



# Media Policy

## Purpose

The purpose of Baw Baw Shire Council's Media Policy (Policy) is to ensure all media releases, statements and enquiries relating to Baw Baw Shire Council (Council) are managed professionally, appropriately and in a way that benefits Council's reputation. The policy provides a framework to promote timely, positive, consistent and accurate coverage of Council through all media.

The Media Policy is implemented throughout the entirety of the current Council term and includes:

- Council's dedicated spokesperson for both policy and operational matters
- target response times for media enquiries; and
- formal processes for Councillors and staff when responding to the media.

## Governance principles

Section 9 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) specifies the overarching governance principles and supporting principles that Council must adhere to in the performance of its role and functions.

This Policy gives effect to the following overarching governance principles outlined in Section 9(2) of the Act:

- Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations.
- The municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making.
- Innovation and continuous improvement is to be pursued.
- The transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

This Policy also takes into account the following supporting principles defined in Section 9(3) of the Act:

- The community engagement principles (Community Engagement Policy).
- The public transparency principles (Public Transparency Policy).

- The service performance principles.

## Definitions

Define key terms and acronyms.

**Media** is any means of communication, such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet, that reach or influence people widely.

**Media enquiry** means any request for an interview and/or for information either written or verbally received from a media representative.

**Media release** means an official statement delivered to members of the media for the purpose of providing information, creating an official statement, or making an announcement directed for public release.

**Spokesperson** means a person who is designated and authorised to speak officially on behalf of Baw Baw Shire Council.

## Scope

This policy applies to elected Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team and staff including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, work experience and trainees, contractors, and volunteers of Council.

It applies to all written or verbal statements provided to media by staff or Councillors.

## Legislative context

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*

## Related policies and documents

This Policy is intended to support and align with other relevant Council policies and procedures, including the following:

- Baw Baw Shire Council – Acceptable Use of Information and Communication Technology
- Baw Baw Shire Council Child Safety Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Community Engagement Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Employee Code of Conduct Policy

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- Baw Baw Shire Council Public Transparency Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Social Media Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Councillor Code of Conduct
- Baw Baw Shire Councillor Staff Interaction Policy.

## Policy principles

This policy is to uphold the integrity and reputation of Council in the media, to ensure Council builds strong and positive relationships with the media and wider community, and further ensure that such engagement with the media does not discredit Council's reputation. Towards this end, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness should be upheld as key policy principles.

## Spokespersons

**The Mayor** is the official spokesperson on all Council matters. In the event that the Mayor is unavailable, this role will be delegated to the Deputy Mayor.

**The Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** is the official spokesperson on all operational matters. In circumstances where the enquiry has a particular focus or calls for the spokesperson to have specific knowledge, the CEO may defer to a Director, who may in turn delegate to a Manager.

If the enquiry is minor and/or regarding something that is a matter of public record (e.g. an enquiry that requires no further context or comment), the enquiry may be answered immediately by a member of the **Strategic Communications Team**.

The roles and responsibilities for each spokesperson have been outlined in Appendix 1 included at the end of this document.

## Councillors and the media

Councillors must abide by this policy, the Social Media Policy as well as the Councillor Code of Conduct when engaging with the media.

Councillors may express personal views that differ from the official Council position. However, they must explicitly qualify their remarks to indicate that they are a personal view and not Council's official position.

When approached by the media, Councillors have the following options available to them:

- Make a personal comment, qualifying that their remarks are personal views only and they are not an official Council position.

- Decline to make comment and refer the journalist to the Mayor to make official comment.
- Defer the enquiry to the Strategic Communications Team for an official response to be prepared.

To avoid exhibiting apprehended bias, Councillors should be particularly mindful of speaking to journalists about any matter prior to that matter coming before Council. This does not mean that Councillors cannot publicly make comment on a forthcoming issue, but Councillors should carefully consider the meaning and potential interpretation of their comments before making them.

## Media enquiries

All media enquiries should be directed through to the Strategic Communications Team. The Strategic Communications Team is responsible for organising the appropriate spokesperson(s) and co-ordinating Council's response.

