

Complaints Handling Policy

The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) is committed to managing complaints professionally, efficiently and fairly. DEWNR acknowledges the right of the public to complain when dissatisfied with our services. Complaints are an important part of customer service and a vehicle for the public to provide feedback, which assists DEWNR to improve performance and our interactions with the public.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, or staff, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected, or legally required.

This policy provides guidance on the key principles and concepts of the complaint management system. DEWNR's complaint management system will:

- enable a response to issues and complaints in a timely and cost-effective way
- boost public confidence in administrative processes
- provide information that can be used to deliver quality improvements in products, services, systems and complaint handling
- provide an explanation of changes proposed or made as a result of the investigation of complaints where applicable and appropriate.

What guides this Policy?

[Public Sector Act 2009](#)

[Code of Ethics for the SA Public Sector](#)

[Australian and New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 10002:2014](#)

[SA's Strategic Plan 2011 - Target 32](#)

[DEWNR Corporate Plan 2016-2019](#)

[DPC Circular PC039: Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector](#)

[Public Service Guarantee](#)

[Ombudsman SA An audit of state government agencies' complaint handling November 2014](#)

[Ombudsman SA Complaint Management Framework March 2016](#)

[Ombudsman SA Unreasonable complainant conduct policy and manual](#)

What is the scope of this Policy?

This policy applies to all DEWNR staff, agents, contractors and volunteers who receive, manage, investigate and respond to complaints from members of the public.

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This policy does not apply to staff grievances, matters for the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption, Whistleblowers, or SA Heritage Council complaints – separate processes apply.

What do I need to know?

DEWNR will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

- Complaints may be lodged in person, by telephone, electronically to <http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/contact-us> or in writing to DEWNR at GPO Box 1047 ADELAIDE SA 5001.
- DEWNR will provide access to an interpreter or translator if required – refer to <http://www.translate.sa.gov.au/home>.
- The National Relay Service provides a phone service for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment – refer to <http://relayservice.gov.au/>.

What information needs to be included in the complaint?

- What you are complaining about.
- When it happened (time/day/month/year).
- Where it happened.
- The names and/or positions of anyone involved in the complaint.
- Who you have had contact with in DEWNR regarding the complaint.
- Any relevant documentation.
- What result you are seeking.
- Who can be contacted to provide further information and advised of the outcome of the complaint.

In order for your complaint to progress, DEWNR may contact you for further details or clarification.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, DEWNR will communicate with them through their representative if that is their wish.

Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

Anonymous complaints

DEWNR accepts anonymous complaints and will carry out an investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

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What happens next with the complaint?

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with DEWNR.

Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 business days and if complaints cannot be resolved within 10 business days, the assigned contact person will provide regular updates.

DEWNR will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

DEWNR is committed to managing complaints transparently, and will provide the following:

- process for handling the complaint
- expected time frames for action to be taken
- progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- likely involvement of the complainant in the process.

Where a complaint involves multiple parts of DEWNR or other organisations, DEWNR will coordinate the response as far as practical to ensure that communication is clear and coordinated.

Where DEWNR services are contracted out, DEWNR expects contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. DEWNR will consider complaints regarding the actions of contracted service providers.

When similar complaints are made by related parties, DEWNR will arrange to communicate with a single representative of the group.

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, DEWNR will contact the person making the complaint and advise them of the:

- outcome of the complaint and any action undertaken
- reason/s for the decision
- remedy or resolution/s that are proposed or put in place
- options for review that may be available to the complainant, such as an internal review, external review or appeal.

Objectivity and fairness

DEWNR will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

The person handling the complaint will be different from any staff member whose service or conduct is the subject of the complaint. Conflicts of interests, whether actual or perceived, will be managed appropriately.

Responding flexibly

DEWNR staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible.

DEWNR will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints.

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DEWNR will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints in the process as far as possible.

Where complaints are found to be justified, DEWNR will remedy the situation where possible in a manner which is fair, consistent with DEWNR and whole-of-government policy and within powers set out in legislation. If the outcome of the complaint finds that DEWNR is at fault, DEWNR will accept responsibility for the fault and provide an apology.

Privacy and confidentiality

Complainants have a right to expect that their complaint will be investigated confidentially, to the extent possible. The identity of complainants will be made known only if required to investigate and resolve the complaint.

The complaint will not be revealed or made public by DEWNR, except where required by law.

Complaints lodged with DEWNR are subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed under the provisions of that legislation.

DEWNR will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by DEWNR as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

Empowerment of staff

All staff managing complaints are empowered to implement DEWNR's complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

DEWNR is committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time DEWNR's success depends on:

- our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of our staff
- our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with DEWNR, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our staff to do the same in accordance with this policy and the [Ombudsman SA Unreasonable complainant conduct policy and manual](#).

Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

DEWNR will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight bodies).

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Where can I get more information?

Ms Wiebke Billows, Office of the Chief Executive, email: wiebke.billows@sa.gov.au, phone: 8204 1213

Ms Jo Mitchell-Smith, Performance & Strategy Branch, email: jo.mitchell-smith2@sa.gov.au, phone: 8463 6839

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Sandy Pitcher'.

Sandy Pitcher

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Date: 23 December 2016

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