



Blackall-Tambo

Regional Council

Media Policy

Version Number: Two	Effective Date: 20 May 2020
Policy Compiled by: Chief Executive Officer	Review Date: 20 May 2023
Policy Approved by: Chief Executive Officer	

SCOPE

This policy applies to all Blackall-Tambo Regional Council employees, Councillors, volunteers and contractors.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Media Policy is to establish protocols for managing communication between the Council, the media and the community so as to ensure coordinated, coherent, accurate and reliable presentation of Council information.

REFERENCES / POLICIES

- *Australian Copyright Act 1968*
- *Queensland Local Government Act 2009*
- *Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*
- *Australian Spam Act 2003*
- *Australian Privacy Act 1988 and Australian Privacy Principles*
- *Queensland Information Privacy Act 2009*
- Councillor Code of Conduct Procedure
- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Computer, Email and Internet Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Harassment and Bullying Governance Policy

DEFINITIONS

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To assist in interpretation the following definitions shall apply:

Caretaker Period – Section 90A of the Local Government Act 2009 provides that the caretaker period starts on the day when public notice of the holding of the election is announced by the Electoral Commission of Queensland and ends at the conclusion of the election.

CEO shall mean the Chief Executive Officer or delegated officer.

Council shall mean the Mayor and Councillors of Blackall-Tambo Regional Council.

Communication – will include all forms of communication to both the media and public including, but not limited to, interviews, press statements, emails, facsimiles, letters, phone calls etc.

Council Business – includes any matter that has been, or is being, considered by Council as having appeared in Council's business papers or can be reasonably expected to appear in Council's business papers.

Media – all forms of published content such as newspapers, radio, television, social media and online. All organisations involved in publishing media contact including freelancers.

The Act shall mean the *Local Government Act 2009*.

The Regulation shall mean the *Local Government Regulation 2012*.

POLICY STATEMENT

Council encourages open, prompt and accurate communication with the media and the community to promote a positive, progressive and professional image of Council.

This policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant policies and procedures of Blackall-Tambo Regional Council including:

- Councillor Code of Conduct Policy
- Code of Conduct for Employees Policy

CONTENT

The following outlines the authority and notification required in scenarios in which statements and comments are likely to be requested by, or made to, the media.

- The Mayor is the official spokesperson for the Council. No other Council personnel may assume this responsibility unless specifically authorised by the Mayor.
- The Mayor will be responsible for communication Council's Policy, Strategy, Service Levels and political responses to, or on behalf of, community advocacy issues.



- The Chief Executive Officer will be responsible for communicating with the media on operational matters including events and programs.
- The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for and must authorise paid advertisements, social media pages, community notices and promotional material prepared by Council.

This policy is not intended to limit a Councillor from communicating with or engaging with their constituents. Councillors are actively encouraged to do this, provided that the Councillor Code of Conduct requirements are complied with.

Councillors are not permitted to distribute in any way, any documentation pertaining to the Council and Council business, without first seeking approval from the Chief Executive Officer to determine if the document is available to the public.

Councillors may redistribute public information provided by Council in newsletters or social media posts.

PROCEDURE

Communicating with Media on Council Business

Media statements must be undertaken in the following manner:

- a) By the Mayor;
- b) By the CEO;
- c) If the matter has a specialised or technical component, the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer may authorise a senior officer to provide information to the media;
- d) All written media releases must be authorised by the CEO.
- e) Should a Councillor wish to represent Council and communicate on a particular issue of Council business, they must seek delegation from the Mayor.

All external media enquiries and requests for media comment on official Council position or policy should be directed to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer must ensure the Mayor is offered the first opportunity to respond. On those occasions where the Mayor is unavailable, the Chief Executive Officer will refer the request to the Deputy Mayor.

As a matter of courtesy, copies of final media releases will be distributed to Councillors by email at the same time as the item is released to media outlets.

All communications to the media must have regard to the law, preservation of privacy and be free from discrimination. All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that the information is accurate, factual and not prejudicial to Council's legal standing.

Guidelines for Councillors

This policy does not purport to restrict Councillors from making statements, or from responding to media enquiries, in their capacity as a Councillor about their personal opinion regarding a Council matter. Should Councillors intend to make statements reflecting their personal opinion, such remarks should be clearly qualified accordingly.



It is the sole responsibility of the Councillor under the Code of Conduct to ensure that when communicating with the public or media, they make it clear that they are expressing a personal opinion and are not speaking on behalf of Council.

