



<b>Policy Title:</b>	<b>Internal Reporting (Public Interest Disclosures)</b>
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## 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 Richmond Valley 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 we 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, and
- 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, and
- Imposing duties on agencies who receive reports of wrongdoing to take appropriate action to investigate or otherwise deal with them.

In NSW, that framework is the PID Act. Council is committed to maintaining the highest level of community accountability, community stewardship and leadership whilst maintaining respect for individuals and the rule of law.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Richmond Valley Council policies and procedures, and relevant legislation:

- Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy
- Business Ethics Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Councillor Access to Information Policy
- Equal Employment Opportunity Policy & Management Plan
- Fraud and Corruption Control Plan
- Fraud Prevention Policy
- Issue Resolution Guidelines Procedure
- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*
- *Local Government Act 1993*
- Local Government (State) Award 2023
- *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022*.

## ACCESSIBILITY OF THIS POLICY

This policy is available on Richmond Valley Council's publicly available website [www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au](http://www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au) as well as on Council's Policy Register (accessible via a link on Council's Intranet).

A copy of the policy is also issued to all staff of Richmond Valley Council upon their commencement. A hard copy of the policy can be requested from Council's Governance or People and Culture departments.

## 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,
- 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,
- Person providing services or exercising functions on behalf of an agency, including a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer, and/or
- 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.

The General Manager, other nominated Disclosure Officers and managers within Richmond Valley 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 Richmond Valley Council may use this policy if they want information on who they can report wrongdoing to within Richmond Valley Council.

Complaints that do not fall under the PID Act, should be dealt with via Council's existing policies and procedures, such as the Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy, Issue Resolution Guidelines or Local Government (State) Award.

## 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, or
- People, such as contractors, who provide services to an agency. For example, employees of a company that sold a product to an agency.

Consultants, although engaged by Richmond Valley Council to assist in their exercise of functions, are not considered public officials under the PID Act.

If you are not a public official, this policy does not apply to your complaint (however, 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).

You can still make a complaint to Richmond Valley Council. This can be done by writing to:

General Manager  
Richmond Valley Council  
Locked Bag 10  
CASINO NSW 2470

## COMPLIANCE WITH THE PID ACT

Refer to section 8(c) at page 19-20 of this policy for an outline of the policy review schedule and approval process.

## WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THIS POLICY?

This policy will provide you with information on the following:

- Ways you can make a voluntary PID to Richmond Valley Council under the PID Act,
- Names and contact details for the nominated Disclosure Officers in Richmond Valley Council,
- Roles and responsibilities of people who hold particular roles under the PID Act and who are employees of Richmond Valley 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,
- Richmond Valley Council procedures for dealing with disclosures and for managing the risk of detrimental action and reporting detrimental action,
- Richmond Valley Council record-keeping and reporting requirements, and
- How we will ensure compliance 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 Richmond Valley Council,
- Contact the PID Advice Team within the NSW Ombudsman by phone: (02) 9286 1000 or email: [pidadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pidadvice@ombo.nsw.gov.au), or
- Access the NSW Ombudsman's PID guidelines which are available on their 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.

## 1. HOW TO MAKE A REPORT OF SERIOUS WRONGDOING

### (a) 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 other relevant Council policies and procedures.

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.

The General Manager is responsible for overseeing complaints management and for ensuring complaints are managed in accordance with Council policies and procedures.

Staff should report all wrongdoing and misconduct, not only reports of serious wrongdoing as defined under the PID Act. Council will deal with these complaints appropriately, even if they are not a PID. It is important to note that a complaint or grievance may also be classified as a PID.

Reporting avenues for all types of wrongdoing and misconduct with Council are outlined in this policy.

### (b) When will a report be a PID?

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

#### 1. **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.

#### 2. **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.

#### 3. **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:

1. A report is made by a public official
2. It is made to a person who can receive voluntary PIDs
3. The public official <i>honestly and reasonably believes</i> that the information they are providing <i>shows (or tends to show) serious wrongdoing</i>
4. The report was made orally or in writing
5. The report is voluntary (meaning it is not a mandatory or witness PID)

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.

