About the Council
The Australian Press Council was established in 1976 and is the principal body that issues and monitors standards of good practice for the publication of news and comment in Australian newspapers, magazines and associated online material. It is also the principal body that considers complaints about coverage of news or comment across this range of publications.

Role
The Council's three main areas of work involve:

- developing standards of media practice which are applied by the Council when considering and adjudicating upon complaints;
- responding to complaints from the public about material that relates to news or comment in Australian newspapers, magazines, and associated online material;
- issuing statements on policy matters within its areas of interest in order to highlight the importance of community access to information and freedom of expression.

Membership
The Council has 23 members, comprising:

- the independent Chair and nine “public members”, who have no affiliations with a media organisation;
- nine nominees of media organisations, including most major publishers of newspapers and magazines as well as the principal union for employees in the media industry;
- four independent journalist members, who are not employed by a media organisation.

The current Chair of the Council is Julian Disney AO. The Vice-Chairs are Hon John Doyle AC and Julian Gardner.

Resources
The Council’s core funding is provided by its “constituent bodies”, which comprise News Corp, Fairfax Media, Bauer Media Group and most other major newspaper and magazine publishers in Australia.

The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, which represents journalists and other workers in the media, is also a constituent body, as are a number of online-only publishers. The Myer Foundation has provided additional project funding, as have several of the constituent bodies.

The Council has a secretariat based in Sydney. Council meetings are usually held in Sydney but the Adjudication Panel often meets in other cities.
WHAT DO WE DO

Overview

The Council pursues its goals by:

- considering complaints and concerns about material in newspapers, magazines, journals and online media;
- encouraging and supporting initiatives to address the causes for readers’ complaints and concerns;
- developing and monitoring Standards of Practice for print and online media;
- making representations to governments, public inquiries and other forums on matters concerning freedom of speech and access to information;
- undertaking research and consultation about public policy affecting the media sector and freedom of speech, and promoting public awareness of such issues;
- promoting an understanding of the workings of the Council within the print media and the broader community, as well as encouraging feedback for the Council’s consideration.

Standards

The Council’s Standards of Practice for the print and online media are contained in its Statements of General Principles, Statement of Privacy Principles and Specific Standards of Practice. The Standards of Practice are applied by the Council when considering complaints and are used as the basis for statements by Council representatives about good media practice, whether addressing practitioners within the industry or the broader community.

The Standards of Practice are developed after consultation with the media industry and members of the broader community. They are subject to ongoing review in the light of experience, research and consultation. The Council also undertakes research and convenes conferences and seminars on aspects of media standards.

Complaints

Complaints may be made to the Council about the print and online publications of any of its publisher members. These members are responsible for publishing almost all Australian newspapers in Australia, as well as most magazines and most of the leading news websites. In some circumstances, complaints against other publications may be considered.

The Council currently receives about 700 complaints each year. Many complaints result in a correction, apology or some other form of action being taken due to the involvement of Council staff. Where the complaint cannot be resolved without a formal adjudication, the publisher is required to publish the adjudication promptly and with due prominence.

Policy

The Council issues statements on policy matters within its areas of interest, including through submissions to parliamentary committees, commissions and other public bodies. It also undertakes research and convenes or participates in conferences and seminars on policy issues. In recent years, the Council has focused on issues such as freedom of information, freedom of expression, privacy and the protection of whistleblowers.

MAKING A COMPLAINT

Who can complain?

Any person or organisation can make a complaint. Where the complainant was not personally identified or directly affected, some special procedures apply.

What kinds of complaints can be made?

Complaints may relate to news reports, articles, editorials, letters, cartoons, images and other published material. The Council does not consider complaints about advertising material, except where the complaint is that the material is not clearly identifiable as advertising.

Where it is more appropriate for a complaint to be dealt with by another organisation, the Council will suggest that the complainant raises the matter with that organisation. This may occur where, for example, the complaint relates to advertising, or to broadcasts on radio or television.

Complaints are treated by the Council as being against the publication, not any individual journalist or editor. But in most complaints the Council’s consideration is likely to focus on the actions of journalists, editors or other media practitioners.

When should a complaint be made?

A person can complain to the Council without having previously raised the matter with the publication. In some cases the Council may then ask the complainant to raise it first with the journalist, editor or whoever at the publication is responsible for handling complaints. But where it is more appropriate for a complaint to be dealt with by another organisation, the Council will suggest that the complainant raises the matter with that organisation.

Complaints must usually be made within thirty days of the first publication of the relevant material. A longer period may be allowed where, for example, there is a reasonable justification for the complainant not having previously noticed the material or the complaint involves a number of articles or over a lengthy period or the complainant has spent time unsuccessfully seeking a response from the publication.

How should a complaint be made?

Complaints should be made by completing the Council’s Complaint Form (available on its website or by contacting the secretariat for a copy) and submitting it online or by email, fax or post. If it is difficult to

Further details of the processes for receiving and considering complaints are available on the Council’s website.

www.presscouncil.org.au/complaints