

MURRAY RIVER COUNCIL  
COUNCIL POLICY

# MEDIA POLICY

POL-108.V#2

Based on the Model Media and Model Social Media Policy – published by the Department of Planning and Environment / Office of Local Government - 2022



murray river  
council

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Media Policy provides Council with a robust framework for the administration and management of their interactions with all forms of media – print, broadcast and social media. It also sets standards of conduct for all Council Officials who are required to interact with media in their official capacity.

Council recognises that a well-run, competent, ethical and reputable organisation is the best way to promote a favourable image and also recognises that it can actively promote a favourable image through successful management of its communication process with the media.

Effective media engagement can assist Council to keep their community informed, explain decisions and to promote community confidence in the Council and its decisions.

Social media has become an important tool, it is used by Council to interact and share information with their communities in an accessible and often more informal format.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- › Ensure all communication from Council is consistent, accurate, timely and appropriate;
- › Clearly indicating Council's authorised spokespersons;
- › Provide a wide variety of mediums, that information from and about Council, can be accessed by the community;
- › Improve communication with internal and external customers and enhance Council's public image;
- › Ensure that full and complete details of all issues relevant to Council activities are fairly presented to the community.
- › Ensure confidential information is managed appropriately, and
- › Decrease the exposure and risk to reputation by managing information appropriately.

Murray River Council is committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

Openness	We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our Council and the media. Our social media platforms are places where anyone can share and discuss issues that are relevant to our Council and the community we represent and serve.
Consistency	We will ensure consistency by all Councillors and Council employees when communicating with the media.
Relevance	We will ensure our social media platforms are kept up to date with informative content about our Council and community.
Accuracy	The information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our Council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur. The content we upload onto our social media platforms and any other social media platform will be a source of truth for our Council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
Timeliness	We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.
Respect	Our social media platforms are safe spaces. We will uphold and promote the behavioural standards contained in this policy and our Council's code of conduct when using our social media platforms and any other social media platform.

### 3. SCOPE

This Policy applies to all Council Officials of Murray River Council.

### 4. LEGISLATION

Council is committed to promoting consistency and accountability by complying with the following relevant legislation:

- ▶ Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) - Sections 226 and 231
- ▶ Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- ▶ Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)
- ▶ Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW)
- ▶ Copyright Act 1968 (CTH)
- ▶ Copyright Amendment Act 2006 (CTH)
- ▶ Copyright Amendment (Disability Access and Other Measures) Act 2017 (CTH)
- ▶ Defamation Act 2005 (NSW)
- ▶ Government information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)
- ▶ Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)
- ▶ State Records Act 1998 (NSW)
- ▶ Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)

### 5. POLICY STATEMENT

This Media Policy has been developed to provide a framework to assist Murray River Council when dealing with the media and to ensure that media engagement by Councillors and Council employees is consistent, accurate and professional and enhances the council's reputation.

Effective media engagement can assist Council to keep their community informed, explain decisions and to promote community confidence in Council and its decisions.

The term "media" used in this Policy means print, broadcast and online/social media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, television broadcasters and social media platforms.

The advancement of technology and the development of non-traditional media means that the media now has unprecedented reach and accessibility. Anyone with a computer or hand-held device can access media platforms and actively engage in content which has the potential to be viewed and shared by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

How Council is portrayed in the media impacts greatly on how the organisation is perceived. Media can be an effective tool to promote council programs, events, and initiatives. In addition, media can be invaluable in times of crisis or emergency when information needs to be communicated to the public.

Together with the associated Social Media Procedure, this Policy provides Murray River Council with a robust framework for the administration and management of their social media platforms. It sets standards of conduct for all Council Officials who use social media in their official capacity.

Despite its obvious benefits, media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- ▶ Maintaining the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of information;
- ▶ Ensuring confidential information is managed appropriately; and
- ▶ The increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately.

## 5.1 STANDARDS OF CONDUCT WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

Council Officials must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council Official.

