



DUBBO  
REGIONAL  
COUNCIL

# COUNCIL POLICY

## MEDIA POLICY

**Date** AUGUST 2021

**Council Resolution Date**

**Clause Number**

**Responsible Position** Manager Corporate Image and Communications

**Branch** Corporate Image and Communications

**Division** Executive Services

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**Consultation** Executive Leadership Team, Senior Leadership Team, Communications Partners, Social Media Coordinator.

| Document Revision History                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Date          |
| Policy defines authorised spokespeople and procedures for interacting with the media. Updated to explain limitations and circumstances where elected officials may be representing Dubbo Regional Council, including a quick-reference guide to approved topics. | 6 August 2021 |
| Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |               |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |               |

## POLICY

### PURPOSE

The purpose of Council's Media Policy is to ensure the engagement between Council and the media is managed appropriately to maximise the benefits for Council, and to minimise the risk of adverse publicity and misunderstanding due to inaccurate information or inappropriate sharing of information.

### BACKGROUND AND RELATED LEGISLATION

Effective and engaging communication can significantly contribute to the success of service delivery by informing members of the community and key stakeholders of Council matters. Dubbo Regional Council recognises the important role the media plays -- including regional, national and international media -- in informing the public about Council's decisions, activities, programs, events, services, initiatives and role the Dubbo region plays as a leader in regional and Western NSW.

For many residents of the Local Government Area media channels such as newspapers, radio, television and the World Wide Web are primary sources of news and information about Council's policies, programs and services. The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Provide guidelines relating to the authorisation of Council spokespersons;
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for Council staff in terms of media management and the pro-active promotion of Council's services, events and activities;
- Ensure the media receives accurate information in a timely manner;
- Ensure the community and other stakeholders are kept abreast and informed about Council decisions, developments, policies and major projects;
- Ensure media spokespersons are skilled and feel confident to communicate with print, online and broadcast, print and online media

This policy is not intended to prevent information which is in the public interest from entering the public arena.

Related legislation:

- Defamation Act 2005
- State Records Act 1998
- Copyright Act 1968
- Local Government Act 1993
- Privacy and Personal Protection Act 1998
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991

- Industry Codes of Practice, as identified by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). This includes the Broadcasting Services Act, Commercial Radio Code of Practice, and Community Radio Code of Practice.

### SCOPE

This Policy applies to the Mayor, all Councillors, Council staff, contractors and volunteers, when representing Council in the media. This policy also applies to verbal and written comments in the media, public speaking engagements – including industry conferences, industry publications/media, media releases and the use of social media. For specific social media requirements, refer to Council's Social Media Policy – public official, professional and personal use.

### DEFINITIONS

To assist in interpretation, the following definitions apply: (Delete section if not required)

| Term                                                | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Blogs</i>                                        | A log of events, experiences or commentary on a web platform to build credibility and create a readership of devotees. Also includes video blogs, or vlogs.                                                                                               |
| <i>Contentious issue</i>                            | Refers to any circumstances that have caused, or may potentially cause, a concern in the media or community.                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Council / Corporation</i>                        | Dubbo Regional Council (including Mayor, Councillors and operational staff).                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Media</i>                                        | The main means of mass communication, including broadcasting, publishing and the internet. Any print, broadcast and online media (including social media) accessible to the public. Media in this context also refers to paid media and PR opportunities. |
| <i>Corporate media and corporate communications</i> | All Council-specific media and communications produced by Council's Corporate Image and Communications team for internal/ external distribution                                                                                                           |
| <i>Spokesperson</i>                                 | Authorised person to speak on behalf of Council                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>Personal information/opinion</i>                 | Information or an opinion about a person whose identity is apparent, or can be determined from the information or opinion                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>Responsible officer</i>                          | Council staff member responsible for the project / service / business / facility or program etc.                                                                                                                                                          |
| <i>Social media</i>                                 | Refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies that enable people to communicate two-way (includes Facebook, Twitter, blogs etc).                                                                                                                 |

### POLICY

Any comment made to a journalist or member of a media organisation is to be consistent with this policy, Council's Code of Conduct, Social Media Policy – public official, professional and personal use, and accurately reflect the decisions and values of Dubbo Regional Council.

