



# General Statement of Principles

*NOTE: This General Statement of Principles applied to material published before August 2014. A revised version was released by the Press Council on 1 August 2014 and replaces this one.*

To assist the public and the press, the Australian Press Council has laid down the broad principles to which it is committed.

First, the freedom of the press to publish is the freedom, and right, of the people to be informed. These are the justifications for upholding press freedom as an essential feature of a democratic society. This freedom includes the right to publish the news, without fear or favour, and the right to comment fairly and responsibly upon it.

Second, the freedom of the press is important more because of the obligation it entails towards the people than because of the rights it gives to the press. Freedom of the press carries with it an equivalent responsibility to the public. Liberty does not mean licence. Thus, in dealing with complaints, the Council will give first and dominant consideration to what it perceives to be in the public interest.

The Council does not lay down rules by which publications should govern themselves. However, in considering complaints, the Council will have regard for these general principles.

## **General Principle 1: Accurate, fair and balanced reporting**

Publications should take reasonable steps to ensure reports are accurate, fair and balanced. They should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers either by omission or commission.

## **General Principle 2: Correction of inaccuracy**

Where it is established that a serious inaccuracy has been published, a publication should promptly correct the error, giving the correction due prominence.

## **General Principle 3: Publishing responses**

Where individuals or groups are a major focus of news reports or commentary, the publication should ensure fairness and balance in the original article. Failing that, it should provide a reasonable and swift opportunity for a balancing response in an appropriate section of the publication.

## **General Principle 4: Respect for privacy and sensibilities**

News and comment should be presented honestly and fairly, and with respect for the privacy and sensibilities of individuals. However, the right to privacy is not to be interpreted as preventing publication of matters of public record or obvious or significant public interest. Rumour and unconfirmed reports should be identified as such.

## **General Principle 5: Honest and fair investigation; preservation of confidences**

Information obtained by dishonest or unfair means, or the publication of which would involve a breach of confidence, should not be published unless there is an over-riding public interest.

## **General Principle 6: Transparent and fair presentation**

Publications are free to advocate their own views and publish the by-lined opinions of others, as long as readers can recognise what is fact and what is opinion. Relevant facts should not be misrepresented or suppressed, headlines and captions should fairly reflect the tenor of an article and readers should be advised of any manipulation of images and potential conflicts of interest.

## **General Principle 7: Discretion and causing offence**

Publications have a wide discretion in publishing material, but they should balance the public interest with the sensibilities of their readers, particularly when the material, such as photographs, could reasonably be expected to cause offence.

## **General Principle 8: Gratuitous emphasis on characteristics**

Publications should not place any gratuitous emphasis on the race, religion, nationality, colour, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness, or age of an individual or group. Where it is relevant and in the public interest, publications may report and express opinions in these areas.

## **General Principle 9: Publication of Council adjudications**

Where the Council issues an adjudication, the publication concerned should publish the adjudication, promptly and with due prominence.

### **Notes**

#### 1. "Public interest"

For the purposes of these principles, "public interest" is defined as involving a matter capable of affecting the people at large so they might be legitimately interested in, or concerned about, what is going on, or what may happen to them or to others.

#### 2. "Due prominence"

The Council interprets "due prominence" as requiring the publication to ensure the retraction, clarification, correction, explanation or apology has the effect, as far as possible, of neutralising any damage arising from the original publication, and that any published adjudication is likely to be seen by those who saw the material on which the complaint was based.