### (c) 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 Richmond Valley Council, or
- You are a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer who provides services, or exercises functions, on behalf of Richmond Valley Council, or
- You work for an entity (such as a non-government organisation) who is contracted by Richmond Valley Council to provide services or exercise functions on behalf of Richmond Valley 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.

Please note that although consultants may be engaged to assist Council in undertaking of the exercise of functions, consultants are not considered public officials under the PID Act.

#### (d) 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.
- Government information contravention — such as destroying, concealing or altering records to prevent them from being released under a Government Information Public Access application.
- 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.
- Privacy contravention — such as unlawfully accessing a person's personal information on an agency's database.
- 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.

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

#### (e) 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 Richmond Valley Council*

You can make a report inside Richmond Valley Council to:

- General Manager.
- Disclosure Coordinator or Disclosure Officer for Richmond Valley Council – a list of Disclosure Officers for 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.
- Mayor – the Mayor may receive reports from any member of staff of Richmond Valley Council or any Councillor of Richmond Valley Council, where the report concerns the General Manager or a Councillor.

There are different meanings of manager for different types of public officials under section 15 of the PID Act. The following are considered managers for Richmond Valley Council:

- For a public official who is a person providing services or exercising functions on behalf of an agency (including a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer) or an employee, partner or officer of an entity that provides services on behalf of an agency or exercises functions of an agency — their manager is taken to be the public official in that agency who oversees those services or functions, or who manages the relevant contract or volunteering arrangement.
- For all other public officials — this is the person to whom the public official reports directly or indirectly, or who supervises them directly or indirectly.



## *Making a report to a recipient outside of Richmond Valley 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:

- Head of another agency — this means the head of any public service agency
- Integrity agency — a list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy
- 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
- Minister or a member of a Minister's staff – however, the report must be made in writing.

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

## *Making a report to a Member of Parliament or journalist*

Disclosures to a Member of Parliament (MP) or journalist 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 Richmond Valley Council:
  - notification that Richmond Valley Council will not investigate the serious wrongdoing and will also not refer the previous disclosure to another agency, or
  - the following information at the end of the investigation period:
    - notice of Richmond Valley Council's 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.

### **(f) 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 us to investigate the matter(s) you have disclosed if we cannot contact you for further information.

### **(g) 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.

### **(h) 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 us 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.

### **(i) Deeming that a report is a voluntary PID**

The General Manager 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 the General Manager 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. For more information about the deeming power, see the Ombudsman's guideline 'Deeming that a disclosure is a voluntary PID'.

### **(j) Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?**

Please speak with one of Council's Disclosure Officers, listed at Appendix A.

## 2. PROTECTIONS

### (a) 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 Richmond Valley Council that concerns serious wrongdoing relating to Richmond Valley Council has been made, we 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.

## (b) 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 outlined below:

- **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:
  - breaching a duty of secrecy or confidentiality, or
  - breaching another restriction on disclosure.

## 3. 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 Richmond Valley Council via a Disclosure Officer (refer Annexure A). Reports can also be made to an integrity agency. A list of integrity agencies is located at Annexure B of this policy.

## 4. GENERAL SUPPORT

Once you have made a report, a key contact person will be appointed to assist you through this process. Support is also available via Council's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – further information can be obtained on Council's Intranet or via our People & Culture (P&C) team.

Questions pertaining to the PID Act and reporting generally, should be referred to the NSW Ombudsman.

## 5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF RICHMOND VALLEY COUNCIL EMPLOYEES

Certain people within Council have responsibilities under the PID Act.

### (a) 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 that Richmond Valley Council comply with this policy and the PID Act
- ensuring that Richmond Valley 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.

### (b) Disclosure Coordinator and Disclosure Officers

The Disclosure Coordinator and 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
- ensuring that any oral reports that have been received are recorded in writing.

The Disclosure Coordinator has the added responsibility of overseeing the actions of Disclosure Officers and acting as the primary contact for PID matters.

### (c) 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.

Note that the term 'manager' within the PID Act is more broadly interpreted to mean any employee who directly, or indirectly, supervises staff. Or a staff member who oversees a contractor, subcontractor or volunteer. Note that 'manager' is not restricted to members of Council's management team.

