

# **EDWARD RIVER COUNCIL MEDIA POLICY 2023**

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## PREFACE

### Media – opportunities and challenges

This Media Policy has been developed to ensure that media engagement by Edward River Councillors and staff is consistent, accurate and professional, and enhances Council's reputation.

Effective media engagement assists Council in keeping the community informed, explaining decisions and promoting community confidence in Council and its decisions.

The term “media” used in this policy means 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.

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.

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
- an increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately.

### The development and intent of this policy

This Media Policy has been developed by Edward River Council using the better practice model provided by the NSW Office of Local Government, which was developed in consultation with councils.

The Model Policy provides an exemplar approach by incorporating examples of best practice from the media policies of a diverse range of NSW councils, as well as from Commonwealth and State Government agencies.

The Policy provides a robust framework for the administration and management of Council's interactions with the media. It also sets standards of conduct for all Council officials who are required to interact with media in their official capacity.

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At the heart of the Media Policy are the four 'principles' of media engagement. These are:

- Openness
- Consistency
- Accuracy
- Timeliness

These principles, which are expanded upon in Part 1, underpin every aspect of Council's media engagement and Council and Council officials commit to upholding them.

This policy applies to engagement between Council officials and the media. It does not apply to social media use. Edward River Council has developed a separate policy for social media use.

### **Enforcement**

Clause 3.1(b) of the Edward River Council Code of Conduct provides that Council officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to Council's policies.

A breach of the policy will be a breach of Council's Code of Conduct.

Concerns or complaints about the administration of Council's engagement with the media should be made to the Chief Executive Officer in the first instance.

# MEDIA POLICY

## PART 1 – PRINCIPLES

1.1 Edward 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.

**Consistency** We will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.

**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.

**Timeliness** We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

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## **PART 2 – ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MEDIA**

### **Role of the Chief Executive Officer**

2.1 The role of the Chief Executive Officer is to:

- a) delegate to staff members to respond to media enquiries where appropriate
- b) maintain a register of delegated staff
- c) maintain effective oversight of delegated staff
- d) revoke a staff member's status as a delegated staff member when required
- e) where appropriate, ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor prior to their release
- f) approve media training and/or induction to be provided to delegated staff and/or councillors
- g) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- h) provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation.

### **Role of the Media Coordinator**

2.2 The Chief Executive Officer will appoint a Council staff member to be Council's Media Coordinator. The Media Coordinator should be a suitably qualified member of staff.

2.3 The Chief Executive Officer may appoint more than one Media Coordinator.

2.4 The Media Coordinator's role is to:

- a) be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, and for requests to film or photograph Council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes
- b) be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
- c) liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate
- d) ensure that media statements are approved by the Chief Executive Officer prior to their release
- e) maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses

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- f) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
  - g) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with in accordance with agreed service levels
  - h) ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.

## **PART 3 – WHO CAN ENGAGE WITH THE MEDIA**

### **The Chief Executive Officer**

- 3.1 The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson for Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive Officer 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 Chief Executive Officer is unavailable).

### **The Mayor**

- 3.3 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 (section 226(c) of the Local Government Act 1993).
- 3.4 If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as Council's spokesperson.
- 3.5 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 area of expertise).

### **Councillors**

- 3.6 As members of the governing body and as representatives of the community, councillors are free to express their personal views to the media.
- 3.7 When engaging with the media, councillors:
- a) must not purport to speak for 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 Council (unless authorised to do so)
  - c) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of Council
  - d) must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
  - e) must seek information and guidance from the Chief Executive Officer 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.
- 3.8 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.



3.9 Where councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Chief Executive Officer as soon as practicable.

### **Council Staff**

- 3.10 Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to Council unless authorised by the Chief Executive Officer to do so.
- 3.11 If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to Council, they must refer the enquiry to the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate (in this instance, the Media Coordinator).
- 3.12 Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to Council but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on Council or that may bring it into disrepute.
- 3.13 If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
- a) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of Council
  - b) must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the Chief Executive Officer, and
  - c) must seek information and guidance from the Chief Executive Officer 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.
- 3.14 Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Chief Executive Officer as soon as practicable.

### **Tone**

- 3.15 All media engagement by Council officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

### **Induction and training**

- 3.16 Council must provide training to Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.
- 3.17 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.

### **Councillors' questions about media engagement**

- 3.18 Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the Chief Executive Officer.

## PART 4 – STANDARDS OF CONDUCT WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 Council officials must comply with Council’s Code of Conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.
- 4.2 Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
- a) are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public
  - b) contains profane language or is sexual in nature
  - c) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Code of Conduct, or is unlawfully discriminatory
  - d) 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
  - e) contains content about Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
  - f) divulges confidential Council information
  - g) breaches the privacy of other Council officials or members of the public
  - h) contains allegations of suspected breaches of Council’s Code of Conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*
  - i) could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
  - j) commits Council to any action
  - k) violates an order made by a court
  - l) breaches copyright
  - m) advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

## **PART 5 – USE OF MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES**

- 5.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, Council's Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO) will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of Council in collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer and Media Coordinator.
- 5.2 Councillors, Council staff 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.
- 5.3 Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.

## **PART 6 – MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEAD UP TO ELECTIONS**

- 6.1 This policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a Council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 6.2 Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a 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 using any Council resources.

## **PART 7 – RECORDS MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS**

- 7.1 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*.
- 7.2 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.

## PART 8 - DEFINITIONS

In this Media Policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

**Council** means Edward River Council

**Council official** means councillors, members of staff and delegates of Council (including members of committees that are delegates of Council)

**Councillor** means a person elected to the governing body of Edward River Council as per section 222 of the *Local Government Act 1993*

**Media Coordinator** means a person appointed under clause 1.3 of this policy under delegation by the Chief Executive Officer

**Chief Executive Officer** means the General Manager as referenced in the *Local Government Act 1993*

**media** means 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

**personal information** means 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

**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

**POLICY VERSION CONTROL**

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