1. POLICY SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this Policy provides information on the authorised spokespersons for Murray River Council (the 'Council'), appropriate ways to handle enquiries from media representatives and the approval process for Council-generated material being released.

1.2 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.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVES

2.1 The objectives of this Policy are to:

- ensure all communication from Council to the media is consistent, accurate, timely and appropriate;
- clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons;
- maintain positive relations with the media by providing them with accurate, timely information;
- improve communication with internal and external customers and enhance Council's public image; and
- ensure that full and complete details of all issues relevant to Council activities are fairly presented to the community.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 This Policy applies to Councillors, Council employees and volunteers of the Council.

3.2 Council will take advantage of interest from the media to further its reputation. In dealing with the media, Councillors, Council employees and volunteers of the Council must be careful to protect the best interests of the Council.

3.3 Council welcomes enquiries from the media. All media representatives are to be treated in the same manner as any other customer of Council. That is, Council will attend to media requests with promptness and courtesy, honesty and respect.

3.4 Council believes that a good relationship based on trust and confidence is important between Council and the news media. Accordingly, Council will endeavour to:

- Be a reliable source of information;
- Never provide false information;
- Be as cooperative as possible;
► Be available, even outside normal working hours (if required);  
► Check second-hand sources of “facts” or opinions for accuracy before repeating;  
► Provide up to date information;  
► Always give a direct and honest answer; and  
► Respond promptly

4. POLICY STATEMENT

4.1 Consideration should always be given to the decisions of the Council, Council’s policy or stated opinion on a matter.

4.2 Council’s Code of Conduct (POL100) applies to Councillors, Council employees and volunteers of Council in dealing with media enquiries and responses.

4.3 Written documents created for Council should meet the requirements of Council’s adopted Style Guide for the use of templates, logo, minimum font size, colour, etc.

4.4 Once approved by the Council, this Policy will be issued to Councillors, Council employees and volunteers of Council.

5. LEGISLATION, TERMINOLOGY AND REFERENCES

5.1 This Policy is based on the Local Government Act 1993, Sections 226 and 231.

5.2 The definition of Media, as referred to in this Policy is: includes all types of media – printed material, emails, websites, social media, radio, television and any other means of distribution and communication of information.

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND DELEGATION

6.1 Authorised spokespersons  
(a) Council has nominated the following Council representatives to act as official spokespersons to the media:  
(i) Mayor  
(ii) General Manager.  
(b) The following authorised officers may handle media enquiries, where the request is for simple, factual information:  
(i) Director Corporate Services  
(ii) Director Engineering  
(iii) Director Planning, Environment & Economic Development.  
(c) No other Council employee is authorised to handle an enquiry from the media on Council’s behalf, unless requested by one of the above listed to provide simple, factual information.

6.2 Role of Councillors  
(a) It is commonplace for Councillors to be asked by the media to comment on Council policy or decisions of the Council. Only the Mayor and the General Manager, or where appropriate, the Chairperson of a Standing Committee of the Council, are permitted to speak on behalf of Council. Individual Councillors remain free to make personal comments to the media, but not to speak on Council’s behalf.
(b) Defamation law covers Councillors, as it does everyone else. It is illegal to harm another person’s reputation verbally or through the written word.

(c) 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.

6.3 Enquiries from media representatives

(a) Most journalists call the Mayor’s or the General Manager’s Office when they need information about the Council or wish to arrange an interview. The Mayor or General Manager are to be available to receive requests and provide appropriate background and follow up to the media. Often the Mayor or the General Manager are able to handle enquiries directly. Occasionally, however, more complex questions require input from appropriate Council officers. In these cases, while journalists may be under deadline pressures, it is important that Council officers provide information to the Mayor or General Manager to support their response as promptly as possible. Such cooperation enhances Council’s reputation for integrity with the news media.

(b) Journalists may, on occasions contact a senior officer directly. No Council employee, other than those authorised and listed above at 6.1 (a) and (b), has approval to handle an enquiry from the media.

(c) When contacted directly by the media, authorised officers may only handle the enquiry where the request is simple, factual information. If the media request is for a comment on Council policy or official opinion, the enquiry must be directed to the General Manager.

(d) The Mayor or General Manager are to handle all enquiries made by television or radio media.

6.4 Written material for media use

(a) 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 General Manager for review and approval for release.

(b) In the absence of the General Manager, authorised officers may approve media releases.

(c) 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 General Manager for review and content approval is supplied back to the requesting organisation.

6.5 Media alerts

Any Council employee who is aware of an occurrence that may be of interest to the media should immediately contact the General Manager.

6.6 Crisis communication

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. Accordingly, only the Mayor and General Manager are authorised to speak to the media on these occasions.
6.7 Monitoring of media liaison
Where possible and cost effective, monitoring of media uptake of Council media releases and alerts will be undertaken. Visitation to the Council website will be counted and reported.

6.8 Non-compliance with this Policy
(a) Councillors:
(i) An alleged breach of this Policy by a Councillor, other than the Mayor, may be reported to the Council by the Mayor.
(ii) An alleged breach by the Mayor may be reported to the Council by the General Manager.
(iii) The Council may investigate an alleged breach of this Policy in such a manner that is considered appropriate.
(b) Council employees:
(i) An alleged breach of this Policy by a Council employee may result in disciplinary procedures and/or dismissal.

7. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

7.1 It is the responsibility of the General Manager to monitor the adequacy of this Policy and recommend appropriate changes.

7.2 This Policy will be formally reviewed every three (3) years or as needed, whichever comes first.

8. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- Murray River Council Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW (POL100)

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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<th>Version No.</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Initial Issue – On 12 May 2016, the Premier of NSW, The Hon Mike Baird MP, made the Local Government (Council Amalgamations) Proclamation 2016 under the Local Government Act 1993, whereby Murray Shire Council and Wakool Shire Council were amalgamated to constitute the new area to be known as Murray River Council, effective immediately.</td>
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Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy at any time

This Policy is scheduled for review in April 2021
APPENDIX 1
Media Relations Flow Chart

Print Media Enquiry
(The Mayor or General Manager handle all enquiries made by TV and radio media)

Official Spokespersons
- Mayor
- General Manager

Authorised Spokespersons
To provide simple, factual information only
- Director Corporate Services
- Director Engineering
- Director Planning, Environment & Economic Development

Employees
If requested by the General Manager or a Director – provide simple, factual information only

Request for Council policy or official opinion

All media enquiries and answers given are to be provided to the General Manager