

# Media Policy

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# 1. Purpose

This Policy outlines how Council will manage its media activities and will explain how:

- Council liaises with media (traditional)

This policy applies to Council officials defined in Council's Code of Conduct and includes Councillors, Council staff, members of Council committees and delegates of Council.

Council operational procedures should be referred to for direction on the use of media for critical incident and business continuity purposes.

# 2. Background

This Policy replaces the Media Policy and Protocols, which was adopted in September 2016.

The Office of Local Government (OLG) finalised the Model Media Policy in December 2022.

While not mandatory, the Model Media Policy reflects best practice and all councils, county councils and joint organisations are encouraged to adopt them. Council is free to adapt the policy to suit its local circumstances and operating environments and to supplement it with its own provisions.

All Federation Council communication channels are an extension of Council's information networks and is further governed by other policies including:

- Community Engagement Strategy;
- Council Participation Plan;
- Code of Conduct; and
- Privacy Management Plan and Records Management Act.

## Part 1 Principles

1.1 Councillors, staff, and other officials of Federation Council, are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

**Openness:** We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between Council and the media.

**Consistency:** We will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.

**Accuracy:** The information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.

**Timeliness:** We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

## Part 2 Administrative framework for engagement with the media

- 2.1 The General Manager delegates the role of media management to the Manager Communication & Engagement.
- 2.2 The Manager Communication & Engagement's role is to:
- a) Be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes;
  - b) Be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release;
  - c) Liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate;
  - d) Ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or General Manager and/or the appropriate Director prior to their release;
  - e) Develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or Councillors;
  - f) Maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses;
  - g) Ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias;
  - h) Ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly;
  - i) Provide guidance to Councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
  - j) Ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.

## Part 3 Who can engage with the media

### The General Manager

- 3.1 The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 3.2 The General Manager may delegate to other Council staff to speak on their behalf where appropriate (for example, where the delegated staff member has professional expertise regarding the subject matter, or the general manager is unavailable).

### The Mayor

- 3.3 The Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of the Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities (section 226(c) of the *Local Government Act 1993*).
- 3.4 If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 3.5 The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other Councillors where appropriate, (for example, where another Councillor is best placed to comment, because the issue is of particular interest to them, or it is within their particular area of expertise).

## Councillors

- 3.6 As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, Councillors are free to express their personal views to the media.
- 3.7 When engaging with the media Councillors:
- must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so.
  - must clarify when speaking to the media that they are expressing their personal views as an individual Councillor and that they are not speaking for the Council (unless authorised to do so)
  - must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
  - must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
  - must seek information and guidance from the General Manager/Manager Communication & Engagement where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks.
- 3.8 In the interests of promoting a positive, safe and harmonious organisational culture, Councillors Should endeavour to resolve personal differences privately and must not prosecute them publicly through the media.
- 3.9 Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager/Manager Communication & Engagement.

## Council Staff

- 3.10 Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the General Manager/Manager Communication & Engagement or through delegated authority from the relevant Director to do so.
- 3.11 If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to the Council, they must refer the enquiry to the Manager Communication & Engagement.
- 3.12 Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to the Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on the Council or that bring it into disrepute.
- 3.13 If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
  - must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the General Manager and/or Manager Communication & Engagement, and
  - must seek information and guidance from the General Manager and/or Manager Communication & Engagement where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks
- 3.14 Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Manager Communication & Engagement.

## Tone

- 3.15 All media engagement by Council officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

## Induction and training

- 3.16 Council may provide training to Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.
- 3.17 Media engagement advice will be provided to Councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or through more formal training as part of their ongoing professional development program.

## Councillors' questions about media engagement

- 3.18 Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the General Manager/ Manager Communication & Engagement.

