



Bellingden Shire Council **POLICY**

Internal Use Only



External Use



MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Department: Governance & Engagement
Responsible Officer: Anton Juodvalkis
Contact Officer: Robyn O'Dwyer
Date Approved by General Manager:
Date Confirmed by SCC:

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1.0 PURPOSE

Bellingden Shire Council is committed to keeping its local and wider community well informed about its activities. To achieve this outcome Council recognises that a good working relationship with the media is essential and the purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for effective communication of Council affairs to the community via the media.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The Media Policy has the following objectives:

- 1.1 To ensure consistency by Councillors and staff in dealing with the media.
- 1.2 To promote open exchange of information between Council and the media.
- 1.3 To promote positive media relationships.
- 1.4 To ensure all communication with the media is consistent, well informed, timely and appropriate.
- 1.5 To clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons.
- 1.6 To ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for information provided.

3.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors and Council workers.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

Councillors: All elected members of Bellingden Shire Council.

Worker: A worker is an employee, a contractor or subcontractor, an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, a student gaining work experience or a volunteer.

Media: includes print media such as national or local newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures and other documents and the broadcast media including radio and television broadcasters and internet publishers.

Public Comment: includes interviews with the media (including comments to, or interviews with, the press, radio or television), public speaking engagements and expressing views in letters to the press, in book, notices, articles or in any medium

where it is reasonably foreseeable that the publication or circulation will enter the public domain.

5.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 5.1 Council encourages open communication with the media and the community, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council and staff.
- 5.2 Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the media unless disclosure of information contravenes the Council's duty of care, contractual obligations, or could infringe laws or regulations that govern its operations (or the privacy of any individual.)
- 5.3 Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.
- 5.4 Media enquiries are to be dealt with promptly, truthfully and within the media's deadline wherever possible, provided adequate notice has been given.
- 5.5 Only the General Manager and Mayor (or their delegated representative/s) has permission to speak to the media as official spokespersons of council.
- 5.6 In the case of matters with possible legal consequences, that is, official investigations, accidents, or enquiries into business dealings or actions, any statements made to the media must be authorised by the General Manager with the input and approval of legal counsel.
- 5.7 Council representatives will not knowingly provide information to the media which is untruthful or inaccurate.
- 5.8 As elected community representatives, Councillors may express their personal view on any matter to the media.

6.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Mayor and/or the General Manager are the official spokespersons for the Council on all matters. The General Manager may nominate other staff to act as spokespeople for the Council.

Councillors

Statements made by Councillors are to be identified as their opinions only and as such do not necessarily represent the position of the Council.

As specified by the Local Government Act, Councillors must not disclose material classified as confidential in reports presented to Council.

The Mayor and Councillors should, out of courtesy, inform the General Manager of comments provided to the media.

Council Workers

Council workers are not permitted to speak with the media without prior permission from the General Manager or his/her delegate.

Workers may express their views in a public debate in their capacity as a local citizen and not as a Council representative, unless authorised. However, staff should avoid any perception of a conflict of interest and take care not to give the impression that the comments are made on behalf of Bellingen Shire Council.

The Communications Officer will ensure that all staff and the community have access to Council media releases in a timely fashion via the Council website.

7.0 RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

Code of Conduct
Privacy Management Plan
Social Media Policy (to be developed)
Bellingen Shire Community Engagement Policy
Bellingen Shire Community Engagement Strategy

8.0 LEGAL PARAMETERS

NSW Local Government Act 1993
NSW Environmental, Planning & Assessment Act 1979
Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000
Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA)
Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act (NSW) 1998 (PPIA)