



# BOULIA SHIRE COUNCIL

## Media (including Social Media) Policy

---

<b>Category:</b>	Policy
<b>Policy Number:</b>	163
<b>Document Version:</b>	New
<b>Obsolete Version:</b>	n/a
<b>Keyword Classification:</b>	Media, Social Media
<b>Summary:</b>	This policy is intended to help staff make appropriate decisions about the use of media and social media.
<b>Adoption Date:</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> November 2022
<b>Resolution:</b>	2022/11.12
<b>Due for Revision:</b>	Every three years or as impacted by legislation
<b>Revision date:</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> November 2025
<b>Date revoked:</b>	n/a
<b>Related documents:</b>	Policy 112 Email and Internet Policy Policy 129 Councillor Code of Conduct Policy 146 Code of Conduct
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Executive
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Administration Supervisor
<b>Legislation:</b>	Local Government Act 2009 Local Government Regulations 2012 Information Privacy Act 2009

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Boulia Shire Council (Council) recognises the importance of communicating Council initiatives, services and decisions to its key stakeholders – ratepayers, residents, community organisations, visitors, business, industry and government - through a range of media.

Council uses both media and social media as a communication and community engagement tool.

This policy is intended to help staff make appropriate decisions about the use of media and social media, outline the standards required to be observed when engaging with media or using social media, media approvals, the circumstances in which we will monitor use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

## **SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

This policy applies to all communications from the Boulia Shire Council to the community and applies to all Councillors, staff and contractors. For the purposes of this policy:

Media can include radio, television, print media, photographers, specialist publications, internet news, online publications and newspapers. Media releases may include a direct quote from an elected member or staff member. It includes any emails forwarded to the media industry with the potential of being published in a newspaper or on a website or other public platform. Internally generated and distributed media and receipt of external enquiries from the media form part of this policy also.

Social media encompasses a wide range of digital spaces within which content can be posted, shared and commented on. It can consist of a variety of websites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums or message boards etc., as well as Council's official social media.

This policy applies to all staff, contractors and volunteers employed or engaged by Boulia Shire Council and any individual who may at any time potentially be perceived as communicating on behalf of Council, including Councillors, committee members and other stakeholders. The policy is not intended to cover personal use of social media where the user publishes content in their own personal capacity and makes no reference to being associated with Boulia Shire Council and it also does not apply to the use of personal advertising, however the principles of this policy apply to both.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment/engagement and it may be amended at any time.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Administration Supervisor.

## **MEDIA**

Council will openly communicate with its key stakeholders to achieve organisational transparency and accountability by providing the media with accurate and timely information. Council will establish a positive relationship with the media to contribute to balanced and objective reporting of Council matters. Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the media unless disclosure would contravene information privacy, commercial in confidence or any legislative provision or duty of care.

The Mayor is the designated spokesperson for all matters determined by full Council, and any other non-administration matter. In absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor is authorised to speak on all matters usually responded to by the Mayor.

Councillors are entitled to express their personal views provided the comments are not attributed to them in any official Council position.

Councillors, if requested by the media, to provide a quote or respond to a matter outside their portfolio, should forward such media enquiries to the Mayor.

Unless authorised by the Mayor, in accordance with this policy, a Councillor must not speak to media on behalf of Council. If an elected member wishes to liaise with the media on a matter or has been contacted directly by any media to provide comment, the Councillor must notify the Mayor and/or CEO of: the publication name, publication date, nature of the story and the quote they provided as soon as possible.

The CEO is the spokesperson for administration matters. The CEO may delegate spokesperson authority to the relevant departmental Director or appropriate staff member. All enquiries from and to the media should be facilitated through the Office of the CEO (Executive Assistant). The Office of the CEO is the central point of contact for all staff wishing to promote events, opportunities, services or programs.

From time to time, staff may be required to provide information for a Director, CEO or elected member on a topic. Providing the information promptly and to a high level of accuracy is essential.

## **MEDIA APPROVALS**

The Mayor or CEO (depending if the article is general Council business or administrative only) must approve all media prior to issue/publication/distribution.

Any person quoted in print material will be provided an opportunity to review/amend their quote.

If an elected member other than the Mayor is quoted, only elected member quotes which support Council's agreed position will be approved.

Council staff, their spouses and close relatives, should refrain from providing personal public comment on Council operations, policy or decisions, including on social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and other forms including blogs, video/photo posting sites, forums and online chat services, in accordance with Council's Employee Code of Conduct Policy.

