

## 95. MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

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### 1. Statement

At Douglas Shire Council we value the role print, broadcast and digital media play in sharing news of events, activities and milestones. This policy confirms our ongoing commitment to provide timely, accurate, relevant and consistent information to the community through positive working relationships with media organisations and via Council's media channels.

Douglas Shire Council welcomes and encourages scrutiny from the public and from third party media organisations. As a matter of principle, this policy acknowledges that all information made public through official channels, including but not restricted to Ordinary Council Meetings, is open to media scrutiny. As a core principle, Council should be in a position to explain all publicly available background, commentary, decisions, or other publicly available material to the community, including through official Council media channels or via third party media organisations.

### 2. Purpose and Principles

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure the community is aware of Council's Corporate Plan, strategies, policies, services, activities, and decisions.
- Ensure Councillors have fair and equitable opportunity to engage with the community through Council's communication networks, recognising the shire wide role and responsibilities of all Councillors under section 12 of the Local Government Act 2009.
- Ensure the timely, accurate, relevant and consistent provision of information to the community via Council's external communication networks including Council's media channels and external media organisations.
- Ensure an overall positive image and reputation of Council is maintained through external communication networks.
- Provide clear direction on the responsibilities of Councillors, Council employees, and contractors in relation to official media comment.
- Encourage the sharing of Council's successes with the community.
- Ensure Council media resources are utilised effectively, efficiently and economically.
- Ensure Councillors, as elected representatives of the community, are aware of emerging media issues.
- Provide clarity with media statements and other external communications.

### 3. Corporate Plan

This policy aligns with the Douglas Shire Councils' 2019-2024 Corporate Plan theme/s.

#### Theme 5 - Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery

Strong governance and financial management are the foundations of the way in which Council will conduct its business and implement the initiatives of the Corporate Plan.

**Goal 1** - *We will conduct Council business in an open and transparent manner with strong oversight and open reporting.*

### 4. Regulatory Authority

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- *Local Government Regulation 2012*
- Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Douglas Shire Council policies

### 5. Human Rights Commitment

Douglas Shire Council (Council) has considered the human rights protected under the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)* when adopting and/or amending this policy. When applying this policy, Council will act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and give proper consideration to a human right relevant to the decision in accordance with the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*.

### 6. Scope

- This policy applies to all Councillors, Council staff and contractors of Douglas Shire Council when responding to media enquiries or when seeking to make comment on behalf of Council or otherwise by a Councillor on a particular matter.
- This policy specifies who is authorised to act as a Designated or Lead Spokesperson and the procedures to be followed for issuing of any proactive or reactive media statement or publication of any public facing document.
- This policy applies to the preparation and issuing of any media statement which purports to represent a position or policy of Council.
- This policy applies to all external communications undertaken by Council departments, units and sections.
- This policy enables information dissemination and discussion of topics relevant to Council's strategic and operational activities and objectives for the shire.
- This policy does not preclude Councillors from making their own statements or comments which may conflict with Council's position, or on matters that are not current Council programs or initiatives. In these scenarios, Councillors must be aware of their Code of Conduct obligations by ensuring that their comments are not portrayed by them as the official view of Council.
- Nothing in the policy shall be interpreted as affecting the right of individual Councillors to raise or comment on issues of public importance or significance to them and to speak about such matters as elected representatives of the local community or in some other capacity.

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## 7. Media Statements

The Media and Communications Unit will manage proactive and reactive media statements to ensure a positive image and reputation is maintained through the Council's external communications.

During election caretaker periods, all parties must be mindful of the restrictions outlined in Section 9 of this policy.

### 7.1 Proactive Media Statements

Proactive media statements provide Council with an opportunity to share its successes with the community and to inform the community of issues, events and activities.

The Mayor, Councillors and authorised Council staff and contractors may seek advice and assistance regarding proactive media statements from the Media and Communications Unit.

Council staff are encouraged to consider instances where their activities and achievements, and those of their team, branch and department could be shared with the community. Staff may raise these instances through normal operational processes for consideration by the Media and Communications Unit.

### 7.2 Reactive Media Statements

Reactive media statements are prepared and issued in response to media enquiries or emerging community issues.

The Senior Media and Communications Officer is responsible for ensuring media enquiries are responded to within a prompt timeframe.

The Media and Communications Unit will manage the response to any media enquiry in accordance with this policy.

The Media and Communications Unit will promptly advise the Mayor and CEO, and Councillors of all media enquiries regarding major matters.

The Media and Communications Unit will promptly advise Councillors who are the subject of any media enquiry.

From time to time, it may be necessary for a Letter to the Editor to be written as an official Council communication to inform the community about a particular matter. Such letters must be issued through the Senior Media and Communications Officer subject to first informing the Councillors of the intended letter.

### 7.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities relate only to the preparation and issuing of media statements.

#### 7.3.1 Designated Spokesperson

A Designated Spokesperson is a person authorised by this policy to make comment on behalf of Council on a particular matter.

The appropriate Designated Spokesperson(s) for a particular matter will be determined in accordance with this policy.

