



POLICY REGISTER

Social Media Policy

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Issue.	Prepared/Revised by and Date	Action/Amendment Description	Approved By and Date
1.0	Glenn Wilcox Acting General Manager	First Edition	Council Minute No. (2021)

Background

Balranald Shire Council is committed to engaging with its community and staff in relevant and meaningful ways and is cognisant of the ever increasing and important role of online social media for communication, engagement and interaction.

This policy and guidelines will promote wider and responsible use of these technologies within the organisation now and into the future. Online collaboration technologies are changing the way we work, providing new avenues to engage with customers, colleagues, and the public. They provide new models for interaction and can help build stronger, more successful relationships.

If you are a Balranald Shire Council staff member, employee or contractor, volunteer and are creating, using or contributing to social media then these guidelines are designed to assist you.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to all Council officials (Council staff, volunteers and contractors) utilising social media platforms.

Policy Purpose

This Policy provides clarification for Balranald Shire Council concerning Social Media use in relation to obligations under the Code of Conduct, including:

- The provisions of the Code of Conduct that hold employees accountable for the consequences of their private actions where they may have a bearing on their standing as a public official;
- Reinforcing that breaching the Code of Conduct when using social media may result in disciplinary action.

Policy Objective

To define the responsibility of staff when using social media in public within the work environment and to differentiate this activity from private use.

Policy

Definition:

Social media is the term used for internet based tools for sharing and discussing information among people and communities. It refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared and discussed over open digital networks. Social media may include (although it is not limited to):

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Myspace)
- Video and photo sharing websites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube)
- Blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs (e.g. BlogSpot, Blogger)
- Micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter)
- Forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g. Google groups, LGNSW groups)
- Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Podcasting
- Email and instant messaging.

Social media also includes all other emerging electronic/digital communication applications.

Responsibilities

The *Code of Conduct* sets out the standards of behaviour expected of Balranald Shire Council staff based on a framework of behavioural principles and obligations.

Social Media and the Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct applies when participating in social media in the same way as when participating in any other media, public forum or engagement with the community. The Code of Conduct applies to Balranald Shire Council staff when participating in social media for official and private use.

Official and Private Use

Whether using social media for official or private purposes, employees are reminded that comments will often be permanently available and able to be reproduced in other media. For the purposes of this guidance, the definition of official and private use is as follows:

- *Official use*: Using social media tools when acting as an official representative of Balranald Shire Council.
- *Private use*: Using social media tools in a personal, private capacity.

Official Use

Making Public Comment

When using social media for official purposes it should not be used to express personal opinions.

Fair and Objective Treatment

All communication of an official nature should be objective and courteous in dealings with the government, other councils and the wider community.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Council officials must ensure the privacy and confidentiality of information acquired at work is protected at all times and treated in accordance with relevant laws and policies. The potential risks and ramifications of a breach of privacy or confidentiality when using social media are severe.

Council officials will not use the images of children unless the parent or guardian has provided written permission and is aware of the proposed use, social media sites and distribution potential across websites and social media.

Council will seek permission to use images of all persons where possible except in images taken of events or social gatherings, street or park landscapes or where a person can not be identified by the location or distance to the person.

Council officials shall remove all images of people immediately on the request of the person, family or organisation with legal responsibility.

General Conduct

Pursuant to Council's Code of Conduct, staff must ensure that any use of social media platforms, when used in an official capacity, is free from any form of verbal abuse, intimidation, harassment or discriminatory language or behaviour.

Inappropriate and offensive language (and/or inappropriate or offensive pictures, cartoons or diagrams) are prohibited from any Council social media platform.

Council officials must treat all users of Council's social media platforms equitably, fairly and with respect.

Creation of Council Social Media Platforms

Creation of new platforms (such as the creation of new Facebook pages) must be approved by the General Manager.

Council has one official Facebook site and will use only a single site for transmission on other social media and through its web site. The General Manager may approve other sites subject to need for a single purpose or limited time.

Facilitators and Moderators

All social media sites operated by Balranald Shire Council must have moderators and facilitators appointed in writing (by Council's) General Manager to enable oversight of activity within the site; monitor and decide on content; ensure moderation rules are followed; encourage participation and enable an understanding of common objectives for all participants.

Register and Passwords

Facilitators and moderators of Council Social Media sites must create and maintain their entry in the Social Media Register. The register will record the device/platform being used, the name of the principal Council staff member (user) and the access passwords.

Access to passwords will be limited to designated staff listed on the register as nominated by the General Manager.

Complaints Management

Council maintains a separate Complaints Management Policy and Customer Request Management (CRM) System. Complaints regarding social media are encompassed within that policy and any complaints received are to be entered into the CRM system and a response determined.

Council Business Transactions

Do not conduct Council business transactions, such as customer requests, over social media. Customer Service is provided by staff, by telephone or email.

Some General Rules of Use

- Be responsible for what you write. Your words will be archived and available for many years into the future. Readers in the future may be potential employers, clients or friends and family.
- Do not share Balranald Shire Council Intellectual Property.
- Do not click unsolicited links. These often conceal malware, spyware, phishing or other malevolent software used by scammers.
- Do not reveal sensitive personal information. See note above on children and other images.
- Do not reveal other people's sensitive information.
- Personal use of social media during work hours is generally not permissible by Council. If you are using social media this should be limited to your lunch break and/or before or after working hours.

- Council accepts that social media is a reciprocal medium and content on specific issues may not always be complimentary. To the extent that criticism is established as having valid grounds a response will be provided by Council, only after consultation between the relevant site facilitator/moderator and Council's General Manager.

Private Use

Personal or private use of social media at the council officials home is deemed to be a staff member's private matter and private interest. However, the provisions of Council's Code of Conduct must be considered if making any form of comment about another Council official or the Balranald Shire Council elected body.

Therefore, a Council official must **not** harass, bully, discriminate against nor make defamatory or inappropriate comments about any other Council official on their own personal social media platform (e.g. their own Facebook page).

Making Public Comment Relating to Council on a Private Platform

When using social media for private purposes, Council officials must ensure that they make it clear that any comments relating to Balranald Shire Council or its programs and activities are not official, and that they are speaking only on behalf of themselves.

Council officials must ensure that any personal comments do not compromise their capacity to perform their public role in an unbiased manner. Such comments (made in a personal capacity) about Council, its activities or programs should not be derogatory nor defamatory. Council officials must also ensure that they do not reveal any confidential information relating to Council when using a social media platform privately.

Breach of this Policy

A breach of the provisions and/or requirements of this policy may constitute a breach of Council's Code of Conduct. Therefore, disciplinary actions may be undertaken pursuant to the Code of Conduct and/or the Local Government (State) Award.

Staff Acknowledgement

All staff, must sign the acknowledgement at attachment 1 of this policy. New staff must sign the acknowledgement at their induction. Council's General Manager must ensure the acknowledgment is signed by all current staff as soon as practicable.

Review

This policy should be reviewed every 4 years. The policy may be reviewed and amended at any time at Council's discretion (or if legislative changes occur or changes to the relevant technology that impact on social media use).

Attachment 1

Council official acknowledgement

I acknowledge and confirm:

receiving a copy of Council's Social Media Policy;

*I have read and understand the requirements of the Policy and I will comply with the Policy;
and*

I understand there may be disciplinary consequences if I fail to comply with the Social Media Policy, including up to termination of my employment.

Your name:

Signed:

Date:
