

POLICY STATEMENT

Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Policy

AUTHORISATION

POLICY TYPE: <i>(Council or Operational)</i>	Council
POLICY LOCATION: <i>(eg. Corporate, Engineering, etc.)</i>	Governance
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Director Corporate and Community Services
AUTHORISED BY: <i>(GM or Director Title)</i>	General Manager
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RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN	CSP Objective 13 - Plans and Policies provide open and transparent information. DP13.2 – Develop, implement and promote best practice governance policies and procedures.

DOCUMENT HISTORY

VERSION NO.	DATE	DESCRIPTION OF AMENDMENTS <i>Include names of former policies that this policy will replace if applicable</i>	AMENDED BY <i>(Where required)</i>
4	10/03/2025	Minor typographical amendments and review of appendix positions	Coordinator Internal Audit, Governance and Risk
3	1/10/23	Amendments following changes to legislation to incorporate Model Policy elements	Director Corporate and Community Services
2	25/3/21	Inclusion of additional disclosure officer Adapt to new policy framework template	Governance and Integrated Planning Officer
1	22/6/2020	Policy Drafted and Adopted	Director Corporate and Community Services

REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

This Policy will be reviewed within Twelve months from the date of adoption or as required in the event of legislative changes. The Policy may also be changed as a result of other amendment that are

to the advantage that Council and in the spirit of this Policy. Any amendment to the Policy must be by way of a Council Resolution.

Contents

<u>1. PURPOSE</u>	4
<u>2. ACCESSIBILITY OF THIS POLICY</u>	4
<u>3. WHO DOES THIS POLICY APPLY TO?</u>	4
<u>4. WHO DOES THIS POLICY NOT APPLY TO?</u>	5
<u>5. COMPLIANCE WITH THE PID ACT</u>	5
<u>6. WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THIS POLICY?</u>	6
<u>7. HOW TO MAKE A REPORT OF SERIOUS WRONGDOING</u>	6
<u>8. PROTECTIONS</u>	12
<u>9. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF BLAND SHIRE COUNCIL EMPLOYEES</u>	14
<u>10. HOW WE WILL DEAL WITH VOLUNTARY PIDS</u>	15
<u>11. REVIEW AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION</u>	21
<u>12. OTHER AGENCY OBLIGATIONS</u>	22
<u>ANNEXURE A — NAMES AND CONTACT DETAILS OF DISCLOSURE OFFICERS FOR BLAND SHIRE COUNCIL</u>	24
<u>ANNEXURE B — LIST OF INTEGRITY AGENCIES</u>	24
<u>ANNEXURE C - DEFINITIONS</u>	27

Purpose

All agencies in NSW are required to have a Public Interest Disclosure (**PID**) Policy under section 42 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 (PID Act)*.

At Bland Shire Council we take reports of serious wrongdoing seriously. We are committed to building a 'speak up' culture where public officials are encouraged to report any conduct that they reasonably believe involves wrongdoing.

The integrity of our agency relies upon our staff, volunteers, contractors and subcontractors speaking up when they become aware of wrongdoing.

This policy sets out:

- how Bland Shire Council will support and protect you if you come forward with a report of serious wrongdoing
- how we will deal with the report and our other responsibilities under the PID Act
- who to contact if you want to make a report
- how to make a report
- the protections which are available to you under the PID Act.

This policy also documents our commitment to building a speak up culture. Part of that speak up culture is having in place a framework that facilitates public interest reporting of wrongdoing by:

- protecting those who speak up from detrimental action
- imposing duties on agencies who receive reports of wrongdoing to take appropriate action to investigate or otherwise deal with them.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Bland Shire Council's Model Code of Conduct, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Complaints Handling Policy, Enterprise Risk Management Framework, Fraud Control Policy, Grievance – Disputes Policy and their associated procedures.

This policy replaced Council's Internal Reporting Policy when adopted in October 2023.

Accessibility of this policy

This policy is available on Bland Shire's publicly available website as well as on the staff intranet home page and Council's Records Management System - Magiq. A copy of the policy is also sent to all staff of Bland Shire Council on their commencement. A hard copy of the policy can be requested from Council's Director Corporate and Community Services.

Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to, and for the benefit of, all public officials in NSW. You are a public official if you are:

- a person employed in or by an agency or otherwise in the service of an agency
- a person having public official functions or acting in a public official capacity whose conduct or activities an integrity agency is authorised by another Act or law to investigate

- an individual in the service of the Crown
- a statutory officer
- a person providing services or exercising functions on behalf of an agency, including a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer, including Committee members.
- an employee, partner or officer of an entity that provides services, under contract, subcontract or other arrangement, on behalf of an agency or exercises functions of an agency, and are involved in providing those services or exercising those functions
- a judicial officer
- a Member of Parliament (**MP**), including a Minister
- a person employed under the *Members of Parliament Staff Act 2013*.

The General Manager, Disclosures Coordinator (Director Corporate and Community Services), other nominated disclosure officers and managers within Bland Shire Council have specific responsibilities under the PID Act. This policy also provides information on how people in these roles will fulfil their responsibilities. Other public officials who work in and for the public sector, but do not work for Bland Shire Council may use this policy if they want information on who they can report wrongdoing to within Bland Shire Council.

Who does this policy not apply to?

This policy does not apply to:

- people who have received services from an agency and want to make a complaint about those services
- people, such as contractors, who provide services to an agency. For example, employees of a company that sold computer software to an agency.