## Part 4 Standards of conduct when engaging with the media

- 4.1 Council officials must comply with the Council's code of conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.
- 4.2 Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
  - a) Are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public;
  - b) Contains profane language or is sexual in nature;
  - c) Constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*, or is unlawfully discriminatory;
  - d) Is contrary to their duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety;
  - e) Contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive;
  - f) Divulges confidential Council information;
  - g) Breaches the privacy of other council officials or members of the public;
  - h) Contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*;
  - i) Could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment;
  - j) Commits the Council to any action;
  - k) Violates an order made by a court;
  - l) Breaches copyright;
  - m) Advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

## Part 5 Use of media during emergencies

- 5.1 In NSW, local governments are not the authorised organisation to coordinate emergency or disaster responses. Council has two roles in relation to communicating and providing information to the media in an emergency or natural disaster:
  - a) To support the relevant State or combat agency to distribute their message and information as wide and far as possible to residents of Federation Council; and
  - b) To provide information on the operations and status of Council services, assets and facilities with a focus on essential services of roads, water supply, wastewater services and waste management.
- 5.2 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Manager Communication & Engagement will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of Council, approved by either the General Manager or specific Crisis Incident Controller. This may include regular status and situation updates.
- 5.3 Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.
- 5.4 Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to Councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.

## Part 6 Media engagement in the lead up to elections

- 6.1 This policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a Council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 6.2 Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a Council or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by the Council or produced by the Council or with Council resources.
- 6.3 During caretaker period, Council will be mindful of its obligations before issuing public statements.

## Part 7 Records management requirements

- 7.1 All media releases and images distributed by Federation Council through its communication and engagement department remain the property of Federation Council unless copyright is specifically acknowledged to a third-party owner.
- 7.2 Media content created and received by Council officials (including Councillors) acting in their official capacity is a Council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

## Part 8 Council meetings and business paper

- 8.1 Media are welcome to attend any public Council meetings and along with the general public, will be required to leave during closed sessions.
- 8.2 Media organisations can access and subscribe to receive Council Business Papers and Minutes online: <https://www.federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-Meetings/Minutes-Agendas> They can also view the livestream or recording of the meeting.
- 8.3 Media organisations are encouraged to read the Code of Meeting Practice: <https://www.federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au/Council/Corporate-Planning/Policies> which outlines Council's position on use of electronic devices, filming, cameras and recording (including Facebook and Instagram Live) in Council Meetings. Media that breach these rules may be banned from attending meetings for a nominated period of time, at the direction of the General Manager.
- 8.4 Media can update their organisation's social media pages during Council meetings and following decisions of Council, however are reminded that until the Minutes of the meeting are confirmed at the next Council meeting, votes and decisions can be rescinded and outcomes may change.

### 3. Definitions

**Authorised spokesperson:** members of Council staff who are authorised by the General Manager or Manager Communication & Engagement to speak to the media on behalf of Council.

**Council official:** means Councillors, members of staff and delegates of Council (including members of committees that are delegates of Council).

**Manager Communication & Engagement (MCE):** is Council's Manager Communication & Engagement appointed under clause 2.1 of this policy.

**Media:** includes print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including but not limited to, newspaper, magazines, internet publishers, radio and television broadcasters.

**Minor:** for the purposes of this policy, is a person under the age of 18 years.

**Personal information:** means information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion.

**Social media:** means online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia.

### 4. References & Associated Documents

Related legislation:

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Local Government Act 1993
- Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
- Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct

- NSW State Record Act 1998
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011

## 5. Policy History

Version	Date	Changes / Amendments
1	28 August 2014	Development of document.
2	13 May 2016	Update Council name and references to structure in accordance with Department of Premier and Cabinet Amalgamation guidelines.
3	9 August 2017	Update responsible department details.
4	11 June 2024	New policy developed based on NSW Government's Model Media Policy.
5	August 2024	Update formatting, grammar, numbering. Part 8 - Change the word 'confidential' to 'closed' to be consistent with Code of Meeting Practice and NSW Local Government Act for describing the confidential sessions of a Council meeting.

## 6. Reviews

This policy will be reviewed within a four-year period from the date of each adoption of the policy, or more frequently as required.

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