All parties will be mindful that a key purpose of this policy is to ensure all Councillors have fair and equitable opportunities to engage with the community about any matter through the Council's external communication networks.

Media statements may include comments or quotes from one or more Designated Spokespersons in accordance with this policy.

Each Designated Spokesperson will be offered an opportunity to comment on a particular matter in a media statement.

A Designated Spokesperson may decline to provide a comment or quote on a particular matter.

All parties will be mindful of deadlines and endeavour to respond in a prompt manner to enquires made.

### **7.3.2 Lead Spokesperson**

The Lead Spokesperson is the Designated Spokesperson responsible for authorising a media statement or response.

Where a matter has more than one Designated Spokesperson, the Lead Spokesperson will be assigned in accordance with sections 7.3.3 to 7.3.6 of this policy.

A Lead Spokesperson is not authorised to amend comments or quotes provided by any other Designated Spokesperson without the consent of that spokesperson.

The Media and Communications Unit will consult with the Lead Spokesperson regarding any media release or response.

### **7.3.3 Mayor**

The Mayor will be the Lead Spokesperson on major matters including those specified in section 12(4) of the *Local Government Act 2009*.

The Mayor may request media advice and assistance regarding such matters, including proactive media statements, from The Media and Communications Unit.

Where these matters originate from, or relate to, a committee current or future, the committee chairperson or Councillor will be a Designated Spokesperson. Where these matters originate from, relate to, or are associated with a particular Councillor, the relevant Councillor(s) will also be a Designated Spokesperson.

In the absence of the Mayor, or when the Deputy Mayor is the Acting Mayor, the Deputy Mayor will be Lead Spokesperson for such matters.

The Mayor may also delegate their Lead or Designated Spokesperson role on particular matters to the Deputy Mayor or other Councillor(s).

### **7.3.4 Committee Chairperson**

The relevant committee Chairperson will be the Lead Spokesperson on matters arising from their committee portfolio to the extent that these are consistent with the responsibilities outlined in the Committee Terms of Reference document.

A Chairperson may request media advice and assistance regarding committee matters, including for proactive media statements, from Media and Communications.

Where the Chairperson is unavailable, the Deputy Chairperson may be Lead Spokesperson.

The Chairperson may also delegate their Lead Spokesperson role on particular committee matters to the Deputy Chairperson or other Councillor(s).

Where the Mayor is the relevant Committee Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson of that committee is also a Designated Spokesperson.

Where a committee matter relates to an issue, initiative or activity principally affecting a specific Councillor, the Councillor/s representing that matter will also be Designated Spokespersons.

### **7.3.5 Chief Executive Officer**

Subject to any direction by the Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer will be the Designated Spokesperson for matters concerning Council staff and contractors, and for the operational activities of Council.

The Chief Executive Officer may determine if a matter is an operational matter.

The Chief Executive Officer may choose to delegate their Designated Spokesperson role on a particular matter.

The Chief Executive Officer (or delegate) is responsible for authorising the issuing of all media statements regarding operational matters.

### **7.3.6 The Media and Communications Unit**

The Media and Communications Unit will work through the office of the CEO to manage requests received for advice and assistance from the Mayor, Councillors and Council staff to ensure Council resources are utilised equitably, effectively and efficiently. Requests received may be reasonably prioritised, amended or declined owing to competing media priorities or resourcing issues, with the requestor advised.

The Media and Communications Unit will seek any required technical or background information from the relevant areas of Council.

The Media and Communications Unit will consult with the Lead Spokesperson regarding any proposed media release or response.

The Media and Communications Unit will seek comment from the Lead Spokesperson and any additional Designated Spokespersons.

The Media and Communications Unit will follow the Designated and Lead Spokesperson identification requirements according to Section 7.3 of this policy and the attribution requirements in Section 7.4 of this policy.

The Media and Communications Unit will follow the authorisation process in Section 7.5 of this policy.

The Media and Communications Unit will keep a register of all media enquiries and all requests for assistance received from councillors and any assistance provided.

#### 7.3.7 Council Staff and Contractors

All media enquiries received by Council staff and contractors will be referred to The Media and Communications Unit.

Council and contractor staff may not make any media comment on behalf of Council unless they have been nominated as a Designated Spokesperson for the matter by the Chief Executive Officer (or delegate).

Council staff and contractors are encouraged to consider instances where their activities and achievements, and those of their team, unit, and department, could be shared with the community.

#### 7.4 Attribution

Comments will be attributed to the Designated Spokesperson(s) as detailed in Section 7.3 of this policy unless that spokesperson declines to, or is unable to, provide a comment within required timeframes.

Where all Designated Spokespersons are unable to provide comment, "Council spokesperson" will be attributed in any media response or release.

#### 7.5 Authorisation

The Media and Communications Unit must seek final approval of any media statement from the Lead Spokesperson.

Authorisation is not to be sought from any other party.

Preliminary approval of any quote or comment attributed to any official spokesperson should be sought from that spokesperson before final approval is sought from the Lead Spokesperson.

All parties will be mindful of deadlines and endeavour to respond in a prompt manner to authorisation requests.

