



POLICY:	MEDIA POLICY
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ISSUED BY:	Executive Services
INQUIRIES:	Communications Officer x5744

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish protocols and consistent methods for managing communication between the Council and the media, to ensure coordinated, accurate, and reliable representation.

OBJECTIVE

A co-ordinated approach to media liaison is necessary to:

- Promote a professional and consistent corporate image;
- Maximise the positive promotion of Council work and achievements;
- Minimise the possibility for miscommunication and negative publicity;
- Provide a timely and unified response to media enquiries and negative publicity;
- Ensure that media comments reflect Council's position on the topic, consistent with corporate plans, strategies, policies and minutes;
- Ensure that media comments consider broader 'global' issues that may override the specific issue in question;
- Ensure communications strategies are part of the planning process for each major Council project;
- Ensure staff understand the importance of media liaison and the related workflow required; and
- Ensure appropriate use of emerging social media if and when required.

POLICY STATEMENT

Blue Mountains City 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.

Principles of media liaison

- The 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.)
- Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.
- Media enquiries are to be dealt with promptly, truthfully and within the media's deadline wherever possible.
- In the case of matters with possible legal consequences, that is, official investigations, accidents, or inquiries 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.
- Invitations to relevant functions eg. Launches and civic events, will be extended to a representative of the local press.

PROCEDURES

Spokespeople

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.

The Communications Officer is responsible for coordinating Council's media liaison and has been delegated responsibility to respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council.

Councillors

The Mayor will be the spokesperson on Council business or matters before Council. Therefore all media enquiries should be directed to the Mayor in the first instance or if unavailable, to the Deputy Mayor.

Council Staff

Members of staff are not permitted to speak with the media without prior permission from the Group Manager and/or General Manager. The Communications Officer must be advised of any staff representation to the media before taking place.

Staff may express their views in a public debate in their capacity as a local citizen and **not** as a Council representative (unless authorised by the Group Manager, General Manager or Communications Officer). 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 Blue Mountains City Council.

Response to Media Enquiries

All media enquiries should be directed to the Communications Officer in the first instance. The Communications Officer will then liaise with relevant staff, Managers, the General Manager and/or Mayor to prepare a response to the enquiry.

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 may, out of courtesy, inform the Communications Officer of comments provided to the media.

Council Staff

All media enquiries, requests for interviews or statements etc are to be referred to the Communications Officer and relevant Group Manager, who will advise of most appropriate response and /or action. In some instances, it is appropriate that staff with particular expertise, be nominated to speak to the topic of a media enquiry. This will be done in consultation with the Communications Officer and the relevant Group Manager.

Council staff will not engage in media activity which may be to the personal advantage of a Councillor e.g. during an election campaign.

Staff are required to comply with the statutory requirements contained in the Privacy Act and Local Government Act, which prohibit the disclosure of personal and confidential information.

Media releases

Media releases are distributed in a standard format by the Communications Officer who will ensure that relevant staff have access to these media releases at the time of release and that all staff and the community have access to Council media releases in a timely fashion via the Council website.

The Communications Officer will obtain approval of the relevant Group Manager, General Manager, the Mayor and relevant staff on significant media releases prior to release.

The Communications Officer will handle any follow up media enquiries relating to media releases issued by Blue Mountains City Council.

Where a media release is prepared by another organisation that relates to a Council project or in which Council is involved, the Communications Officer will provide an official comment on behalf of BMCC, in consultation with the Mayor and/or General Manager, and will ensure that a copy of the comment and the media release is provided to relevant staff and Manager/s.

Councillors

The Mayor and Councillors may, out of courtesy, inform the Communications Officer of a media release or other forms of communication forwarded to the media.

Council staff

Staff should provide draft information and photo/s for a media release to the Communications Officer (including a staff name and contact number for further information) with the approval of the relevant Group Manager.

Draft releases or information should be approved by the appropriate Manager before being sent to Communications Officer.

Where a media release is prepared by another organisation that relates to a Council project or in which Council is involved, the Council officer involved is to ensure that a copy of the release is provided to the Communications Officer, who will advise the General Manager and the Mayor.

Articles for Publication / Public Speaking

From time to time staff will be asked to provide an article for a journal, newspaper or magazine or undertake a public speaking engagement. All requests for articles and public speaking should be referred to the Communications Officer and, if required, approved by the Group Manager and General Manager. A draft of the article/speech should be forwarded to the Communications Officer.

Letters to the Editor

Any Letters to the Editor should be forwarded to the Communications Officer and approved by the relevant Group Manager and General Manager before being forwarded to the media outlet by the Communications Officer.

Media Alerts

Any Council officer who is aware of an occurrence that may be of interest to the media (positive or negative) should immediately contact their Group Manager and the Communications Officer, providing relevant background details and the name and contact of the appropriate Council officer for further communication if required.

Paid media advertising

Paid media advertising is the responsibility of the relevant Group Manager. The design and content of the advertising material should be undertaken in consultation with the Communications Officer and mindful of corporate branding guidelines.

Web Communication

All Council material which is to be published electronically should be submitted to the Web Administrator for publishing in a timely manner.

Emergency Media and Communications

Emergency Media and Communications are to be co-ordinated through Communications Officer in accordance with BMCC Guidelines for Emergency Communications.

Filming permits

Applications to use areas under the Control of Council for the purpose of filming shall be subject to the issuing of appropriate approval by the Environmental and Customer Services Group.

Media Monitoring

The Communications Officer will:

- Maintain records of media enquiries and responses, copies of media releases, associated background information and media clippings, including web, TV footage and radio recordings where possible;
- Maintain an 'Issues' folders on subjects in which the Council has an interest and which could become controversial;
- Produce a monthly media roundup in which a record of media exposure is kept by date and publication, including a reference to the status of that exposure (positive/negative/neutral) and significant articles and letters; and
- Inform the General Manager, Group Managers and /or Executive Officer of significant media enquiries or liaison.

Media training and briefings

The Communications Officer will provide or arrange for media training for nominated Council officers, and provide advice on handling controversial issues.

The Communications Officer will provide briefings for the General Manager, relevant Group Managers, the Mayor, or other staff nominated as spokespeople for any issues likely to generate media interest.

Communication Strategies as a component of projects

All projects undertaken by Council should include a communications strategy. The Communications Officer will provide advice to all staff on the preparation of a Communications Strategy as required.

Implementation of the Media Policy

The Communications Officer, Executive Services Branch is responsible for the implementation of the Media Policy.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION & DOCUMENTS

Personal Information and Privacy Act 1998

Local Government Act 2003

BMCC Guidelines for Emergency Communications 2004

BMCC Strategic Communications Plan 2007