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1. Policy Statement

The Media Policy (the policy) provides a clear framework for engaging with all media organisations, including metropolitan and local print, radio, television and digital media, to ensure that Council meets the community's expectations for accuracy, relevance and accountability. The policy will enhance and protect the good reputation of Macedon Ranges Shire Council and facilitate its effective voice within, and on behalf of, the community.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all Councillors, staff, volunteers and contractors.

3. Approved Spokesperson(s)

Mayor

The Mayor is the primary spokesperson for Council. The media role of the Mayor is to:

- inform the public about Council decisions or the strategic direction of Council
- encourage community participation in Council services and programs
- promote the region to residents, visitors and businesses
- represent Council and the community's needs during an emergency

The Mayor does not comment on staffing or operational/administrative matters at Council, as this is the role of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The Mayor may choose to delegate their authority to respond to the media under certain circumstances. For example, the Mayor may delegate to another Councillor.

When engaging with the media, the Mayor (or Delegate) must comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct.

As spokespersons, the Mayor (or Delegate) must represent and respect Council decisions, regardless of their personal views. Councillors must also comply with the requirements of Part 6 – Council Integrity of the Local Government Act 2020.

Councillors

Councillors may be assigned a spokesperson role for particular Council projects or matters, as delegated by the Mayor (see above).

When approached by the media, Councillors may choose to comment on their personal position making it clear that this is not the formal position of the Council, while being respectful of the formal decision-making process.

If a Council decision is yet to be made, Councillors may wish to put forward their personal views or position on the matter, however Councillors need to be aware of their obligations to observe the common law rules of natural justice and procedural fairness when commenting before a Council decision has been made. Councillors making public comments as private citizens need to make it clear they are not speaking on behalf of Council, and that they are personal opinions only so as to not jeopardise their Council position.



For all other matters, unless the Mayor has given a Councillor specific spokesperson responsibility, enquiries from the media will be referred to the Communications unit.

Councillors making personal statements should be guided by these points:

- They must make clear whether they are representing the Council in accordance with an adopted Council position or policy, or whether they are presenting a personal viewpoint as an individual, not on behalf of the Council.
- They play a key role in maintaining a positive public image and in preserving public confidence in Council
- Any media release issued by a Councillor expressing their personal views must not include the Council logo and will not be issued by the Communications unit
- When expressing personal views, they must show respect for the Council, its decisions, decision-making process or other elected members, officers or employees.
- The Council Chamber is the most appropriate forum for Councillors to publicly express their views on a decision and to debate matters with their fellow Councillors.
- Their comments must not breach the provisions in the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Local Government Act.
- Comment on adopted policies and decisions of the Council must be conveyed accurately and should not contain information that may be determined by Council to be confidential.
- In circumstances where a Council decision is made and any Councillor/s are absent due to a declared conflict of interest, that Councillor cannot act as the Council spokesperson on the Council decision or associated issues.
- Councillors must not promote any private business interests, in their role as delegated Council spokesperson. Councillors must not promote their political or personal interests as a registered candidate in a State or Federal Government election.
- Councillors should advise either the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate when contacted by the media, and prior to providing any statement that may be reported in the public domain.

All Councillors must comply with the policy and respect the respective roles of the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer as spokespersons for the Council. When engaging with the media, Councillors must comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct.

Chief Executive Officer

The CEO is responsible for statements about operational/administrative matters. The CEO may delegate (in line with the Media Procedure) to a member of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) or Senior Management Team (SMT) who has portfolio responsibility for a particular issue.

Executive Leadership Team

Media statements from a member of ELT will be on matters directly relevant to their areas of responsibility, or in place of another member of ELT on request. They may delegate to a Manager or staff member where comments are required on specialist matters relating to an officer's responsibility.

Council staff, volunteers and contractors

Council staff, volunteers and contractors are not authorised to speak on behalf of Council or the organisation, unless delegated authority outlined in Table 1. All staff making public comments as private citizens need to make it clear they are not speaking on behalf of Council, and that they are personal opinions only so as to not jeopardise their Council position.