Authorisation is not required for Councillor communication through non-Council social and digital media platforms, individual newsletters, media interviews, media releases or personal communications where the councillor is not seeking to represent the official position of Council.

#### 7.6 Key Practice Guidelines

Statements issued on behalf of Council must:

- Be consistent with Council's current policy and position.
- Support the reputation of the shire, its Council, Council staff and contractors.
- Be respectful of the Mayor, Councillors, the Chief Executive Officer, Council officers, and the community.
- Not commit the shire or its resources without prior Council discussion and/or resolution.
- Not be in breach of any laws (such as privacy, defamation, racial vilification or equal opportunity) or the Code of Conduct.
- Avoid any admission of legal liability.

The Media and Communications Unit must not repost or tag any individual Councillor and their Councillor Social Media pages.

All Councillors should be recognised in Council media when they attend official events in their capacity as Councillors.

## 8. External Facing Communications, excluding Media Statements or Releases

### 8.1 Distribution

The establishment of any new external communication channels must be approved in consultation with the Councillors and published by Council's Media and Communications Unit.

All channels of external communication such as newsletters and newspaper lift-outs will be provided extensively to a minimum of shire wide.

External communication planning will be undertaken by the Media and Communications Unit in consultation with the Mayor and Councillors.

During election caretaker periods, all parties must be mindful of the restrictions outlined in Section 9 of this policy.

Council departments, units and sections may create, publish and update an extensive range of public facing communications.

Information within any external communications channels must be consistent with the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland, Council's Corporate Plan and other relevant Council policies.

The Information that will generally be considered acceptable for inclusion by Council departments in external communications channels may include:

- Information about Council services, facilities, events or projects
- Matters of local community or shire-wide interest
- Information about community and sporting organisations, activities and events.
- Comments from Councillors about matters.

External facing communications may also include:

- Operational information on Council websites
- General interest articles on Council websites
- Posting to Council social media accounts
- Marketing and tourism publications
- Departmental publications (e.g. Environmental Matters newsletters)
- Flyers, newsletters and other materials that promote Council services, activities or initiatives
- Community consultation activities
- Commencement of an advertising campaign.

### 8.2 Content Approval

Content approval of is to be sought through normal operational Procedures.

### 8.3 Authorisation

Authorisation for publishing and updating public facing communications is to be sought from the Chief Executive Officer (or delegate).

### 8.4 Mayor and Councillors

The Mayor and Councillors are to be advised of any significant public facing communications prior to their release, updating or commencement.

Approval from the Mayor and Councillors is not necessarily required for publications of this type and generally there will not be a Designated Spokesperson.

### 8.5 Exclusions

External communication must not contain information which is election campaign material or matters of particular political sensitivity.

Any information considered inappropriate for publication by The Media and Communications Unit will be provided to the CEO for review.

Should the Chief Executive Officer determine that the information is inappropriate for publication, the CEO will discuss the matter with the Mayor and Councillors to determine the most appropriate action.

## 9. Caretaker Period

The *Local Government Act 2009* (the Act) prohibits the publication or distribution of election material during the caretaker period.

Section 90A of the Act defines the caretaker period for a local government as the period during an election for the local government that –

- (a) starts on the day when public notice of the holding of the election is given under the Local Government Electoral Act, section 25(1); and
- (b) ends at the conclusion of the election.

Section 90D of the Act defines election material as anything able to, or intended to:

- (a) influence an elector about voting at an election; or
- (b) affect the result of an election.

Council and Councillors must not issue direct any mail outs from Council during the Caretaker Period.

## 10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The success and effectiveness of the policy will be measured by:

- Information to the community that is timely and accurate, and which encourages discussion about Council decisions and policies.
- Information about the shire and its people that encourages and promotes participation in an active, healthy and liveable community.
- Ensuring the community has access to Council decisions and policies, the reasons for those decisions, and the resultant outcomes.



- Ensuring information that encourages and promotes advancement towards the accomplishment of Council’s social, cultural, economic and environmental goals.
- Ensuring Council media resources are utilised effectively, efficiently, fairly and economically.
- Ensure Councillors have fair and equitable opportunity to engage with the community about matters through our external communication networks.
- Maintenance of audience across Council-owned external communication channels.

## 11. Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Council</b>	Means Douglas Shire Council.
<b>Media</b>	Includes television, print, radio, online and social media, as well as Council-branded or sub-branded social media, mastheads, magazines and media releases.
<b>Media Statement</b>	Means a statement that provides an official statement of Council that is published to a Council website, social media channel or provided to external media organisations.
<b>Proactive media</b>	Means external communication that is initiated by media release. It does not include general educational or communications that help Council achieve specific outcomes or the publication of an information brochure or flyer.
<b>Reactive media</b>	Includes a media statement in response to external enquiries or anticipated community issues.
<b>Spokesperson</b>	Is a person who speaks as a designated representative of Council.

## Policy Review

This policy is to be reviewed whenever legislation changes, or annually if no changes have been required to be enacted, at the direction of the Chief Executive Officer.

## Policy Details

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<b>Policy Department</b>	People and Community Services
<b>Link to Corporate Plan</b>	Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery
<b>Revoked/Superseded</b>	

**This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.**