Enquiries are to be directed to the Strategic Communications Team via the following methods:

- Sending an email request, clearly outlining the enquiry and associated questions to [communications@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au](mailto:communications@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au)
- Telephoning a member of the Strategic Communications Team
- Submitting an online request form through Council's website – [www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/media-enquiry](http://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/media-enquiry).

## Response times

It is to Council's reputational benefit that all media enquiries be treated efficiently and courteously with due regard to the fact that all media work to stringent deadlines which require prompt responses.

Towards this end, efforts should be made to ensure that **all enquiries be answered within 48 working hours of being received.**

If a response time cannot be met due to the complexity of the request or other complicating factors, the Strategic Communications Team will contact the journalist and advise of an alternative timeframe. All enquiries will be acknowledged by the Strategic Communications Team once received.

In order to meet these response times, Council staff and Councillors should place appropriate priority on responding to enquiries allocated to them by Council's Strategic Communications Team.

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## Media releases

All Council media releases are to be written by the Strategic Communications Team in consultation with relevant subject matter experts. Prior to publication, the Strategic Communications Team will secure approval from the relevant delegated Manager, Director or CEO as well as the Mayor and/or relevant quoted Councillors.

All Councillors and the Leadership Team will receive a copy of media releases.

### Protocol for quoting and quote approvals in media releases:

- Councillors and members of the Executive Leadership Team should endeavour to approve media releases and/or quotes in as timely a manner as possible.
- Media releases related to Council Meeting decisions will quote the Mayor as well as the mover and seconder of the motion.
- Comments made publicly in the chamber by Councillors may be quoted by the Strategic Communications Team without further approval.
- Shire-wide, policy-oriented or highly political stories are to quote the Mayor.
- Stories connected to a specific ward, geographic location or committee may also include comments from ward/committee member Councillors if delegated by the Mayor.
- Operational issues are to be quoted on by the CEO unless otherwise delegated.
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be quoted in media releases if so delegated by the CEO via their Director.

## Advertising

All advertising related to Council must be endorsed by the relevant Director, by the CEO or by an officer delegated by the CEO (e.g. Manager Strategic Communications) and the supervising officer of the team requesting advertising, before it is provided to outlets for publication.

## Record keeping

All content published or communicated on behalf of Council must be recorded, along with author's name, date, time and media used.

## Emergency management

Statements made in times of an emergency can have far-reaching effects. Therefore, staff and Councillors should note that informal comment or discussion with the media or on social media channels must be avoided. In the case of a Council emergency (e.g. an emergency localised to Council that affects services, such as a building fire), please refer to Council's Business Continuity Policy. During a wide-ranging emergency (e.g. flood or fire), all communications (including media and social media messaging) will be coordinated through the Municipal

Operations Centre. During an emergency, where Council is authorised or directed to make comment by the agency responsible for coordinating the emergency response, only the Mayor or CEO will do so.

## **Local government election period**

During the local government election period, special provisions will be in place pertaining to the authorisation of media releases and media comment. This is to ensure no electoral matter is included in Council content during this period. Please see the Election Period Policy in the Governance Rules, and the Election Period – Communications and Events Procedure for more information and the authorisation process during this time.

## **Media training**

It is Council policy that spokespersons undertake media training or a media training refresher at the beginning of each Council term.

## Appendix 1 – Spokesperson roles and responsibilities

Authorised officer – roles and responsibilities	
Mayor	Official Spokesperson on all Council matters.
Deputy Mayor	Acts as the Mayor’s delegated Spokesperson if the Mayor is not available.
Councillor	May provide the media with personal comment if it is clearly identified as such.  May make official comment if delegated by the Mayor.
CEO	Official spokesperson on all operational matters.
Director	May act as official spokesperson if delegated by the CEO.
Manager	May act as a Director’s delegated spokesperson at the Director’s authorisation.
Strategic Communications Team	Responsible for coordinating all official responses and providing information to the media on behalf of Council. May respond directly to minor media enquiries relating to publicly available information.
Staff	No spokesperson role unless delegated by the CEO via their Director.

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Responsible Director	Director Economic Development, Arts and Advocacy
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