further two years and if any of the 14 players accepted a ban of six months, they would be back for the 2014 season. The Australian Anti-Doping Agency will be recommending some six-month penalties via its ability to offer a maximum 75 per cent discount of a doping ban of two years, after a player offers "substantial assistance".

Hooker John Morris, who has taken on a leadership role within the team and played for Cronulla in 2011 at the time players allegedly took performance enhancing substances, said the sage had been tough on the players but remarked they were comfortable with the legal advice provided by former ASADA chief counsel Richard Redman. The [Australian Anti-Doping Agency](#), after interviewing coach Shane Flanagan and the four sacked members of the side's football operations staff earlier this month, wants to interview 31 NRL players, including 14 current Sharks and eight former players who were at the club in 2011, as well as others now in Super League.

Morris, with Isaac De Gois sidelined by a hamstring injury, started at hooker against the Warriors and was one of the best of the Sharks and teammates admitted he has been a rock off the field. Morris further added that everyone thinks the place is falling apart, but you get in here after a

game like that and you see the energy and the effort the boys are putting in week in and week out ... it speaks volumes for the pride the boys have in the jumper.

Presently, the Sharks are at the end point of an 18-month investigation that started with the detection of imported peptides from China. However, the agents may escape without any penalty as ASADA merely makes recommendations to a sport's judiciary and cannot demand an interview of anyone not contracted to a club; it has no sanctioning powers.