Council Officials must not:

- ▶ share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms; or
- ▶ use social media to post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings or other information that:
  - Are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council Officials or members of the public;
  - Contains profane language or is sexual in nature;
  - Constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of Council's Code of Conduct, or is unlawfully discriminatory;
  - Is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by Council to ensure workplace health and safety;
  - Contains content about Council, Council Officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive;
  - Divulges confidential Council information;
  - Breaches the privacy of other Council Officials or members of the public;
  - Contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Code of Conduct Procedures
  - Could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment;
  - Commits Council to any action;
  - Violates an order made by a court;
  - Breaches copyright;
  - Advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business;
  - Constitutes spam;
  - Is in breach of the rules of the social media platform; and
  - incite or encourage other persons to act in a way that is contrary to the requirements of this Policy.

Council officials must:

- ▶ Attribute work to the original author, creator or source when uploading or linking to content produced by a third party
- ▶ Obtain written permission from a minor's parent or legal guardian before uploading content in which the minor can be identified.
- ▶ exercise caution when sharing, liking, retweeting content as this can be regarded as an endorsement and/or publication of the content.

Councillors must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council's governing body but may explain why they voted on a matter in the way that they did.

Local Government Act 1993 - Section 232(1) (f)

## **5.2 AUTHORISED SPOKESPERSONS & PLATFORM MANAGERS**

Council has nominated the following Council representatives to act as official spokespersons to the print and broadcast media:

- ▶ Mayor
- ▶ Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Council's Community Engagement Business Unit is the lead point of contact for all media enquiries and act as the authorised Platform Managers for all social media platforms.

Platform Managers may appoint Platform Administrators to different social media sites depending on their accountabilities and expertise. However, the Platform Managers will have overall responsibility for these sites.

## **5.3 WRITTEN MATERIAL FOR MEDIA USE**

All media releases, media kits, feature stories, flyers and other materials written for the media or public distribution should comply with Council's adopted Style Guide and checked for editing, photographic support and policy proofing and then sent to the CEO / relevant Director / or delegate (as per the Delegations Policy) for review and approval for release.

Where a media release is prepared by another organisation which relates to a Council project or in which Council is involved, the Council employee involved is to ensure that a copy of the media release is provided to the CEO for review and content approval is supplied back to the requesting organisation.

## **5.4 USE OF MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES**

Council recognises that ill-considered and uninformed comments can cause dire consequences and legal implications in the event of an emergency, disaster, crisis or sensitive issue.

During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the delegated Council Officials will be responsible for coordinating media releases/statements and posts on social media platforms on behalf of the Council.

Training on media engagement for all forms of media during emergencies should be included in training and/or induction provided to all delegated persons.

Accordingly, only the Mayor and CEO are authorised to speak to the print and broadcast media on these occasions.

Councillors, Council employees and other Council Officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.

To ensure consistent messaging both during and after an emergency, Platform Managers, Platform Administrators and Council Officials must not upload content onto Council's or their own social media platforms which contradicts advice issued by the agency coordinating the emergency response, or agencies supporting recovery efforts.

## **5.5 MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEAD UP TO ELECTIONS**

This Policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at Council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.

Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at 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 Council or with council resources.

## 5.6 RECORDS MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

All 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 Council's approved records management policies and practices.

Council Officials must not destroy, alter, or remove social media content unless authorised to do so. If you need to alter or remove social media content, you must do so in accordance with this Policy and consult with the Council's Records Management Unit and comply with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998.

When/if a Councillor's term of office concludes, the Councillor must contact the Council's Records Business Unit and/or the Community Engagement Business Unit to manage/transfer records of social media content created during their term of office and comply with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998.

In fulfilling their obligations, Council Officials should refer to any guidance issued by the State Archives and Records Authority of NSW relating to retention requirements for Council and Councillor's social media content.

## 5.7 DEFAMATION

Defamation law covers Council Officials, as it does everyone else. It is illegal to harm another person's reputation verbally or through the written word.

Under the law, a level of qualified privilege does apply. It recognises that Councillors may need to speak freely and publicly in undertaking their civic duties. However, this should be treated with great caution. It covers only statements made at Council or Committee meetings in carrying out a Councillor's duties. Such statements must not be made maliciously but in good faith.