Any use by a Councillor of their official title (Councillor) is to accompany a disclaimer that the opinion or comments provided are those of the Councillor and not those of the Blackall-Tambo Regional Council. A Councillor must consider whether using their official title (Councillor) may lead a recipient of the information to assume that the Councillor is commenting on behalf of Council.

Guidelines for Employees

All communications from Council employees to the media must be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer.

Employees must not respond to any media enquiries. All enquiries must be referred to the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

Employees may issue general promotional material and information relating to the operating activities of Council, eg advertisements, community notices, event notices etc; only after obtaining approval from the Chief Executive Officer.

Employees will not engage in media or campaign activity which may be to the personal advantage of a Councillor.

Caretaker Period

Council's publications may be produced as usual and will only cover key operational projects and events during this period.

During this period:

- Council will restrict its advertising and media releases to those required to maintain the necessary, customary and routine operations;
- Individual Councillors will not be featured in any paid advertising and media releases will not be attributed to individual Councillors;
- Advertising or media releases must not be able to be construed of a political nature;
- All quotes within media releases will be attributed to the CEO or his delegate;
- Councillors may respond to media questions in their individual capacity as a candidate and should distinguish their individual opinion and the majority view of the elected Council;
- Councillors must not seek media notes from officers for the purpose of assisting them with their campaign.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Council's use of social media



Council uses social media as a business tool primarily for general communication and community engagement. All social media accounts are to be set-up and transacted in the name of Blackall-Tambo Regional Council.

The Executive Office is responsible for managing the administration of all social media sites and channels across Council. They manage content for Council's social media accounts, which includes maintaining the organisation's brand, and building a positive and trusted online presence and maintaining records.

Social media sites keep a running record of content posted. Where required, Council's organisational record keeping procedures are to be followed.

Content should be planned in advance and checked for validity and accuracy by the Chief Executive Officer, prior to posting online.

Council resources must not be used to post material which is fraudulent, threatening, bullying, embarrassing, sexually explicit, obscene, racist, intimidating, defamatory or any other content which is unlawful or offensive.

Responsible persons

- Chief Executive Officer – the CEO is the only authorised staff member.
- Other employees may post or make comment on social media but only if first discussed with and approved by the CEO.

Principles

Anyone using social media will:

- Adhere to the Council's code of conduct, policies and procedures.
- Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect.
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations.
- Post and share to uphold the integrity, reputation and values of Blackall-Tambo Regional Council.

Personal use of social media

Blackall-Tambo Regional Council acknowledges that Councillors, staff, volunteers and contractors choose to use social media in a private context however, they should be aware that content published on social media sites is publicly available, even on personal sites. When using social media, users must be aware that;

- You are still bound by the Councillor Code of Conduct Policy and Code of Conduct for Employees Policy.
- Your comments should not be purported to be made on behalf of Blackall-Tambo Regional Council or in relation to Council's decision making.
- All personal opinions must be stated as an expression of personal view where referring to a related stakeholder or function of Council.



- You are not to make comments which compromise your capacity or other's capacity to fulfil duties.
- You are not to publicly criticise a colleague, the organisation's administration or any of Council's partners or stakeholder groups.
- You are not to compromise confidential information obtained via your engagement with Council.
- You are not to promote / publicise a particular individual or business where it could be perceived as preferential treatment, or purport services to be superior to other potential suppliers.
- Posts by Councillors related to Council administration or business are public records and includes such posts on a Councillor's personal social media platform.

ENFORCEMENT

Blackall-Tambo Regional Council reserves the right to remove, where possible, content that violates this policy or any associated policies.

Staff

A breach of this policy by staff may result in a code of conduct complaint, disciplinary action, performance management and/or review.

Councillors

The use of Facebook messenger, private email accounts, WhatsApp or other messaging apps to undertake council business without capturing public records in official council systems, will be a breach of the *Public Records Act 2002* and will be misconduct.

Misuse of information or material acquired by Councillors, whether the misuse is for the benefit of the Councillors or for the benefit or detriment of another person and release of confidential information is misconduct and will be referred to the Independent Assessor (s171 of the *Local Government Act*).

A breach of this policy by a Councillor may result in a code of conduct complaint.

POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed when any of the following occur:

1. As required by legislation.
2. The related documents are amended or replaced.
3. Other circumstances as determined by the Chief Executive Officer.

Notwithstanding the above, this policy is to be reviewed at intervals of no more than three (3) years.