

**FILE NO:** PSC2015-0350

**TITLE:** MEDIA LIAISON POLICY

**OWNER:** COMMUNICATIONS AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE  
SECTION MANAGER

## **1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 Enable the delivery of timely, creative and transparent communications that connects our stories, our people and our place.
- 1.2 Build trust and reputation through proactive, consistent and trustworthy information that responds to issues and community priorities.
- 1.3 Establish and maintain a collaborative relationship between Council and media representatives and organisations.
- 1.4 Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Council's delegated media spokespeople.
- 1.5 Encourage identification of proactive opportunities for media coverage across all business units of Council.

## **2. CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:**

- 2.1 The media plays a key role in the delivery of Council communications by sharing information and helping our community connect Council's strategic direction with the programs and works in their place.
- 2.2 The media helps create awareness of the opportunities for our community to be actively involved in Council decision making.

## **3. SCOPE:**

- 3.1 This policy applies to the Mayor, all Councillors and Council staff including permanent, casual and temporary employees; volunteers; contractors; or consultants in relation to interaction with the media.
- 3.2 This policy is guided by the Office of Local Government (OLG) Model Media Policy.

## 4. DEFINITIONS:

4.1 An outline of the key definitions of terms included in the policy.

Media	Any print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio and television broadcasters.
Delegated spokesperson	Any staff with delegations to interact with the media in an official capacity on behalf of Council.

## 5. STATEMENT:

- 5.1 Port Stephens Council is committed to building and maintaining strong relationships with the media to facilitate informed communications.
- 5.2 Council will promote Port Stephens with positive and proactive media by identifying stories of interest to the media and our community.
- 5.3 Council will be open and honest in its dealing with the media, notwithstanding that Council will comply with its duty of care to protect confidential or personal information and does not infringe any laws in providing information.
- 5.4 Council will respond promptly to media enquiries to meet news deadlines.
- 5.5 Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.
- 5.6 All Council staff contact with the media is to be coordinated through the Communications and Engagement team.
- 5.7 The Communications and Engagement team is responsible for coordinating media liaison and issuing media releases and is delegated to respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council.
- 5.8 Written statements will be approved by the Mayor, General Manager or relevant Group Manager or other quoted delegated spokespersons.
- 5.9 All media engagement by council officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.
- 5.10 All staff, Councillors, volunteers and contractors must abide by Council's Code of Conduct when speaking with the media.

## **General Manager and the media**

- 5.11 The General Manager is the official spokesperson for Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 5.12 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).
- 5.13 From time to time, the General Manager may also authorise individuals other than staff or Councillors to represent Council to the media, for example Chairperson of a committee.

## **Mayor and the media**

- 5.14 The Mayor is the principle spokesperson of Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities.
- 5.15 If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 5.16 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 areas or expertise).

## **Councillors and the media**

- 5.17 As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, Councillors have been elected to represent the community and are free to speak to the media.
- 5.18 When engaging with the media Councillors:
- a) must not intend to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so
  - b) 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)
  - c) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
  - d) must not disclose council information unless authorised to do so, and
  - e) must seek information and guidance from the General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator 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.

- 5.19 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.
- 5.20 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, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator.
- 5.21 Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator.

## **Staff and the media**

- 5.22 Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator to do so.
- 5.23 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 General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator.
- 5.24 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.
- 5.25 If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
- a) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
  - b) must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator and
  - c) must seek information and guidance from the General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator 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.
- 5.26 Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager, Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator.

## **Media during emergencies**

- 5.27 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager or Communications and Engagement Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 5.28 The Mayor, 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.

## **Media in the lead up to elections**

- 5.29 This policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates for Council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 5.30 Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates for Council or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by Council or produced by the Council or with Council resources.

## **Record management requirements**

- 5.31 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.

## **6. RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 6.1 The Communications and Customer Experience Section Manager and the Communications and Engagement Coordinator is responsible for monitoring, reviewing and providing advice on this policy.
- 6.2 Implementation of and compliance with this policy is the responsibility of all staff, with the Senior Leadership Team responsible for ensuring the policy is implemented throughout the organisation.

## 7. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- 7.1 Code of Conduct
- 7.2 Communications and Engagement Strategy
- 7.3 Online and social media directive
- 7.4 Social media guidelines

### CONTROLLED DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

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### VERSION HISTORY:

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