1. Policy statement

The Office of the Queensland Ombudsman aims to be an effective, accessible and responsive organisation. Having a constructive relationship with the media is one way of achieving this. This policy outlines the Office's approach to communicating with the media.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- provide clear direction on when and how information can be provided to the media
- maintain the image and reputation of the Office by clearly outlining the procedure for contact with the media
- ensure that in all dealings with the media the Office acts in a professional, coordinated manner and that all statements are accurate and appropriate
- bring to the attention of the Ombudsman any issues that will or could attract either positive or negative media attention.

2. Principles

To ensure a consistent and professional approach, the Office speaks with one official voice through the Ombudsman.

The media plays a valuable role in disseminating information and comment about the work of this Office in appropriate circumstances. When dealing with media enquiries, staff must comply with the following legislation:

- ***Ombudsman Act 2001***
    - ***s.92*** prohibits the disclosure of information obtained *in a preliminary inquiry or an investigation or the performance of another function under (the) Act,* other than in the performance of or formulating a report or recommendation about, the function.

- ***Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*** **and the Office's Code of Conduct**

Clause 3.9 of the Office's Code of Conduct, which pursuant to the Public Sector Ethics Act has the force of law, deals with the disclosure of official information, principally to the media. In essence, it prescribes that dealing with the media is a matter for the Ombudsman, unless the Ombudsman has authorised another person to handle the matter on his behalf.

- ***Information Privacy Act 2009*** **and the Office's Privacy Plan**

The Information Privacy Act contains principles governing the management of personal information. This includes providing information or access to documents containing personal information and limits on the use and disclosure of personal information.

3. Application/scope

The policy does not attempt to define the different media enquiries that may arise or specify the approach for each case. It provides general guidelines to be observed. The application of this policy will require staff to exercise judgement and be aware that context is often just as important as the content.

This policy applies to all permanent and temporary employees of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman.

4. Procedures

4.1 Official spokesperson

All media enquiries and proposed media releases or comment (including on regional visits) must be referred to the Ombudsman in the first instance through the Communication Officer. The Ombudsman will then decide if he or another officer will respond, and may indicate the actual terms of the response or its tone.

If the Ombudsman is unavailable, the Deputy Ombudsman must be consulted and may provide direction in relation to a response.

A member of the Ombudsman Management Group (OMG) may deal immediately with media enquiries concerning information *of a routine or minor operational nature which has already been published and is readily available to the public* (i.e. current content in annual report, regional visits schedule, explaining our role and jurisdiction). However, where practicable the Ombudsman should be consulted prior to a response. The Communication Officer should be notified of these matters for recording purposes.

4.2 Media materials

In some cases, a media release or statement may be provided in response to a media enquiry. Media releases and statements may also be prepared to promote the Office's activities.

In either case, the following process must be followed:

4.2.1 All draft media materials must be prepared by the Communication Officer and authorised by an OMG member, who will check the release or statement for content, format and accuracy.

4.2.2 The Communication Officer will then send all media materials to the Ombudsman to seek approval for their release.

4.2.3 The Communication Officer will distribute media materials and monitor the impact. The Communication Officer will also brief the Ombudsman on any issues arising from media materials.

4.3 Recordkeeping

The Communication Officer will keep records of all contact between the Office and the media, via the Media Enquiries Log: K:\CSU\Comms, Marketing & Design\Media\Media enquiries - log.xls

These records will be maintained according to the General Retention and Disposal Schedule for Administrative Records (QDAN 249 v.6) and the Office of the Ombudsman Retention and Disposal Schedule (QDAN 553 v.2).

4.4 Potential issues

All staff are encouraged to anticipate possible issues or incidents of media interest and report this to an OMG member.

The Communication Officer should be notified of potential media issues/incidents by telephone or email, with further details provided through a briefing note if necessary. This will avoid situations where the Communication Officer or the Office receives media enquiries about issues or incidents of which they are unaware but which are known about or anticipated at the operational level.

4.5 Media enquiries by telephone

For media enquiries received directly by phone without warning, follow these steps:

1. establish who the journalist is and what medium/organisation/publication they work in/for
2. refer the call to the Communication Officer. If the Communication Officer is not available, direct the query to the Manager, Corporate Services Unit. If neither is available, divert the query to an OMG member.
3. staff must not provide comment or issue a response directly to the journalist.

The Communication Officer will:

1. identify the appropriate spokesperson
2. evaluate the facts or information to hand
3. prepare a response
4. have the response/message checked by the Ombudsman
5. respond to the journalist via email/phone.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 All employees

All employees should:

- ensure they do not make any comment to the media except in accordance with the provisions of this policy
- immediately advise the Communication Officer of all approaches by the media for information
- inform OMG members about possible issues of media interest.

5.2 Communication Officer (CO)

The CO will:

- provide general advice on media issues
- prepare media statements and responses
- identify opportunities to promote the role of the Office
- maintain appropriate records of interaction with the media.

5.3 Ombudsman

The Ombudsman (or delegate) will:

- approve the release of any information to the media
- determine the response of the office to media enquiries
- approve the content of media statements
- approve any officer to speak to the media as a representative of the Office.

5.4 OMG members

OMG members will:

- deal with media enquiries concerning information of a routine or minor operational nature
- provide information/feedback for media releases relevant to their team
- liaise with CO and Ombudsman about potential issues of media interest