

No. 17

Contact with the Media

Key Points

Public Comment

- This Chief Executive Instruction (CEI) has been issued pursuant to section 44 of the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* (FMA Act) and sections 13, 14 and 15 of the *Public Service Act 1999*.
- There are some circumstances in which it is not appropriate for public servants to make public comment.
- Employees should consider the likely impact of comments made by them in a personal rather than official capacity.

Media Contacts

- Ensure that all approaches from the media for comment are redirected to the Corporate Branch's Media & Ministerial Team for approval and advice on the appropriate response.
- Ensure that all opportunities to communicate through the media are used as effectively as possible.
- Avoid media contact which is uncoordinated, potentially misleading or potentially embarrassing to the Government, Ministers, our CEO or Geoscience Australia.

Introduction

There is little restriction on the majority of public servants making public comment. Public servants have a right, as members of the community, to make public comments. However, there are some circumstances in which it is not appropriate to make public comment. To ensure that Geoscience Australia employees are aware of what is expected of them, the Chief Executive Officer has issued this instruction.

Public Comment.....	3
Media Contacts	4
Media Releases	5

Public Comment

1. There is little restriction on the majority of public servants making public comment. Public servants have a right, as members of the community, to make public comment. However, because of the nature of public service employment and the working relationship with the elected government, there are some circumstances in which it is not appropriate for public servants to make public comment.
2. Geoscience Australia employees should consider the likely impact caused by comments made by them as public servants in a personal rather than official capacity, and are advised to consider carefully whether it is realistic for them to claim to appear in a personal, rather than official capacity, especially if they are likely to be asked to comment on matters which fall within their area of official responsibility.

When public comment is considered inappropriate by Geoscience Australia management

3. Examples of when public comment will be considered inappropriate by Geoscience Australia management are:
 - when a Geoscience Australia officer is making public comment in a private capacity, but has not made this fact clear to the audience, who may be under the impression that the officer is speaking on behalf of Geoscience Australia or the Government;
 - where public comment amounting to criticism of Geoscience Australia administration could cause serious disruption to the workplace (NB: public servants have a legislative responsibility to adhere to the APS Code of Conduct and the APS Values);
 - where public comment, although it has little or no connection with an officer's normal duties, is so harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Government or its policies, that it indicates that the public servant concerned is incapable of professionally, ethically or impartially performing their official duties;
 - when a Geoscience Australia officer is involved in advising / implementing / researching an aspect of government policy, and the public comment could be seen as compromising the officer's ability to continue to do so in an unbiased manner; and
 - where public comment amounts to gratuitous personal attacks.

Media Contacts

4. Geoscience Australia aims to ensure that all opportunities to communicate with our stakeholders and clients through the media are used as effectively as possible.
5. A key strategy is to avoid media contact which is uncoordinated, potentially misleading or potentially embarrassing to the Government, Ministers, our CEO or Geoscience Australia.
6. All media contact, both pro-active through the issue of media releases and reactive to direct media contact, will be coordinated by the Corporate Branch's Communications Section via the 24/7 Media Hotline – 1800 882 035
7. Geoscience Australia officers should act with common sense and discretion. The following procedures are **mandatory** for all Geoscience Australia staff.

Direct media contact

8. All approaches from the media for comment on any issue must be reported to the Communications Section before responding. The response will be coordinated by the Communications Section with approval from the relevant Chief of Division or CEO.
9. The term "media" refers to all commercial and independent media in all mediums, including online blogging and social networking sites (where the staff member is representing GA).
10. The Communications Section will redirect the media query to the Ministers Office IF the information requested covers :
 - Current political issues;
 - Government policy development;
 - Government policy (unless agreed with the Minister's office);
 - Cabinet matters and decisions; or
 - Electorate issues.
11. If requested by the Ministers Office, Ministerial letters to the Press should be prepared for Ministerial approval and signature and cleared through the Communications Section in accordance with normal briefing procedures.
12. In response to an approved media release, routine factual/administrative enquiries about such matters as research findings, statistical reports, and promotion of Geoscience Australia products etc can be given to the media

by nominated contact officers on request, and should be reported to Corporate Branch's Communications Section to enable accurate monitoring of media contact.

13. Contact officers on media releases must handle all media contact on the issues covered by the release, and must ensure that they will be available to the media for several days following the issue of the release.
 - In all contact with the media, officers must remember that they are **not** permitted to give opinions on Government policies. Note that this does not preclude the provision of appropriate factual background information to clarify the reasons for the adoption of particular policies by Government.
14. Geoscience Australia letters to the Press must be cleared with the CEO.
 - Clearance with the Minister's Office may also be required if the letter deals with sensitive or significant issues on which enquiries may be directed to the Minister or his staff.

Media Releases

15. All media releases are developed by the Communications Section in partnership with projects/divisions and will be approved by the relevant Chief of Division or CEO.
 - All media releases must have the Geoscience Australia Media Hotline number. The Duty Media Officer will coordinate all media contact on the issue covered by the release.
16. Media releases that cover any of the following areas will be developed by the Communications Unit in liaison with the Minister's Office and will be **Ministerial Releases**.
 - The story is directly related to an announcement or policy decision made by government.
 - The story is in response to a request by the Minister's Office.
 - The story is based in their electorate and they wish to be involved.
 - The story can be added to by having the Minister comment.
17. Other media releases that cover the work of Geoscience Australia, including its science, activities and the release of results, will be developed by the Communications Section in partnership with the project and approval of the relevant Chief of Division or CEO as **Geoscience Australia Releases**.
 - Geoscience Australia Releases must not quote the Minister.

18. The Minister's Office will arrange distribution of Ministerial media releases to the Press Gallery. The Communications Section may distribute these releases to other media outlets if requested and approved by the Minister's Office.
19. The Communications Section will arrange distribution of Geoscience Australia media releases to appropriate media outlets.

References

Geoscience Australia CEI 33 Code of Conduct

Australian Public Service (APS) Code of Conduct

Australian Public Service (APS) Values