This means that if you are not a public official, this policy does not apply to your complaint (there are some circumstances where a complaint can be deemed to be a voluntary PID, see section 1(i) of this policy for more information).

However, you can still make a complaint to Bland Shire Council through Council's Code of Conduct or Complaints Management policies and procedures.

You can also make a complaint directly to the General Manager as follows:

*General Manager
Bland Shire Council
6 Shire Street
West Wyalong NSW 2671*

Compliance with the PID Act

This policy has been prepared in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 and has been based on the PID Model Policy. Under section 42 of the PID Act, all agencies must have a PID policy having regard to the Ombudsman's guidelines.

This policy will be reviewed a minimum of once per Council term (4 years). Council policies are presented to Council for adoption and, where required, placed on public

exhibition for a minimum period of 28 days. As this policy relates to Council officials, there are no requirements for it to be subject to a period of public exhibition.

Responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of this policy sits with the Director Corporate and Community Services. The Director can be contacted to discuss any issues in relation to this policy.

What is contained in this policy?

This policy will provide you with information on the following:

- ways you can make a voluntary PID to Bland Shire Council under the PID Act
- the names and contact details for the nominated disclosure officers in Bland Shire Council
- the roles and responsibilities of people who hold particular roles under the PID Act and who are employees of Bland Shire Council
- what information you will receive once you have made a voluntary PID
- protections available to people who make a report of serious wrongdoing under the PID Act and what we will do to protect you
- Bland Shire Council procedures for dealing with disclosures
- Bland Shire Council procedures for managing the risk of detrimental action and reporting detrimental action
- Bland Shire Council record-keeping and reporting requirements
- how Bland Shire Council will ensure it complies with the PID Act and this policy.

If you require further information about this policy, how public interest disclosures will be handled and the PID Act you can:

- confidentially contact a nominated disclosure officer within Bland Shire Council
- contact the PID Advice Team within the NSW Ombudsman by phone: (02) 9286 1000 or email: pidadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au, or
- access the NSW Ombudsman's PID guidelines which are available on its website.

If you require legal advice with respect to the PID Act or your obligations under the PID Act, you may need to seek independent legal advice.

How to make a report of serious wrongdoing Reports, complaints and grievances

When a public official reports suspected or possible wrongdoing in the public sector, their report will be a PID if it has certain features which are set out in the PID Act.

Some internal complaints or internal grievances may also be PIDs, as long as they have the features of a PID. If an internal complaint or grievance is a report of serious wrongdoing, we will consider whether it is a PID. If it is a PID, we will deal with it as set out in this policy, but we will also make sure we follow our Bland Shire's relevant policies.

It is important that we quickly recognise that we have received a PID. This is because once a PID is received, the person who has made the report is entitled to certain

protections and we have certain decisions that we have to make on how we will deal with the PID and how we will protect and support the person who has made the report.

Council officials are encouraged to report all wrongdoing and misconduct, not only reports of serious wrongdoing as defined under the PID act. Council will deal with these appropriately and in accordance with established policies and procedures, even if they are not a PID. It should be noted that a complaint or grievance may also be a PID.

When will a report be a PID?

There are three types of PIDs in the PID Act. These are:

Voluntary PID: This is a PID where a report has been made by the public official because they decided, of their own accord, to come forward and disclose what they know.

Mandatory PID: This is a PID where the public official has made a report about serious wrongdoing because they have a legal obligation to make that report, or because making that report is an ordinary aspect of their role or function in an agency.

Witness PID: This is a PID where a person discloses information during an investigation of serious wrongdoing following a request or requirement of the investigator.

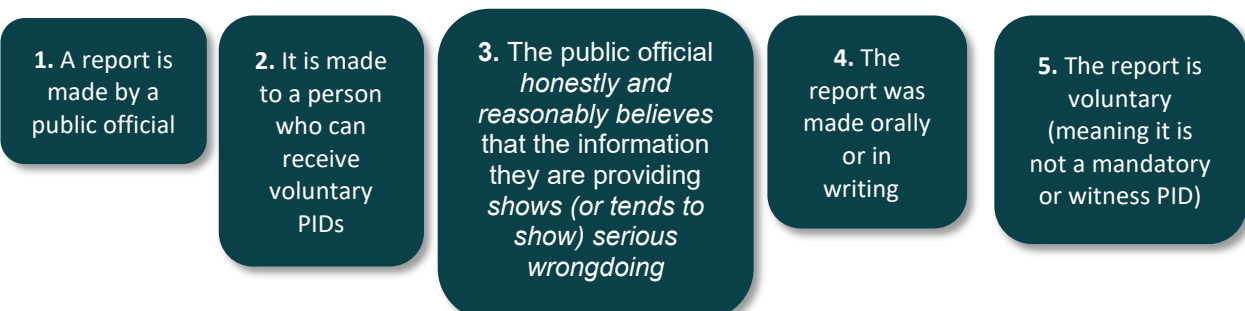
This policy mostly relates to making a voluntary PID and how we will deal with voluntary PIDs. People who make a mandatory PID or a witness PID are still entitled to protection. More information about protections is available in section 2 of this policy.

You can find more information about mandatory and witness PIDs in the Ombudsman's guidelines 'Dealing with mandatory PIDs' and 'Dealing with witness PIDs'.

Voluntary PIDs are the kind of PIDs most people have in mind when they think about public interest reporting and 'whistleblowing'.