## 5.8 MONITORING OF MEDIA LIAISON

Where possible and cost effective, monitoring of media uptake of Council media releases and alerts will be undertaken.

Visitations to the Council website will be counted and reported.

## 5.9 CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS

Complaints about the conduct of Council Officials (including Councillors) when speaking to the media or on social media platforms may be directed to the CEO.

Concerns or complaints about the administration of a Council's social media platforms should be made to the council's CEO in the first instance.

Complaints about a CEO's conduct when speaking to the media or on social media platforms may be directed to the Mayor.

## 6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES COUNCIL OFFICIALS

### 6.1 CEO

The CEO:

- › Is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- › May delegate to other Council employee/s to speak on their behalf where appropriate, (for example, where the delegated staff member has professional expertise regarding the subject matter, or the CEO is unavailable)
- › May delegate responsibility for the establishing, monitoring and management Council's social media platforms.

### 6.2 MAYOR

The Mayor:

- › Is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of Council, including representing the views of Council as to its local priorities;

Local Government Act 1993 - Section 226(c)

If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as Council's spokesperson.

- › 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 area of expertise).

### 6.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BUSINESS UNIT

The Community Engagement Business Unit's role is to:

#### PRINT & BROADCAST MEDIA

- › Be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph Council employees, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes;
- › Be responsible for preparing all media statements and gaining approval by the Mayor and/or CEO prior to their release;
- › Liaise with relevant employees within the organisation where appropriate;
- › Develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or Councillors;
- › Maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses;
- › Ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias;
- › Ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly;
- › Provide guidance to Councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation; and
- › Ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

- › In conjunction with the CEO, has overall responsibility for all Council social media sites and approve/revoke an employees status as a Platform Administrator;
- › develop and/or approve the training and/or induction to be provided to Platform Administrators;
- › maintain a register of Platform Administrators;

- › maintain effective oversight of Platform Administrators;
- › ensure the Council complies with its record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media;
- › ensure the Council adheres to the rules of the social media platform(s);
- › ensure the Council's social media platforms are set up and maintained in a way that maximises user friendliness and any technical problems are resolved promptly.

#### **6.4 PLATFORM ADMINISTRATORS**

Platform Administrators should be Council employees that are responsible for managing, or have expertise in, the events, initiatives, programs or policies that are the subject of the social media content.

The role of a Platform Administrator is to:

- › Ensure, to the best of their ability, that the content they upload onto social media platforms is accurate;
- › Correct inaccuracies in Council generated content;
- › Engage in discussions and answer questions on Council's behalf on social media platforms – where appropriate. Only MRC Pages will have discussions or questions answered. Posts or shares into other pages such as community pages will not be monitored or responded to;
- › Keep the Council's social media platforms up to date;
- › Where authorised to do so by the Community Engagement Business Unit;
  - Moderate the Council's social media platforms in accordance with this Policy;
  - Ensure the Council complies with its record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media.

When engaging on social media on Council's behalf (such as, but not limited to, on a community social media page), a Platform Administrator must identify themselves as a Council employee but they are not obliged to disclose their name or position within the Council.

Platform Administrator must not use Council's social media platforms for personal reasons.

All Platform Administrators must set up Two-Factor Authentication for all social media accounts they have access to.

#### **6.5 COUNCILLORS**

As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, Councillors are free to express their personal views to the media.

When engaging with the media, Councillors:

- › Must not purport to speak on behalf of Council unless authorised to do so;
- › Must clarify when speaking to the media that they are expressing their personal views as an individual Councillor and that they are not speaking on behalf of Council (unless authorised to do so);
- › Must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of Council;
- › Must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
- › Must seek information and guidance from the CEO or the Community Engagement Business Unit 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.

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.



Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the CEO.

Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this Policy to the CEO.

## **6.6 DIRECTORS, MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS**

To communicate, implement and comply with this Policy and related Procedures.

## **6.7 COUNCIL EMPLOYEES**

Council employees must not speak to the media about matters relating to Council unless authorised by the CEO to do so.

If Council employees 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 CEO or the Community Engagement Business Unit.

Council employees 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.

