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Communications Policy

INTRODUCTION

This policy provides overarching guidance to all Hunter Region Landcare Network communications activities. The effective dissemination of information and communication is a vital element in linking with our community and creating greater community awareness of Hunter Region Landcare Network's services, activities, achievements and ethos.

In order to maximise the advantages of media presentation and minimise the risks of media misrepresentation it is necessary to establish guidelines for how media contacts will be conducted.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media.

In dealing with the media, staff, committee members and other volunteers should be conscious that they may be seen as representatives of the organisation and should therefore avoid making comments or participating in photo opportunities that may damage the long-term reputation of Hunter Region Landcare Network.

PURPOSE

Hunter Region Landcare Network works with the media in order to:

- advocate for the goals of the organisation
- promote the work of the organisation
- inform the public of the details of the organisation
- increase community awareness of the Landcare ethos

In order to ensure that these purposes can be fulfilled, this policy regulates the choice of people entitled to speak for Hunter Region Landcare Network.

The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the community in holding Hunter Region Landcare Network to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to officers and members and to background information to assist them in this role.

To balance this, Hunter Region Landcare Network must have the capacity to defend itself from any unfounded criticism, and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts (if necessary using other channels of communication).

It is the responsibility of all staff, board members and volunteers to ensure that effective media relations are maintained in order to achieve the aims of Hunter Region Landcare Network. This policy deals with the day-to-day relationship between Hunter Region Landcare Network and the media.

POLICY Hunter Region Landcare Network operates on the values of:

- **Honesty:** The organisation will never knowingly mislead the public, media or staff on an issue or news story.
- **Transparency:** The organisation will promote openness and accessibility in our dealings with the media, whilst complying with the law and maintaining confidentiality when appropriate.
- **Clarity:** All communications with the media will be written in plain English
- **Balance:** Information provided to the media by Hunter Region Landcare Network will as far as possible be objective, balanced, accurate, informative and timely.

Hunter Region Landcare Network should seek to establish and maintain a good and open relationship with the media. It is important that the organisation works with the media to communicate important public information messages about its work and its goals.

However, contact concerning any significant matter in the name of or on behalf of Hunter Region Landcare Network should only be made by staff, committee members and other volunteers where:

- They have consulted the Communications Officer nominated by the Committee
- They have the required expertise to speak on the issue under discussion
- They have some experience in media relations.

Where any of these criteria do not apply, staff, committee members and volunteers are recommended to exercise extreme caution and to seek guidance from the most senior staff or committee member available.

DUTIES OF KEY PERSONNEL The Board shall nominate a Communications Officer to coordinate Hunter Region Landcare Network's relationships with the media.

The Communications Officer and Chairperson are both authorised to speak on behalf of Hunter Region Landcare Network.

Other staff, committee members and volunteers are advised to ensure they are properly briefed and guided by the Communications Officer or Chairperson before talking to the media on any issue related to Hunter Region Landcare Network.

Where information or public comment is requested or required, the Communications Officer shall determine the most appropriate person to respond.

Staff, committee members and other volunteers, and third parties, are encouraged to deliver public presentations that discuss Hunter Region Landcare Network's work and its goals, provided that they make it clear where such presentations are or are not authorised by the organisation.

All staff, committee members and other volunteers must observe Hunter Region Landcare Network's Privacy Policy in relation to client records.

PROCESSES Significant statements on behalf of Hunter Region Landcare Network shall be made as authorised by the Communications Officer or Chairperson as detailed above.

It should always be made absolutely clear whether the views put forward regarding any issue relating to Hunter Region Landcare Network are those of the organisation or of an individual. At all times consideration should be given as to how the correspondence may affect the reputation of Hunter Region Landcare Network.

The Communications Officer is responsible for:

- Producing and updating a list of key contacts for distribution to local press and radio and TV stations. The Communications Officer can also be contacted for preliminary discussions on any story or if a journalist or researcher is unsure who to approach for a comment.
- Authorising all media releases from Hunter Region Landcare Network, and for uploading them on the organisation's website. All media releases must also be checked and approved by staff in charge of the relevant area before distribution.
- Being involved in any approaches to the media to feature Hunter Region Landcare Network's work or responding to approaches from press, radio or TV stations or specialist press.

All staff, committee members and volunteers are responsible for:

- Providing advice (preferably before the issue becomes public knowledge) to the Communications Officer on any issues that are likely to be complex or contentious or to be sustained for any length of time.
- Ensuring that no photos shall be released to the public via advertising, news media, or internet, or by any other means, without the approval of the Communications Officer, who shall satisfy themselves that the organisation's Privacy Policy has been observed.
- Notifying the Communications Officer of any contact made in the name of Hunter Region Landcare Network to the media and providing the name of the reporter or writer and the media outlet they represent.

Every effort should be made to assist the media in their inquiries. Where media queries involve requests for information that will require substantial staff work to produce, such work must be authorised by the Chairperson.

Hunter Region Landcare Network reserves the right to withhold certain sensitive information such as commercial transactions or governmental negotiations. Any such information will be clearly notified to relevant staff by the Communications Officer or the Chairperson.

If any unauthorised releases of confidential information do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will be taken.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Advanced preparation is critical when dealing with a crisis situation. Occasionally, an unforeseen crisis occurs and the following steps will be followed:

- Identify a single spokesperson, such as the Chairperson and ensure he / she is available to talk to the media and is well briefed on the issue.
- Be prepared and forthright for a response to media enquiry. Ensure all facts and figures are available.
- Develop a response to the media which puts the community first, takes responsibility, is honest and states the 'who, what, when, where and how' of the situation.
- Provide a constant flow of communication to all stakeholders, most importantly employees.
- Be accessible and familiar with media needs and deadlines.
- Monitor media coverage and correspondence.

RESPONSIBILITIES

It shall be the responsibility of the Network Committee to ensure that these requirements of this policy are complied with. These policy and procedues shall be reviewed every year by the Committee.

AUTHORISATION:

This version was approved on: 19/04/2018
This version takes effect on: 19/04/2018
Authorised by: The Network Committee
Chairperson: Leslie Pearson
Chairperson signature:

DISCLAIMER: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of January 2014. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of Landcare NSW or the user's independent advisor.

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