They involve a public official making a report because they have information that they believe shows (or tends to show) serious wrongdoing, where they are not under a legal obligation to make that report and where it is not an ordinary part of their role to report such wrongdoing.

A report is a voluntary PID if it has the following five features, which are set out in sections 24 to 27 of the PID Act:



If the report has all five features, it is a voluntary PID.

You will not be expected to prove that what you reported actually happened or is serious wrongdoing. You *do* have to honestly believe, on reasonable grounds, that the information you are reporting shows or tends to show serious wrongdoing.

Even though you do not have to prove the serious wrongdoing happened or provide evidence, a mere allegation with no supporting information is unlikely to meet this test.

If we make an error and do not identify that you have made a voluntary PID, you will still be entitled to the protections under the PID Act.

If you make a report and believe we have made an error by not identifying that you have made a voluntary PID, you should raise this with a nominated disclosure officer or your contact officer for the report. If you are still not satisfied with this outcome, you can seek an internal review or we make seek to conciliate the matter. You may also contact the NSW Ombudsman. Further information on rights to internal review and conciliation is found in section 7 of this policy.

Who can make a voluntary PID?

Any public official can make a voluntary PID — see ‘Who this policy applies to’. You are a public official if:

- you are employed by Bland Shire Council
- you are a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer who provides services, or exercises functions, on behalf of Bland Shire Council, or
- you work for an entity (such as a non-government organisation) who is contracted by Bland Shire Council to provide services or exercise functions on behalf of Bland Shire Council — if you are involved in undertaking that contracted work.

A public official can make a PID about serious wrongdoing relating to *any* agency, not just the agency they are working for. This means that we may receive PIDs from public officials outside our agency. It also means that you can make a PID to any agency, including an integrity agency like the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and the NSW Ombudsman. Annexure B of this policy has a list of integrity agencies.

What is serious wrongdoing?

Reports must be of one or more of the following categories of *serious wrongdoing* to be a voluntary PID (in addition to having the other features set out here). Serious wrongdoing is defined in the PID Act as:

- *corrupt conduct* — such as a public official accepting a bribe
- *serious maladministration* — such as an agency systemically failing to comply with proper recruitment processes when hiring staff
- *a government information contravention* — such as destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released under a Government Information Public Access application
- *a local government pecuniary interest contravention* — such as a senior council staff member recommending a family member for a council contract and not declaring the relationship

- *a privacy contravention* — such as unlawfully accessing a person's personal information on an agency's database
- *a serious and substantial waste of public money* — such as an agency not following a competitive tendering process when contracting with entities to undertake government work.

Additional information of what can be considered as serious wrongdoing can be obtained from the Ombudsman's Guideline "What is serious wrongdoing". It can be found at the following:

<https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/Find-a-publication/publications/guidelines/public-interest-disclosures-2022/what-is-serious-wrongdoing>

When you make your report, you do not need to state what category of serious wrongdoing you are reporting or that you are reporting serious wrongdoing.

Who can I make a voluntary PID to?

For a report to be a voluntary PID, it must be made to certain public officials.

Making a report to a public official who works for Bland Shire Council

You can make a report inside Bland Shire Council to:

- General Manager
- The Disclosures Coordinator – this role is undertaken by the Director Corporate and Community Services
- a disclosure officer for Bland Shire Council — a list of disclosure officers for Bland Shire Council and their contact details can be found at Annexure A of this policy
- your manager — this is the person who directly, or indirectly, supervises you. It can also be the person who you directly, or indirectly, report to. You may have more than one manager. Your manager will make sure that the report is communicated to a disclosure officer on your behalf or may accompany you while you make the report to a disclosure officer.

Making a report to a recipient outside of Bland Shire Council

You can also make your report to a public official in another agency (meaning an agency you do not work for) or an integrity agency. These include:

- the *head of another agency* — this means the head of any public service agency
- an *integrity agency* — a list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy
- a *disclosure officer for another agency* — ways to contact disclosure officers for other agencies is located in an agency's PID policy which can be found on their public website

- a Minister or a member of a Minister's staff but the report must be made in writing.

If you choose to make a disclosure outside of Bland Shire Council, it is possible that your disclosure will be referred back to Council so that appropriate action can be taken.

Making a report to a Member of Parliament or journalist

Disclosures to MPs or journalists are different to other reports. You can only disclose a report of wrongdoing as a voluntary PID to an MP or journalist in the following circumstances:

- You must have first made substantially the same disclosure (described here as a 'previous disclosure') to someone who can receive disclosures.
- The previous disclosure must be substantially true.
- You did not make the previous disclosure anonymously.
- You did not give a written waiver of your right to receive information relating to your previous disclosure.
- You did not receive the following from Bland Shire Council:
 - a. notification that Bland Shire Council will not investigate the serious wrongdoing and will also not refer the previous disclosure to another agency, or
 - b. the following information at the end of the investigation period:
 - notice of Bland Shire Council decision to investigate the serious wrongdoing
 - a description of the results of an investigation into the serious wrongdoing
 - details of proposed or recommended corrective action as a result of the previous disclosure or investigation.

Investigation period means:

- after six months from the previous disclosure being made, or
- after 12 months if you applied for an internal review of the agency's decision within six months of making the disclosure.

If all the above requirements are met, your disclosure to an MP or journalist may be a voluntary PID.

What form should a voluntary PID take?