Table 1. Media responsibilities by scenario

Scenario	Spokesperson
Major decisions made by Council and associated issues	Mayor
Spokesperson for Council and the community's needs during an emergency	Mayor
Major decisions made by Council and associated issues - when the Mayor is unable to perform their duties	Deputy Mayor
Other Council decisions and associated issues - as delegated by The Mayor	Councillor
Council decisions or policy matters - as delegated by the Mayor	Chief Executive Officer
Organisational, operational or administrative matters	Chief Executive Officer
Declared municipal emergency (as defined in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan)	Chief Executive Officer
All high-level administrative, operational, sensitive and management issues following the activation of the Business Continuity Plan,	Chief Executive Officer
Organisational, operational or administrative matters specific to their department or service area (delegated by the Chief Executive Officer)	Executive Team member
Promotion of specific Council services, events or facilities, when delegated by the relevant ELT member	Employees with specialist or technical knowledge
Matters of fact or clarification only, in response to approved media statements	Council's Communications Officer/s

4. Role of the Communications Unit

All media enquiries must be referred to, coordinated and managed by the Communications Unit.

The Communications Unit will provide advice and support to other departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately. Council-initiated news stories will be coordinated and managed by the Communications Unit.

The Communications Unit will support the Mayor in their role as Council spokesperson. This includes liaison with media and ensuring the Mayor is appropriately briefed/supported as spokesperson.

4.1 Media Releases

The Communications Unit will write, and seek necessary approvals for media releases and statements. The Communications Unit will liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate enquiries.



Quotes within a Media Release are approved in accordance with the Media Procedure. Media releases are approved by the relevant Manager, ELT member and Executive Manager People, Culture and Performance. The CEO will be provided with final review of Media Releases at the discretion of the Manager Customers, Communications and Engagement and Executive Manager People, Culture and Performance for matters that are of a higher risk, political in nature or sensitive.

4.2 Media Relations

Council will maintain good working relationships with all media organisations including metropolitan and local print, radio, television and digital media.

It will achieve this through:

- Providing clear, consistent and reliable information to the media in a timely manner at all times;
- Issuing regular media releases and statements;
- Responding promptly to media questions and working to meet mutually agreed deadlines - where this is not possible we will keep the media outlet advised of the timeline for our response;
- Initiating, developing and implementing positive media strategies that inform the community about Council activities and services, and enhance the reputation and image of the Macedon Ranges Shire Council.
- Not having exclusivity with individual media outlets

Council employees will promptly provide background information to the Communications Unit to assist in preparing responses. All responses will be approved by the Executive Team member and/or Mayor as per Media Procedure.

In return, Council expects fair and balanced reporting, with an opportunity to represent Council's position on issues.

4.3 Promoting Council business

The Communications Unit is responsible for developing, approving and implementing Council's media and external communications strategies with the relevant Executive authorisation.

Council media and external communication strategies and resources will be used only to promote and disseminate the decisions, intentions, activities and actions of Council, and will not be used to promote individual Councillor or officer views or agendas that are inconsistent with or contrary to those of Council.

State or Federal politicians will only be represented through Council's media and extra communication strategies where necessary to reasonably inform the community of important news.

5. Media responsibilities in Emergency Management

In an emergency, it is vital that the spokesperson ensures they are fully briefed by emergency staff before making media comments, and that comments do not bypass or conflict with incident control communication processes.

In particular, comments to the media should not cover warnings or incident updates as this is the role of the control agency (the CFA, Fire Rescue Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, Victoria Police or SES). The spokesperson must not take command of the situation. They must be clear that Council is not managing the emergency. It only plays a support and facilitation role.



6. Social Media

Mayor and Councillors

Councillors should refer to Council's Social Media Policy and Councillor Code of Conduct regarding their personal and professional use of social media in conjunction with this Media Policy.

Council staff, volunteers and contractors

Staff should refer to Council's Social Media Policy regarding their personal and professional use of social media in conjunction with this Media Policy.