## **USING SOCIAL MEDIA SITES IN COUNCIL NAME**

Only delegated Staff that have been issued with the relevant authorisation to interact on Council social media sites can act on a Council social media account.

Staff delegated to post on social media websites as Council will:

- act in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct
- comply with relevant laws and regulations
- post and share in a manner that maintains the organisation brand, upholds our integrity, reputation and values and builds a positive and trusted online presence
- maintain records where required.

## **CONTENT ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

Council's social media sites are primarily intended for information distribution only. Any complaints, service requests etc should be directed for lodgment and further action to the Council office.

All content shall fall within the following parameters:

- be related to the works and services of Council,
- promote Council's tourism attractions,
- promote local events and workshops,
- be customer focused, with the needs of the user in mind,
- not promote a third party commercial business

Council acknowledges that comments posted on our social media sites by third parties cannot be completely controlled and may not always support and endorse Council. While Council respects the right of individuals to express their personal opinion, in order to keep with the intent of Council's social media sites and to promote a respectful and welcoming environment, bullying or degrading comments of any description or the use of profanity will not be tolerated on any Council social media site and comments of this nature will be removed from the page and/or may result in the person posting the comment being banned from Council's social media site.

Content that is removed from a Council social media site will be recorded and stored in Council's electronic record management system and will include information regarding:

- the post content,
- the Author's name,
- the date and time,
- the name of the Council's social media site from which the content was removed from,
- a screen shot of the content prior to removal.

The CEO is to be notified of all comments that are removed from social media sites.

Other comments that raise legal, privacy or political concerns, should be managed immediately in consultation with the CEO or appropriate Department Director.

Delegated staff that have the authority to reply to comments on social media sites shall exercise sound judgment and common sense when responding and not enter into or start arguments.

If delegated staff are unclear on the content of any post, comment or reply, they are to seek advice and approval from the CEO or appropriate Department Director.

## **PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES DURING WORK TIME**

Council permits the incidental use of social media sites for personal use subject to certain conditions set out below. However, this is a privilege and not a right. It must neither be abused nor overused and Council reserves the right to withdraw their permission at any time at their entire discretion. The following conditions must be met for personal use to continue:

- use must be minimal and take place substantially out of normal working hours (that is, during lunch hours, before 8.15 am or after 5.00 pm),
- use must not interfere with business or office commitments,
- use must comply with the Email and Internet Policy, Employee Code of Conduct and Councillor Code of Conduct.

Any comment posted in a personal capacity should not be purported to be made on behalf of Bouliia Shire Council or in relation to Council's decision making.

Posts or comments by Councillors (including on a Councillor's personal social media platform) related to Council administration or business are considered public records.

## **MONITORING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES**

Staff should be aware that any use of social media sites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under our Code of Conduct.

Council reserves the right to restrict or prevent access to certain social media sites if it considers personal use to be excessive. Monitoring is only carried out to the extent permitted or as required by law and as necessary and justifiable for business purposes.

If staff notice:

- any use of social media by other members of staff in breach of this policy
- any content posted on social media about Council (whether complementary or critical)

they are requested to report it to Chief Executive Officer.

## **MANAGING A PERSONAL OPINION**

Prior to an adopted position by Council, Councillors may express personal opinion, however such quotes will not be published by the Bouliia Shire Council. Up until a decision is made by Council on a topic, Councillors must acknowledge their comment as being their view or opinion and not that of Council. At the point Council makes a decision on the topic, Councillors should respectfully support the decision as that of the majority of Council.

Staff are not permitted to comment publicly on Council business. In speaking informally with the public, staff must support Council's decisions.

## **GUIDELINES ON MAKING PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- Use positive language
- Have a main thought in mind and stick to the topic
- Make your point quickly
- After a decision is adopted by Council, Councillors are not permitted to use language that is disparaging of Council's decision
- Accurate and consistent Council image, brand and messaging
- A flexible yet efficient system to receive and deliver Corporate communication
- Timeliness of messaging
- Management of reputational risk
- Circulate a copy of the media release to the organisation to keep Councillors and staff informed of current news
- Use all forms of media to circulate the message including Council's website and social media accounts

## **BREACH OF POLICY**

Breach of this policy may be dealt with under Council's code of conduct policies and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to dismissal.

Misuse of social media sites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.