You can make a voluntary PID:

- *in writing* — this could be an email or letter to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs.
- *orally* — have a private discussion with a person who can receive voluntary PIDs. This can be face-to-face, via telephone or virtually.
- *anonymously* — write an email or letter or call a person who can receive PIDs to make a report without providing your name or anything that might identify you as the maker of the report. A report will only be considered anonymous if there is no reasonable or practical way of communicating with the person making the report. Even if you choose to remain anonymous, you will still be protected under the PID Act. It may be difficult, however, for Council to investigate the matter(s) you have disclosed if we cannot contact you for further information.

What should I include in my report?

You should provide as much information as possible so we can deal with the report effectively. The type of information you should include is:

- date, time and location of key events
- names of person(s) involved in the suspected wrongdoing, their role, title and how they are involved
- your relationship with the person(s) involved, such as whether you work closely with them
- your explanation of the matter you are reporting
- how you became aware of the matter you are reporting
- possible witnesses
- other information you have that supports your report.

What if I am not sure if my report is a PID?

You should report all wrongdoing you become aware of regardless of whether you think it is serious wrongdoing. It is important for Bland Shire Council to understand what is or may be occurring.

We are then responsible for making sure your report is handled appropriately under the PID Act, or if it is not a PID, in line with our other procedures. Even if your report is not a PID, it may fall within another one of the agency's policies for dealing with reports, allegations or complaints.

Deeming that a report is a voluntary PID

The General Manager and/or Disclosures Coordinator can, in certain circumstances, determine that a report is a voluntary PID even if the report does not otherwise have all the features of a voluntary PID. This is known as the 'deeming power'.

By deeming that a report is a voluntary PID, it ensures that reporters are provided with protections under the PID Act.

If you make a report that has not met all the requirements of a voluntary PID, you can refer your matter to General Manager and/or Disclosures Coordinator to request that they consider deeming your report to be a voluntary PID.

A decision to deem a report to be a voluntary PID is at the discretion of the General Manager and/or Disclosures Coordinator. For more information about the deeming power, see the Ombudsman's guideline 'Deeming that a disclosure is a voluntary PID'.

Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?

- General Manager
- Director Corporate and Community Services
- Director Technical Services
- Manager Customer and Financial Services
- Coordinator Internal Audit, Governance and Risk

Protections

How is the maker of a voluntary PID protected?

When you make a voluntary PID you receive special protections under the PID Act.

We are committed to taking all reasonable steps to protect you from detriment as a result of having made a PID. We are also committed to maintaining your confidentiality as much as possible while the PID is being dealt with.

We will not tolerate any type of detrimental action being taken against you because you have made a report, might make a report or are believed to have made a report.

The maker of a voluntary PID is protected in the following ways:

- *Protection from detrimental action*

A person cannot take detrimental action against another person because they have made a voluntary PID or are considering making a PID. Detrimental action includes bullying, harassment, intimidation or dismissal.

Once we become aware that a voluntary PID by a person employed or otherwise associated with Council that concerns serious wrongdoing relating to Council has been made, Bland Shire Council will undertake a risk assessment and take steps to mitigate the risk of detrimental action occurring against the person who made the voluntary PID.

It is a criminal offence for someone to take detrimental action against a person because they have made or may make a voluntary PID. It is punishable by a maximum penalty of 200 penalty units or imprisonment for five years or both.

A person may seek compensation where unlawful detrimental action has been taken against them.

A person can apply for a court order (injunction) where detrimental action is threatened or has occurred (for example, an order to prevent dismissal or to require reinstatement).

Note that a person who makes a PID can still be subject to reasonable management action (such as ordinary performance reviews and performance management). Provided such action is not taken because of the PID, it is not detrimental action under the PID Act.

- *Immunity from civil and criminal liability*

Some public officials are often subject to a duty of confidentiality that prevents them disclosing certain information that they obtain or become aware of at work. Sometimes, in order to make a PID, public officials will need to breach or disregard such confidentiality duties. If that happens, a public official cannot be disciplined, sued or criminally charged for breaching confidentiality.

- *Confidentiality*

Public officials and agencies must not disclose information tending to identify a person as the maker of a voluntary PID unless doing so is permitted by the PID Act.

- *Protection from liability for own past conduct*

The Attorney General can give the maker an undertaking that a disclosure of their own past conduct will not be used against them if a person discloses their own wrongdoing or misconduct while making a report. This undertaking can only be given on application by an integrity agency to the Attorney General.

Protections for people who make mandatory and witness PIDs

Apart from PIDs that are made voluntarily by public officials, there are other types of reports that are recognised as PIDs under the PID Act:

- *A mandatory PID*: This is a PID where the public official has made the report about serious wrongdoing because they have a legal obligation to make that report, or because making that report is an ordinary aspect of their role or function in an agency.
- *A witness PID*: This is a PID where a person discloses information during an investigation of serious wrongdoing following a request or requirement of the investigator.

Protections for makers of mandatory and witness PIDs are detailed in the table below.

Protection	Mandatory PID	Witness PID
Detrimental action — It is an offence to take detrimental action against a person based on the suspicion, belief or awareness that a person has made, may have made or may make a PID.	✓	✓
Right to compensation — A person can initiate proceedings and seek compensation for injury, damage or loss suffered as a result of detrimental action being taken against them.	✓	✓
Ability to seek injunction — An injunction can be sought to prevent the commission or possible commission of a detrimental action offence against a person. For example, an order to prevent dismissal or to require reinstatement.	✓	✓
Immunity from civil and criminal liability — a person will not incur civil or criminal liability if the person breaches a duty of confidentiality while making a disclosure. This means that legal action cannot be taken against a person for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• breaching a duty of secrecy or confidentiality, or• breaching another restriction on disclosure.	✓	✓

Reporting detrimental action

If you experience adverse treatment or detrimental action, such as bullying or harassment, you should report this immediately. You can report any experience of adverse treatment or detrimental action directly to Council's General Manager, Disclosure Coordinator or Disclosure Officers, or to an integrity agency. A list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy.

