



Baw Baw Shire Council

Media Policy 2017-2020

Status	Adopted
Adopted Date	24 May 2017
Approval Authority	Executive Manager Community Information and Advocacy

Purpose

The purpose of Baw Baw Shire Council's Media Policy 2017-2020 is to ensure a consistent approach when dealing with the media. The Media Policy 2017-2020 is an important document that helps to protect Council's reputation by ensuring consistency and accuracy in the information Council places in the public realm.

The Media Policy 2017-2020 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 guidelines for Councillors and staff when responding to the media.

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 Baw Baw Shire Council.

Media Relations

Media relations are a key part of Council's operations, an important source of information for our community, and a significant part of Council's role as a community leader and advocate within the region. Council recognises that traditional media (press, television, magazine, radio) and social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) provide opportunities for Baw Baw Shire Council to communicate and engage with its community and stakeholders.

It is the policy of Baw Baw Shire Council to communicate openly and honestly with the media in order to maintain our commitment as a transparent and accountable organisation and to maximise public knowledge of our activities.

Baw Baw Shire Council will use this policy, in conjunction with the Social Media Policy, to assist the Mayor, Councillors, Chief Executive Officer and staff in understanding Council's communication processes when handling media enquiries, identifying spokespersons for media interviews, preparing media statements and making comments to the media.

Response Times

The Baw Baw Shire community is entitled to receive all public information, as is the media cohort. Journalists are entitled to expect that Council will furnish them with all public information relevant to their enquiries.

Council will strive to respond to enquiries as quickly as possible. We will aim to reply to enquiries within 48 hours of being received. In the event that a response time cannot be met due to the complexity of the request or the need to seek information from a cross-section of departments, a member of the Communications Team will contact the journalist and advise of an alternative timeframe. All enquiries will be acknowledged by the Communications Team once received.

In order to meet these response times, Council officers shall place priority on responding to enquiries allocated to them by Council's Communication Team.

Enquiries

To ensure Council meets its response times, we request that the media direct enquiries through to the Communications Team. The Communications Team will be responsible for organising the appropriate spokesperson and co-ordinating Council's response.

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

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

Council officers who are contacted by a journalist are to refer the media enquiry to the Communications Team. The Communications Team will then take responsibility in the coordination, preparation of the response.

Spokesperson

The Mayor is spokesperson on decisions of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the spokesperson on all operational matters. In circumstances in which 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.

In the event that a Director is out of the office or not contactable for a period of time that would push the enquiry response past the 48 hour turn-around time, a Manager may be asked to comment in their place.

If the enquiry is minor and/or regarding something that is a matter of public record, the enquiry can be answered immediately by a member of the Communications Team, or a referral made to the journalist to visit Council's website for the relevant information.

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

Media Training

While the Mayor and CEO handle the majority of media enquiries, there may be a need for other staff to act as Council spokesperson from time-to-time. These staff must undergo working with the media training.

Media Briefings

Council will schedule media briefings on topics of interest to the community. All media outlets will be invited to attend. In the event that a journalist wishes to propose additional questions for discussion at the media briefing, to ensure Council is able to

provide timely information, we invite the media to send questions in writing to the Communications Team 24 hours prior to the briefing taking place; otherwise questions may be taken on notice and responded to after the event in accordance with Council's standard response timeframes.

Councillors and the Media

Councillors must abide by the Councillor Code of Conduct when engaging with the media. In recognising that an individual Councillor may have a view that differs from the official Council position, Councillors who express personal views should qualify their remarks to indicate this is a personal view.

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

- Make comment (not as the official spokesperson).
- Decline to make comment and refer the journalist to the Mayor to make official comments.
- Defer the enquiry to the Communications Team for an official response to be prepared.

Councillors need to be careful when speaking to a journalist prior to a matter coming before Council that they do not exhibit apprehended bias. This does not mean that Councillors cannot publically make comment on a forthcoming issue, but Councillors should carefully consider the meaning and potential interpretation of their comments.

Communication Methods

Baw Baw Shire Council utilise a variety of communication tools to provide the media and community with timely information.

Media Releases

A media release is the starting point for gaining editorial on an issue or event. Journalists and editors receive the media release and decide if they want to write a story based on the information provided. The story angle taken by a journalist may differ from the one presented in the media release. Council has no influence on editorial decisions.

All media releases are written by the Communications Team. The Communications Team will garner appropriate approvals prior to posting on the Council website and distributing to the media. All Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team, and Community Information Officers receive a copy of media releases.

Baw Baw Shire Council treats all media outlets equally and avoids giving one outlet preferential treatment. As such, media releases are distributed to all media outlets at the same time.

Protocol for quoting in media releases:

- Shire-wide, policy-oriented or highly political stories are to quote the Mayor.
- Stories connected to a specific ward or geographic location can be quoted on by a ward Councillor and/or the Mayor.
- Stories arising from the work of a committee are quoted on by a Councillor who serves on that committee and/or the Mayor.
- Operational issues are quoted on by the CEO.
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be quoted in media releases with the permission of the relevant delegated authority.

Appendix 1 – Spokesperson Roles and Responsibilities

Authorised Officer	Roles and Responsibilities
Mayor	Official spokesperson on all policy matters and decisions of the Council.
Deputy Mayor	Acts as the Mayor’s delegated spokesperson if the Mayor is not available.
Councillors	Provide the media with comment, identifying that this is provided as their own personal opinion and not representing the official position of Council, unless delegated to by the Mayor.
CEO	Official spokesperson on all operational matters.
Directors	Official spokesperson as delegated by the CEO or in circumstances in which the enquiry has a specific focus or calls for the spokesperson to have specific operational knowledge.
Managers	Acts as a Directors delegated spokesperson if the Director requests or is not available.
Communications Team	Responsible for coordinating responses and providing information to the media on behalf of Council. Responsible for distributing all written media comment to media organisations. May respond to minor enquiries relating to publicly available information.
Staff	No spokesperson role unless requested by the CEO or Director to provide information or comment.