Council employees must not respond to negative comments made by members of the public on any public communication platforms. (eg social media platforms like Facebook). To do so is a breach of Council's Code of Conduct and disciplinary action made be taken against you.

It is very hard for the public to distinguish between comments made by you as a member of the public or as you as an employee of Council. Therefore, it is best that you do not comment.

If authorised to speak to the media, Council employees:

- ▶ Must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of Council;
- ▶ Must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the CEO; and
- ▶ Must seek information and guidance from the CEO or Community Engagement Business Unit 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

Where Council employees become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the CEO or Community Engagement Business Unit.

## **6.8 COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL**

To be aware of and adhere to this Policy.

## **7. INDUCTION AND TRAINING**

Council must provide training to Council Officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.

Councillors who engage, or intend to engage, on social media must receive induction training on social media use.

Media engagement training will be provided to Councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

## **8. NON-COMPLIANCE WITH THIS POLICY**

Council's Code of Conduct provides that Council Officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to Council's policies.

A breach of this Policy will be a breach of Council's Code of Conduct.

Councillors:

- An alleged breach of this Policy by a Councillor, other than the Mayor, may be reported to Council by the Mayor.
- An alleged breach by the Mayor may be reported to Council by the CEO.
- Council may investigate an alleged breach of this Policy in such a manner that is considered appropriate.

Council employees:

- An alleged breach of this Policy by a Council employee may result in disciplinary procedures and/or dismissal.

## 9. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

It is the responsibility of the CEO to monitor the adequacy of this Policy and recommend appropriate changes.

This Policy will be formally reviewed every four (4) years or as needed, whichever comes first.

## 10. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS, DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

External

- OLG - Model Media Policy
- OLG – Model Social Media Policy

Internal

- MRC Policy - Code of Conduct (Councillors) Policy
- MRC Policy - Code of Conduct (Employees) Policy
- MRC Policy - Code of Conduct (Committees) Policy
- MRC Policy – Delegation of Authority (CEO to Employees) Policy
- MRC Policy – Delegation of Authority ( Mayor and CEO) Policy
- MRC Procedure – Social Media Procedure

Definitions

Term	Definitions
The Act	Section 226 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides: The role of the mayor is as follows-- (a) to be the leader of the council and a leader in the local community, (b) to advance community cohesion and promote civic awareness, <b>(c) to be the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body, including representing the views of the council as to its local priorities,</b> (d) to exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy-making functions of the governing body of the council between meetings of the council
Authorised User	Council employees who are authorised by the CEO and/or the Community Engagement Business Unit to upload content and engage on the Council's social media platforms on the Council's behalf
Chief Executive	The Chief Executive of the Office of Local Government or the Chief Executive of any other government department which has the carriage of the administrative functions of the Act and the portfolio of Local Government.

Council Official	means Councillors, employees and delegates of Council (including members of committees that are delegates of Council)
Media	means print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers/social media, emails, radio, television broadcasters and any other means of distribution and communication of information.
Minor	for the purposes of clause 5.1 of this Policy, is a person under the age of 18 years
Personal information	information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion
Platform Manager	Means the person or persons delegated/appointed by the CEO to fulfil the role of monitoring and approving the content uploaded to Council's and Councillor's social media platforms. The person should be a suitably qualified Council employee. Ideally the Platform Managers are members of the Community Engagement Business Unit.
Platform Administrator	Means the person or persons delegated/appointed by the CEO and/or the Community Engagement Business Unit to fulfil the role of uploading information to Council's social media platforms for their relevant business activity. The person should be a suitably qualified Council employee.
Social media	Means online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia
Social Media Platform	'social media platform' and 'platform' means both the Council's and Councillors' social media platforms.
Style Guide	Refers to both the MRC style guide and the River Country Style Guide

## 11. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No.	Details	Dates	CM9 Reference	Resolution No.
1	Initial Issue	17 April 2018 to DRAFT	VF/18/2193	030418
2	Policy developed by incorporating the Model Media and the Model Social Media Policies as published by the Office of Local Government	DRAFT	VF/18/2193	TBA

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy at any time

This Policy is scheduled for review in 2027

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