If you report reprisal action, you will be kept informed of the progress of any investigations and the outcome of the same.

If you have reported wrongdoing and feel that any reprisal action is not being dealt with effectively, you may contact the NSW Ombudsman. Contact details are included at the end of this document.

General support

Bland Shire Council will provide support to those who have made a report through giving access to any professional support they may need as a result of the reporting process including, but not limited to, providing information about Council's Employee Assistance Program.

A key contact person will be allocated to the report maker and this person will be the key point of contact for inquiries and updates in relation to the report. They will also be responsible for taking required steps to protect the interests of the report maker, if they are at risk of detrimental action.

The General Manager or Disclosure Coordinator are to be notified if a person who has made the report is suffering any detrimental action as a result of disclosing any wrongdoing.

For inquiries about the PID Act and reporting generally, please refer to the NSW Ombudsman at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Roles and responsibilities of Bland Shire Council employees

Certain people within Bland Shire Council have responsibilities under the PID Act.

General Manager

The General Manager is responsible for:

- fostering a workplace culture where reporting is encouraged
- receiving disclosures from public officials
- ensuring there is a system in place for assessing disclosures
- ensuring the Bland Shire Council complies with this policy and the PID Act
- ensuring that the Bland Shire Council has appropriate systems for:
 - overseeing internal compliance with the PID Act
 - supporting public officials who make voluntary PIDs, including by minimising the risk of detrimental action
 - implementing corrective action if serious wrongdoing is found to have occurred
 - complying with reporting obligations regarding allegations or findings of detrimental action
 - complying with yearly reporting obligations to the NSW Ombudsman.

Disclosures Coordinator

The disclosures coordinator has a central role in Bland Shire Council's internal reporting system. The disclosures coordinator can receive and assess reports, and is the primary point of contact in Bland Shire Council for the reporter. Council's Disclosure Coordinator is the Director Corporate and Community Services.

The disclosures coordinator has a responsibility to:

- assess reports to determine whether or not a report should be treated as a public interest disclosure, and to decide how each report will be dealt with (either under delegation or in consultation with the General Manager)

- deal with reports made under the Council's Code of Conduct in accordance with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct procedures
- coordinate Bland Shire Council's response to a report
- acknowledge reports and provide updates and feedback to the reporter
- assess whether it is possible and appropriate to keep the reporter's identity confidential
- assess the risk of reprisal and workplace conflict related to or likely to arise out of a report, and develop strategies to manage any risk identified
- where required, provide or coordinate support to staff involved in the reporting or investigation process, including protecting the interests of any officer the subject of a report
- ensure Bland Shire Council complies with the PID Act
- provide six-monthly reports to the NSW Ombudsman in accordance with section 6CA of the PID Act.

Disclosure officers

Disclosure officers are responsible for:

- receiving reports from public officials
- receiving reports when they are passed on to them by managers
- ensuring reports are dealt with appropriately, including by referring the matter to the appropriate complaint unit (if relevant)
- ensuring that any oral reports that have been received are recorded in writing.

Managers

The responsibilities of managers include:

- receiving reports from persons that report to them or that they supervise
- passing on reports they receive to a disclosure officer.

All employees

All employees must:

- report suspected serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- use their best endeavours to assist in an investigation of serious wrongdoing if asked to do so by a person dealing with a voluntary PID on behalf of Bland Shire Council
- treat any person dealing with or investigating reports of serious wrongdoing with respect.

All employees must not take detrimental action against any person who has made, may in the future make, or is suspected of having made, a PID.

How we will deal with voluntary PIDs

When a disclosure officer in Bland Shire Council receives a report which is a voluntary PID, or looks like it may be a voluntary PID, the person who made the report will receive the following information:

- You will receive an acknowledgment that the report has been received. This acknowledgement will:
 - state that the report will be assessed to identify whether it is a PID

- state that the PID Act applies to how Bland Shire Council deals with the report
- provide clear information on how you can access this PID policy
- provide you with details of a contact person and available supports.
- If the report is a voluntary PID, we will inform you as soon as possible how we intend to deal with the report. This may include:
 - that we are investigating the serious wrongdoing
 - that we will refer the report to a different agency (if appropriate) to deal with the voluntary PID. If we do this, we will provide you with details of this referral
 - If we decide to not investigate the report and to not refer it to another agency for it to be investigated, we will tell you the reasons for this decision. We will also notify the NSW Ombudsman of this decision.
- If we decide to investigate the serious wrongdoing, we will provide you with updates on the investigation at least every three months. During this time, if you would like more frequent updates, you should contact the contact person who was nominated when you made the report.
 - If we investigate the serious wrongdoing, we will provide you with the following information once the investigation is complete:
 - a description of the results of the investigation — that is, we will tell you whether we found that serious wrongdoing took place.
 - information about any corrective action as a result of the investigation/s — this means we will tell you what action we took in relation to the person who engaged in the serious wrongdoing or if the serious wrongdoing was by our agency, what we have put in place to address that serious wrongdoing.
 - Corrective action could include taking disciplinary action against someone or changing the practices, policies and procedures that we have in place which led to the serious wrongdoing.
- There may be some details about both the findings made as a result of the investigation and the corrective action taken that cannot be revealed to you. We will always balance the right of a person who makes a report to know the outcome of that report, with other legal obligations we have.
- If you have made an anonymous report, in many cases we may not be able to provide this information to you.