The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer are Council's official spokespersons.

**RELATED POLICIES**

The below policies are referenced in the Media Policy:

- Record Management Procedures Policy
- Councillor Use of Social Media Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Corporate Image Policy
- Event Protocols Policy
- Community Engagement and Communications Policy

**MAYORAL MEDIA RESPONSIBILITIES**

Mayoral Media Responsibilities are determined by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer through Governance, Executive Services Branch. When the Mayor is speaking as the official spokesperson for Council, the topics usually meet one of these criteria:

- Community Strategic Plan;
- the Council's annual budget and rate notices, and
- the Council's Annual Report;
- Announcements or commentary relating to premier events, major projects or key community infrastructure the Council is planning or undertaking;
- Any matter involving the Council (or one of its committees) that could generate state, national or international level dialogue;
- Any issue or topic that could be seen as political in nature; or specific to elected officials
- Controversial matters that could significantly affect the reputation of the local government area, its Council, or Dubbo Regional Council as an organisation;
- The outcomes of any Council decisions (made at Council Meetings or Special Meetings);
- Civic and ceremonial duties involving the Council, as determined by custom, history or practice (ANZAC Day, Christmas program, or Australian Citizenship ceremonies);
- A Council event or activity involving the Prime Minister, State Premier or other senior leaders or dignitaries – including interstate and overseas guests or visitors;
- A significant natural or human-induced emergency imminently or currently affecting the local government area.

**DEPUTY MAYOR'S MEDIA RESPONSIBILITIES**

When serving as acting Mayor, the Deputy Mayor becomes Council's spokesperson. As required, the Mayor may delegate media responsibilities to the Deputy Mayor, including all or part media responsibilities while acting as Mayor.

**DELEGATION OF MEDIA RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHER COUNCILLORS**

The Mayor, or in their absence, the Deputy Mayor, can delegate the mayoral media engagement responsibilities to any other Councillor. Without this delegation, no other Councillor can engage with media on behalf of Dubbo Regional Council.

#### **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND COUNCIL STAFF MEDIA RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Chief Executive Officer is the spokesperson on Council's operational and/or corporate matters. The Chief Executive Officer can delegate operational and/or corporate media spokesperson responsibilities to suitable staff, eg. Directors or other specialist staff, as required. The CEO will liaise directly with the Mayor on topics that could be controversial, whether they are political in nature, or strictly staffing matters, by way of courtesy. The CEO may seek advice or further clarification from staff to pass onto the Mayor and other elected officials.

Council staff are to refer all media enquiries to Corporate Image and Communications and must not, unless otherwise authorised by Corporate Image and Communications, speak to or respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council. Council staff may not speak to reporters or provide background information without the express prior approval of the Chief Executive Officer or Manager Corporate Image and Communications.

Corporate Image and Communications is responsible for preparing media materials in consultation with relevant Council staff. The Mayor, and/or Chief Executive Officer when relevant, must approve all media releases and media responses. Only an authorised Council spokesperson, approved in writing by the CEO in accordance with the Media Procedures, may be interviewed by the media or provide approved responses ensuring the community receives the most accurate and timely information. This includes undertaking commitments at public speaking engagements and/or industry/conference presentations that represent Dubbo Regional Council.

Approval as an authorised spokesperson will be made on a case-by-case basis according to the subject matter of the enquiry, requirement or need. A record of approved media spokespeople should be kept, in line with Council's Record Keeping Policy, with a review of spokespeople every 12 months.

The Manager Corporate Image and Communications is responsible for co-ordinating and issuing media materials.

