

## KEMPSEY SHIRE COUNCIL

### MEDIA RELEASES GUIDELINES

### Procedure 2.3.4

Policy No. and title	2.3	Media and Community Awareness and Engagement Policy
Procedure	2.3.4	Media Releases Guidelines
Version	1	
Date Adopted	28 March 2012	

---

#### **1 Introduction**

- a) The media is a conduit to the public and a means by which Kempsey Shire Council can promote itself and its various projects and initiatives to the community through the use of interesting, factual and up-to-date information.
- b) The staff in Community Engagement will manage communications to ensure consistency with media liaison.
- c) The following procedure is designed to strengthen and build on Council's existing relationship with the media and to ensure there is some consistency in the way that individual Councillors and Council staff deal with the media on a day to day basis.

#### **2 Speaking to the Media**

- a) All media enquiries to staff other than the Directors or General Manager should be directed to Council's Manager Community Relations who will then contact the relevant Director or the General Manager.
- b) Council officers can speak to the media about specific projects and initiatives once approved by the appropriate Director or General Manager.
- c) Media enquiries received by the General Manager or Directors are to be reported to the Manager Community Relations, including an outline of the details of what comment has been provided.
- d) Operational staff approached by the media for information on the job/project they are working on should refer those enquiries to the Manager Operations.
- e) In their line of work, Council employees should not provide comment or information to the media with the intention of contesting or undermining Council policy or casting Council, Councillors or Council staff in a negative light.
- f) In the event of an industrial dispute (or an incident likely to lead to an industrial dispute), statements on behalf of Council employees should be issued via the relevant union.
- g) In official Council media releases, where appropriate, a Councillor or member of staff should become sole spokesperson on a specific issue, event or initiative to ensure consistency of message.
- h) Wherever possible, preference should be given to the Mayor or where the Mayor is unavailable the Deputy Mayor to comment on Council meeting decisions.

- i) Councillors and Council staff are encouraged to cooperate at all times with media outlets and requests for interview/photographs. Councillors and Council staff should respond to media enquiries at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **3 Media Releases**

- a) Council staff are encouraged at all times to be proactive, as opposed to reactive, in their use of the media.
- b) Media releases should be used to:
  - i) Promote specific Council projects and initiatives.
  - ii) Assist with the relay of accurate and up-to-date information to Shire residents and visitors to the area.
  - iii) Congratulate/commend individuals and organisations.
  - iv) Defend Council from unwarranted criticism.
- c) Media releases should not be used to:
  - i) Comment negatively on the considerations or merits of council decisions.
  - ii) Release emotive statements about issues.
  - iii) Provide the opinions or personal views of any officer.
- d) All media releases are to be issued by Community Engagement. Council staff are encouraged to write their own media releases before sending them to Community Engagement for editing and formatting.
- e) Media releases issued on behalf of the elected body of Council should be approved by the Mayor or (in his/her absence) the Deputy Mayor. A draft copy should also be forwarded to any councillor quoted within for approval before release.
- f) Media releases issued by Councils staff should be approved by a Director in consultation with the Manager Community Relations. Media releases deemed controversial in nature should also be approved by the General Manager.
- g) All quoted information should be attributed to a particular position.
- h) Media releases can be developed and released in conjunction with other groups/agencies but should be approved by a representative of both agencies (in Kempsey Shire Council's case a Director or General Manager).
- i) All Kempsey Shire Council media releases should be on the currently adopted template.
- j) Those people quoted in a Kempsey Shire Council media release should always be available for follow-up newspaper/radio or television interviews.
- k) Under no circumstances should a media release be issued quoting a Councillor or member of staff without that person's prior knowledge.
- l) Media releases can be developed and released in conjunction with other groups/agencies but should be approved by a representative of both agencies

(in Kempsey Shire Council's case the General Manager). Joint media releases should always carry Council's logo and a Council contact.

- m) It is rare for a media release to be used immediately. Staff should allow ample lead-up time for a media release to be used – particularly if it is promoting a specific event such as a public meeting, i.e. a media release advising residents of a public meeting should be issued two weeks before that meeting.
- n) All Council media releases should be sent by email to the Media Release List. Media releases should also be placed on Council's website and forwarded to Records.
- o) Media releases that are likely to result in enquiries from residents/ratepayers should also be sent to Community Engagement staff in Council's Customer Services Centre and any staff (including field staff) likely to field enquiries from the public. Where a media release is considered to be a high interest among a large number of staff those releases are to be distributed to staff via email or notice boards.
- p) Certain projects/initiatives and issues will be of interest to a much wider audience. Where appropriate, staff are encouraged to forward Kempsey Shire Council media releases to metropolitan media outlets and specialty publications.
- q) Kempsey Shire Council media releases will not always be used. Staff should also look at the option of paid advertisements to get particularly important message across.
- r) Media outlets receive hundreds of media releases every week and face a range of conflicting demands from owners, readers, advertisers and contributors. Councillors and Council staff should refrain from criticising media outlets for deciding not to use a Council media release.
- s) There is no given rule about the number of media releases that one organisation should (or shouldn't) issue in the course of a week. The important thing is to keep them all 'newsworthy' in their own right. A boring media release will devalue others.
- t) Where media enquiries are received on a matter where a media release has not been issued consideration should be given to the need for a media release.
- u) Media outlets work to strict guidelines and a quick response to an enquiry can often make the difference between a positive or negative story. Council staff are encouraged to respond to all media enquiries as quickly as possible.
- v) Using 'no comment' as a response to media enquires is to be avoided. A delayed (and well thought out response) is better than no response at all.
- w) Councillors and Council staff should avoid providing information 'off the record' during media interviews and if they do to ensure they get their facts right.

#### **4 Photographs**

- a) Use of photographs with media releases is encouraged. These are a good way of giving Council a human face. Wherever possible, photographs should contain at least one person.
- b) Council photographs are scanned at 300dpi and emailed to local newspapers. The originals are kept on file.

- c) Steps should be taken to ensure those people featured in Kempsey Shire Council photos are aware that their photo will be distributed to media outlets and used for promotional purposes. Permission should be gained from the people or guardian in the photograph where individuals are identifiable.
- d) When providing a photo to newspapers it is important to name everyone in that photo in order from left to right. It is rare for a photo to be published without the full names of those people pictured.

## **5 Responding to Criticism in the Media**

- a) Complaints about media content should be forwarded to Council's Manager Community Relations. Formal complaints (on behalf of Council staff) should only be made by a Director or the General Manager.
- b) Responses to Letters to the Editor (with another Letter to the Editor) are not encouraged except in extraordinary circumstances. Letters should be signed by the General Manager.
- c) Consideration should be given to using a media release to respond to criticism if that criticism is perceived as being unwarranted and is of significant interest.

## **6 Media Monitoring**

- a) Council's Community Engagement Section keeps a file of all Council related media clippings and maintains a file of 'uncut' papers.
- b) Staff who would like to hear a copy of a Council related interview are asked to contact the media outlet. Those people who would like to purchase a recorded copy of an interview should contact the Manager Community Relations to ensure that the interview has not already been purchased before making a purchase.

## **7 Manager Community Relations Role**

- a) To produce, disseminate and promote the use of media releases on behalf of Council. Council media releases will always take first priority. Councillors and Council staff should avoid committing the Manager Community Relations to work on behalf of community groups and organisations – particularly without his/her prior knowledge.
- b) To advise and undertake work for Council Committees and associated organisations.
- c) To invite and encourage media attendance at council meetings and other civic events and functions.
- d) To assist and encourage Council departments (and individual officers) to implement short or long-term media plans.
- e) To coordinate regular media training workshops – in conjunction with the training officer – for those employees who identify it as a need.

## **VARIATION**

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this procedure which will be reviewed periodically to ensure it is relevant and appropriate.