Council will engage with the maker of the report to establish whether they are at risk of detrimental action, whether they need support networks to be put in place and how this will be assessed on an ongoing basis.

How Bland Shire Council will deal with voluntary PIDs

Once a report that may be a voluntary PID is received Bland Shire Council will look at the information contained in the report to see if it has the features of a voluntary PID. This assessment is undertaken to identify whether the report is a voluntary PID or another type of disclosure, and to make sure that the right steps are followed. If it is a voluntary PID, we will ensure that we comply with the requirements in the PID Act.

Council officials who report wrongdoing will be told what is happening in response to their report.

When you make a report, you will be given:

- An acknowledgement that your disclosure has been received
- The timeframe for when you will receive further updates
- The name and contact details of those who can providing you with information as to what is taking place.

This information will be given to you within two working days from the date you make your report.

- After a decision is made about how your report will be dealt with, you will be given:
- Information about the action that will be taken in response to your report and timeframes for any investigation.
- information about the resources available to you to handle any concerns you may have
- information about external agencies and services you can access for support.

This information will be provided within 10 working days from the date you make your report.

During any investigation, you will be given:

- Information on the ongoing nature of the investigation
- Information about the progress of the investigation and reasons for any delay
- Advice if your identity needs to be disclosed for the purpose of investigating the matter, an an opportunity to discuss this

At the end of any investigation you will be provided with:

- Enough information to show that adequate and appropriate action was taken and/or is proposed to be taken in response to your disclosure and any problem which was identified
- Advice about whether you will be involved as a witness in any further matters such as disciplinary or criminal proceedings.

Report not a voluntary PID

Even if the report is not a voluntary PID, it will still need to be dealt with in a manner consistent with our relevant internal complaints or grievance handling processes or through an alternate process.

If the report is not a voluntary PID, we will let you know that the PID Act does not apply to the report and how we will deal with the concerns raised in the report.

If you are not happy with this assessment or otherwise disagree with it, you can raise it with the person who has communicated the outcome with you or a disclosure officer, request an internal review or request that the matter be conciliated. Bland Shire Council can, but do not have to, request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the matter.

Cease dealing with report as voluntary PID

Bland Shire Council may stop dealing with a voluntary PID because it is not actually a voluntary PID (meaning it does not have all the features of a PID).

Council will advise the maker of a voluntary PID of the reasons it has ceased dealing with the report as a voluntary PID.

The PID Act requires agencies to provide reasons to the maker of a purported PID if the agency has ceased dealing with the report as a voluntary PID. A purported PID is one that is made to one of the recipients of voluntary PIDs as set out in the Act and it is not a witness of mandatory PID and the maker has stated that it is a voluntary PID.

Where the report is a voluntary PID

If the report is a voluntary PID:

- In most cases we will conduct an investigation to make findings about whether the serious wrongdoing disclosed in the report occurred, who was involved, who was responsible, and whether the people involved, or the agency engaged, in serious wrongdoing. There may be circumstances where we believe an investigation is not warranted — for example, if the conduct has previously been investigated.
- There may also be circumstances where we decide that the report should be referred to another agency, such as an integrity agency. For example, reports concerning possible corrupt conduct may be required to be reported to the ICAC in accordance with section 11 of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*.
- Before referring a matter, we will discuss the referral with the other agency, and we will provide you with details of the referral and a contact person within the other agency.
- If we decide not to investigate a report and to not refer the matter to another agency, we must let you know the reasons for this and notify the NSW Ombudsman.

There may be an occasion to appoint an external investigator to investigate a report. In this instance, Council's appointed Disclosures Coordinator will continue to make contact with the maker of the report.

How Bland Shire Council will protect the confidentiality of the maker of a voluntary PID

We understand that people who make voluntary PIDs may want their identity and the fact that they have made a report to be confidential.

Under the PID Act, information tending to identify a person as the maker of a voluntary PID (known as identifying information) is not to be disclosed by a public official or an agency.

There are certain circumstances under the PID Act that allow for the disclosure of identifying information. These include:

- where the person consents in writing to the disclosure

- where it is generally known that the person is the maker of the voluntary PID because of their voluntary self-identification as the maker
- when the public official or Bland SHire reasonably considers it necessary to disclose the information to protect a person from detriment
- where it is necessary the information be disclosed to a person whose interests are affected by the disclosure
- where the information has previously been lawfully published
- when the information is disclosed to a medical practitioner or psychologist for the purposes of providing medical or psychiatric care, treatment or counselling to the individual disclosing the information
- when the information is disclosed for the purposes of proceedings before a court or tribunal
- when the disclosure of the information is necessary to deal with the disclosure effectively
- if it is otherwise in the public interest to disclose the identifying information.

We will not disclose identifying information unless it is necessary and authorised under the PID Act.