#### **LIMITS OF MAYORAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Chief Executive Officer will involve the Mayor and Councillors in relation to corporate and operational media matters affecting Council. Limitations for Mayoral representation on behalf of Dubbo Regional Council include:

- Confidential matters, including commercial-in-confidence discussions/ negotiations
- Code of Conduct investigations
- Matters relating to staffing
- Anything political in nature

If in doubt, seek advice from the Internal Ombudsman and/or Corporate Image and Communications.

Council recognises the important role the media plays in informing the public about the work of the Organisation and its facilities and businesses. Subject to operational and legal constraints, Council provides the media with as much information as is practical and possible about this work, as long as it is clearly in the public interest, or a requirement to issue or provide a public statement or comment on an issue.

#### **COMMITTEES, ADVISORY PANELS, AND REFERENCE GROUPS**

In line with the Corporate Communications Strategy, members of these groups must refer all media enquiries to the chairperson of the committee, panel, or group in the first instance.

#### **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

The integrity and security of confidential documents or information that Councillors or authorised media spokespeople are in possession of must be maintained and managed in line with Council's Code of Conduct and Media Policy.

#### **DEFAMATION**

Council staff and elected officials should be aware of defamation laws when commenting in the media. This includes on social media, as any moderator of a social media page is responsible for the material published on their page.

As a guide, under *Defamation Act 2005*, published material that identifies a person (not necessarily by name) and meets any of the below criteria may be considered defamatory:

- Exposes a person to ridicule, or
- Lowers the person's reputation in the eyes of members of the community, or
- Causes people to shun or avoid the person, or
- Injures the person's professional reputation.

#### **ROLE OF CORPORATE IMAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Council's Corporate Image and Communications team is the central point of contact for all incoming media enquiries. The communications team also acts as a central point of contact for staff who wish to promote their activities, services or programs or events to the community through the media. It is not the responsibility of the Corporate Image and Communications team to handle media requests on behalf of Councillors, and all media representatives seeking interviews or comment from individual Councillors should be directed to the corporate website, where all contact information for Councillors is publically available. The role of the Corporate Image and Communications branch is to facilitate media requests and interviews about operational and corporate matters involving Dubbo Regional Council. This includes:

- Preparation of media releases
- Statements and responses to media enquiries
- Facilitating media interviews and backgrounds

- Public notices and public exhibition items
- Providing talking points or writing speeches for official openings or events

Refer to Council's Media Procedures for more information about the specific protocols relating to Corporate Image and Communications. Approval as an authorised spokesperson will be made on a case by case basis according to the subject matter of the inquiry. Approval may be granted by the Mayor, the CEO, or the respective Director using the table on the following page as a guide.

| MEDIA SPOKESPERSON              | ROLE                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mayor                           | Primary spokesperson for Dubbo Regional Council including the City of Dubbo and Wellington                                                                                        |
|                                 | Primary spokesperson for decisions made at Ordinary and Extraordinary Meetings of Council and Council Committees. May delegate this task to the CEO or Director where appropriate |
|                                 | Primary spokesperson on political and major issues such as government announcements, significant Council projects, events and high profile issues                                 |
|                                 | May direct the CEO to act as a spokesperson or delegate a spokesperson                                                                                                            |
| Committee Chairpersons          | Spokesperson on issues concerning the deliberations and decisions made by that Committee                                                                                          |
| Chief Executive Officer         | Spokesperson for all high-level administrative, operational, sensitive and management issues                                                                                      |
|                                 | May authorise a nominated Director or manager to act as spokesperson                                                                                                              |
| Executive staff (Directors)     | Spokespersons for matters relating to major projects / operational issues in their Division                                                                                       |
|                                 | May authorise a manager to speak on non-contentious, specific activities, events and projects                                                                                     |
| Branch Managers / project staff | Spokespersons for non-contentious Council activities, events and projects directly related to their role                                                                          |