

# How to use this document

This document is intended to provide guidance to publishers on the key principles and concepts of an effective and efficient complaint management protocol.

The documents can be used as a template for adaptation and then adoption. You will need to consider your publication’s particular circumstances, such as ensuring the documents fit with your Editorial and Advertising policies, as well as calibrating these documents to the size, nature, style, and character of your business and audience. The scope of the policy may therefore vary between publishers, depending on these factors and the level and type of risk factors faced by each publication. For example, consider whether details such as time frames suit your particular needs and adjust the template text accordingly. The complaint policy should refer to, and link with, your other policies, codes and procedure manuals in order to ensure that the complaint policy is relevant and integrated into your newsroom culture.

Your Managing Editor should consider and adopt your publication’s complaint handling policy and ensure all staff (paid and volunteer) and journalists adhere to it. When publishers are addressing complaints by their audience/readers, care needs to be taken that the complaint handling policy and procedure fits with other legal requirements.

You may wish to use this complaints policy in conjunction with a complaints handling tool like **Vettnews**, who partner with LINA to offer members discounted access to their [app tool](https://www.vettnews.com/lina).

Acknowledgements

This abridged template has been adapted from a document published by the Institute of Community Directors.

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## MODEL POLICY COMPLAINTS HANDLING BY NEWS PUBLISHERS

This policy is intended to ensure that we handle complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively. It provides guidance to our staff, and anyone who wishes to make a complaint regarding the quality and delivery of our news service or our content. Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.

As community news publishers, it is our responsibility to abide by a number of requirements for editorial content, including the responsibility to respond to complaints. As such, this policy should be viewed in conjunction with our Editorial Policies. As well as complaints being made directly to our publication, we recognise that some complaints (or at least negative comments) may be made on social media. This policy applies to all distribution channels we use to publish content.

Our approach to complaints is modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness and efficiency. In addition, providing audiences with clear mechanisms for making complaints and quickly acknowledging and rectifying mistakes significantly contributes to audience trust.

Complaints may also be made to the Australian Press Council (editorial content) or Australian Communications and Media Authority (advertising).

### People focus

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our content and publication.

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be resolved within 28 days.

Individuals making complaints will be:

· listened to, treated with respect by staff and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate, and

· provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

We accept anonymous complaints if there is a compelling reason to do so and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament) to assist or represent them in the making and/ or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish.

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

**Complaining to us is free.**

### Objectivity and fairness

We will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any staff member or journalist whose conduct or content is being complained about.

### Complaints involving external parties

Where a complaint involves external parties, we will work with the other party/s where possible to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

### Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:

· our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible

· the health, safety and security of our staff, and

· our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect the operation of our publication. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our staff to do the same in accordance with this policy.

### Complaint resolution

Our publication may assess the complaint as requiring no further action (for example, in cases where the complaint may be considered trivial, serial, or vexatious).

While we will consider the basis of all complaints, we may choose not to respond to complaints based solely on disagreement with the subject of a news story. We will respond to concerns about the delivery of our news content (for example, in cases where the complaint highlights inaccuracy, transparency concerns or incorrect image attribution).

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, we will contact the person making the complaint and advise them:

· The remedy or resolution/s that we have agreed upon, if any, such as a “take-down”, withdrawal, removal, clarification or apology, and

· The reason/s for our decision.

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome, we will advise of any external review options including the Australian Press Council for editorial complaints or the Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) for online advertising complaints.

We will keep records about how the complaint was managed, the outcome and resulting actions of the complaint, and a copy of the original story or social media post if relevant.

**You can submit a complaint here.**

You can consider using the following **user guidelines** on your complaints page or form. These guidelines are adapted with thanks from [**Central Coast News**](https://coastcommunitynews.com.au/about-us/complaints/).

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### Guidelines for complainants

**Please identify yourself** to us as clearly as possible. While we appreciate that you may just wish to give us feedback, we wish to acknowledge your efforts and want to address you directly using your correct name (and spelling) and your accurate contact details. If you are writing on behalf of someone else, or a group of people, please bring that to our attention and in what capacity you are writing (eg. as President of a community association or similar).

**Please identify if you wish to keep your name withheld** from the issue and the reasons why. While the nature of a free press is to promote open and reasonable debate in a transparent fashion, we appreciate that in some circumstances withholding your name from the public debate is justified. We will however not publish letters or other information received anonymously.

**Please identify the issue** in as clear a fashion as you can. We do know that this can sometimes be easier said than done, though it is important for us to be able to answer your concerns as specifically as we are able.

**Please identify the date(s)** that are relevant to the feedback/complaint.

**Please outline a suggested solution** to your grievance. This may be: requesting a retraction; issuing an apology; amending spelling or grammar; or, changing our future practices. You may, more simply, wish to give us important feedback. While we cannot guarantee that we will be in agreement with your suggested resolution, we will take it into serious consideration and use it as a basis for our reply to you.