We will put in place steps to keep the identifying information of the maker and the fact that a report has been made confidential. It may not be possible for us to maintain complete confidentiality while we progress the investigation, but we will do all that we practically can to not unnecessarily disclose information from which the maker of the report can be identified. We will do this by:

- Limiting the number of people who are aware of the maker's identity or information that could identify them.
- If we must disclose information that may identify the maker of the PID, we will still not disclose the actual identity of the maker of the PID, unless we have their consent to do so.
- We will ensure that any person who does know the identity of the maker of a PID is reminded that they have a legal obligation to keep their identity confidential.
- We will ensure that only authorised persons have access to emails, files or other documentation that contain information about the identity of the maker.
- We will undertake an assessment to determine if anyone is aware of the maker's identity and if those persons have a motive to cause detrimental action to be taken against the maker or impede the progress of the investigation.
- We will provide information to the maker of the PID about the importance of maintaining confidentiality and advising them how best to protect their identity, for example, by telling them not to discuss their report with other staff.

If confidentiality cannot be maintained or is unlikely to be maintained, Bland Shire Council will:

- Advise the person whose identity may become known

- Implement strategies to minimise the risk of detrimental action
- Provide additional supports to the person who has made the PID

How Bland Shire Council will assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action

Bland Shire Council will not tolerate any detrimental action being taken by any person against a person who has made a PID, investigators, witnesses or the person the report is about.

Bland Shire Council will assess and take steps to mitigate detrimental action from being taken against the maker of a voluntary PID, the person whose conduct is the subject of a PID, investigators and witnesses.

Bland Shire Council will take steps to assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action by:

- Explaining that a risk assessment will be undertaken, and a risk management plan will be created (including reassessing the risk throughout the entirety of the matter)
- Providing details of the unit/role that will be responsible for undertaking a risk assessment
- Explaining how the agency will communicate with the maker to identify risks
- Listing the protections that will be offered, that is, the agency will discuss protection options with the maker which may including remote working or approved leave for the duration of the investigation
- Outlining what supports will be provided.

Detrimental action against a person is an act or omission that causes, comprises, involves or encourages detriment to a person or a threat of detriment to a person (whether express or implied). Detriment to a person includes:

- injury, damage or loss
- property damage
- reputational damage
- intimidation, bullying or harassment
- unfavourable treatment in relation to another person's job
- discrimination, prejudice or adverse treatment
- disciplinary proceedings or disciplinary action, or
- any other type of disadvantage.

Detrimental action does not include:

- lawful action taken by a person or body to investigate serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- the lawful reporting or publication of a finding of serious wrongdoing or other misconduct
- the lawful making of adverse comment, resulting from investigative action
- the prosecution of a person for a criminal offence

- reasonable management action taken by someone in relation to a person who made or may make a PID. For example, a reasonable appraisal of a PID maker's work performance.

How Bland Shire Council will deal with allegations of a detrimental action offence

If Bland Shire Council become(s) aware of an allegation that a detrimental action offence has occurred or may occur, Bland Shire Council will:

- take all steps possible to stop the action and protect the person(s)
- take appropriate disciplinary action against anyone that has taken detrimental action
- refer any evidence of a detrimental action offence to the Commissioner of Police and the ICAC or the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (whichever is applicable)
- notify the NSW Ombudsman about the allegation of a detrimental action offence being committed.

Bland Shire Council's Disclosures Coordinator will be responsible for making referrals on alleged detrimental action offences as well as providing advice and support to the person against whom alleged detrimental action has been taken. This will include provision of updates in relation to action being undertaken to address the detrimental action allegations.

What Bland Shire Council will do if an investigation finds that serious wrongdoing has occurred

If, after an investigation, it is found that serious wrongdoing or other misconduct has occurred, Bland Shire Council will take the most appropriate action to address that wrongdoing or misconduct. This is also known as corrective action.

Corrective action can include:

- a formal apology
- improving internal policies to adequately prevent and respond to similar instances of wrongdoing
- providing additional education and training to staff where required
- taking employment action against persons involved in the wrongdoing (such as termination of employment, relocation, a caution or reprimand)
- payment of compensation to people who have been affected by serious wrongdoing or other misconduct.

Review and dispute resolution

Internal review

People who make voluntary PIDs can seek internal review of the following decisions made by Bland Shire Council:

- that Bland Shire Council is not required to deal with the report as a voluntary PID
- to stop dealing with the report because Bland Shire Council decided it was not a voluntary PID
- to not investigate the serious wrongdoing and not refer the report to another agency
- to cease investigating the serious wrongdoing without either completing the investigation or referring the report to another agency for investigation.

Bland Shire Council will ensure internal reviews are conducted in compliance with the PID Act.

If you would like to make an application for an internal review, you must apply in writing within 28 days of being informed of Council's decision. The application should state the reasons why you consider the decision should not have been made. You may also submit any other relevant material with your application.

Applications for internal review should be sent to the General Manager.

Voluntary dispute resolution

If a dispute arises between [us/agency name] and a person who has made a report which is, or may be, a voluntary PID, we may request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the dispute. Conciliation is a voluntary process and will only be suitable for disputes where Bland Shire Council and the maker of the report are willing to resolve the dispute.

Other agency obligations

Record-keeping requirements

Bland Shire Council must keep full and accurate records with respect to all information received in connection with the PID Act. This ensures that Bland Shire Council complies with its obligations under the *State Records Act 1998*.

Reporting of voluntary PIDs and Bland Shire Council annual return to the Ombudsman

Each year Bland Shire Council provide an annual return to the NSW Ombudsman which includes:

- information about voluntary PIDs received by Bland Shire Council during each return period (yearly with the start date being 1 July)
- action taken by Bland Shire Council to deal with voluntary PIDs during the return period
- how Bland Shire Council promoted a culture in the workplace where PIDs are encouraged.

Council also provides information in relation to an Annual Return on PIDs is prepared by the Disclosures Coordinator and included in Bland Shire Council's Annual Report. Information gathered in relation to PIDs is securely stored within Magiq, Council's records management system.

How Bland Shire Council will ensure compliance with the PID Act and this policy

Council's General Manager will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of Council's PID policy and compliance with the PID Act. Any audits of the PID processes at Bland Shire Council will be undertaken as part of Council's Internal Audit Schedule and reported through the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee to Council.

Annexure A — Names and contact details of disclosure officers for Bland Shire Council

Available internally to staff.

Annexure B — List of integrity agencies

Integrity agency	What they investigate	Contact information
The NSW Ombudsman	Most kinds of serious maladministration by most agencies and public officials (but not NSW Police, judicial officers or MPs)	Telephone: 1800 451 524 between 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday Writing: Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000 Email: info@ombo.nsw.gov.au
The Auditor-General	Serious and substantial waste of public money by auditable agencies	Telephone: 02 9275 7100 Writing: GPO Box 12, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: governance@audit.nsw.gov.au
Independent Commission Against Corruption	Corrupt conduct	Telephone: 02 8281 5999 or toll free on 1800 463 909 (callers outside Sydney) between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday Writing: GPO Box 500, Sydney NSW 2001 or faxing 02 9264 5364 Email: icac@icac.nsw.gov.au
The Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption	Serious maladministration by the ICAC or the ICAC officers	Telephone: 02 9228 3023 Writing: PO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au
The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the NSW Police Force or the NSW Crime Commission	Telephone: 02 9321 6700 or 1800 657 079 Writing: GPO Box 3880, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au
The Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the LECC and LECC officers	Telephone: 02 9228 3023 Writing: GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: oilc executive@oilc.nsw.gov.au
Office of the Local Government	Local government pecuniary interest contraventions	Email: olg@olg.nsw.gov.au

The Privacy Commissioner	Privacy contraventions	Telephone: 1800 472 679 Writing: GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au
The Information Commissioner	Government information contraventions	Telephone: 1800 472 679 Writing: GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 Email: ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au

Annexure C - DEFINITIONS

General Manager means the General Manager of Bland Shire Council and includes their delegate or authorised representative. References to the General Manager are references to the General Manager appointed under the *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW).

Bland Shire Council means the Council.

Council means the elected Council.

Bland Shire Official means a: Councillor; Bland Shire Officer (including part time, temporary and casual officers); individuals engaged by Bland Shire under a contract to provide services to or on behalf of Bland Shire (such as consultants and contractors); or individuals having public official functions where their conduct could be investigated by an Investigating Authority (such as members of Bland Shire committees and volunteers).

Corrupt Conduct means dishonest or partial exercise of official functions by a Bland Shire Official. For example:

- improperly using knowledge, power or position for personal gain or the advantage of others;
- acting dishonestly or unfairly, or breaching public trust; or
- using their position in a way that is dishonest, biased or breaches public trust.

For more information about corrupt conduct, see the [NSW Ombudsman's guideline on what can be reported](#).

Detrimental Action means action causing, comprising or involving:

- injury, damage or loss;
- intimidation or harassment;
- discrimination, disadvantage or adverse treatment in relation to employment;
- dismissal from or prejudice in employment; and
- disciplinary proceedings.

Government Information Contravention means a failure to properly fulfil functions under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act)*. For example:

- destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released;
- knowingly making decisions that are contrary to the legislation; or
- directing another person to make a decision that is contrary to the legislation.

For more information about government information contravention, see the [NSW Ombudsman's guideline on what can be reported](#).

Investigating Authority means an authority listed in Annexure A. Bland Shire Officials can contact the relevant authority for advice about how to make a disclosure.

Local Government Pecuniary Interest Contravention means the failure to fulfil certain functions under the *Local Government Act 1993* relating to the management of pecuniary interests. A pecuniary interest is an interest that a person has in a matter because of a

reasonable likelihood or expectation of appreciable financial gain or loss to the person. For example:

- a senior Bland Shire Officer recommending a family member for a Bland Shire contract and not declaring the relationship;
- a senior Bland Shire Officer holding an undisclosed shareholding in a company competing for a Bland Shire contract.

For more information about local government pecuniary interest contravention, see [NSW Ombudsman's guideline on what can be reported](#)

Maladministration means conduct that involves action or inaction of a serious nature that is contrary to law, unreasonable, unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory or based wholly or partly on improper motives. For example:

- making a decision and/or taking action that is unlawful; or
- refusing to grant an approval for reasons that are not related to the merits of their application.

For more information about maladministration, see [NSW Ombudsman's guideline on what can be reported](#).

PID Act means the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994* (NSW).

Serious and Substantial Waste means the uneconomical, inefficient or ineffective use of resources that could result in the loss or wastage of local government money. This includes all revenue, loans and other money collected, received or held by, for or on account of BLAND SHIRE. For example:

- poor project management practices leading to projects running over time; or
- having poor or no processes in place for a system involving large amounts of public funds.

For more information about serious and substantial waste, see [NSW Ombudsman's guideline on what can be reported](#).

Unless stated otherwise, a reference to a section or clause is a reference to a section or clause of this Policy.