### (d) 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 Richmond Valley 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.

## 6. HOW WE WILL DEAL WITH VOLUNTARY PIDs

### (a) How we will acknowledge that we have received a report and keep the person who made it informed

When a Disclosure Officer in Richmond Valley 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 we will deal 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 about 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. Updates will take a format (i.e. phone conversation or correspondence) as agreed upon with you. 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.

### (b) How Richmond Valley Council will deal with voluntary PIDs

Once a report that may be a voluntary PID is received we 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.

Once a Disclosure Officer receives a PID, it will be reported to the Disclosure Coordinator for action in accordance with the PID Act and this policy. An assessment will be made with regard to whether the matter will be dealt with by the Disclosure Coordinator or whether an internal or external referral may need to be made.

### ***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 Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy.

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. We can, but are not obligated to, request the NSW Ombudsman to conciliate the matter.

### ***Cease dealing with report as voluntary PID***

We 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). In this case it will be dealt with in accordance with our Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy, and you will be advised of the reasons for this decision.

### ***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 will let you know the reasons for this and notify the NSW Ombudsman of our decision.

### **(c) How Richmond Valley 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 we 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:

- We will limit 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, we will:

- advise the person whose identity may become known, at the earliest opportunity
- update the agency's risk assessment and risk management plan
- implement strategies to minimise the risk of detrimental action
- provide additional supports to the person who has made the PID
- remind persons who become aware of the identifying information of the consequences for failing to maintain confidentiality and that engaging in detrimental action is a criminal offence and may also be a disciplinary matter.



#### (d) How Richmond Valley Council will assess and minimise the risk of detrimental action

Richmond Valley 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.

We 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.

We 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 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 include 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.

## **(e) How Richmond Valley Council will deal with allegations of a detrimental action offence**

If we become aware of an allegation that a detrimental action offence has occurred or may occur, we will:

- take all steps possible to stop the action and protect the person
- 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.

Referrals about alleged detrimental offence action will be undertaken by the Disclosure Coordinator.

## **(f) What Richmond Valley 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, we 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.

Oversight of implementation of recommended actions will be the responsibility of the Disclosure Coordinator. A formal, written plan of proposed or recommended corrective actions will be provided to the PID maker by the Disclosure Coordinator.

## **7. REVIEW AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

### **(a) Internal review**

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

- that Richmond Valley Council is not required to deal with the report as a voluntary PID
- to stop dealing with the report because Richmond Valley 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.

We 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 our decision. The application should state the reasons why you consider Richmond Valley Council's decision should not have been made. You may also submit any other relevant material with your application.

A request for an internal review can be made in writing to:

General Manager  
Richmond Valley Council  
Locked Bag 10  
CASINO NSW 2470

Upon receipt of an internal review, the applicant will be advised which person or department will conduct the review and the proposed timeframes for completion of the review.

### **(b) Voluntary dispute resolution**

If a dispute arises between Richmond Valley Council 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 we and the maker of the report are willing to resolve the dispute.

## **8. OTHER AGENCY OBLIGATIONS**

### **(a) Record-keeping requirements**

Richmond Valley Council must keep full and accurate records with respect to all information received in connection with the PID Act. This ensures that we comply with our obligations under the *State Records Act 1998*. Records will be maintained in line with Council's Records Management Operational Policy.

### **(b) Reporting of voluntary PIDs and Richmond Valley Council annual return to the Ombudsman**

Each year we provide an annual return to the NSW Ombudsman which includes:

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

The collation of data for the annual return will be managed by Council's Governance Department.

### **(c) How Richmond Valley Council will ensure compliance with the PID Act and this policy**

This policy will be reviewed by Council's Governance Department at the time of any relevant legislative changes, compliance requirements or at least every four years. The reviewed policy will be presented to Council for formal adoption.

Version Number	Date	Reason / Comments
1	02/2006	New policy
2	10/2011	Review
3	12/2015	Review
4	05/2020	Review & rename
5	09/2023	Rewrite of policy in line with new requirements under the <i>Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022</i> .

## Annexure A — Names and contact details of Disclosure Officers for Richmond Valley Council

Position under PID Act	Position holder
<b>Head of Agency</b>	<b>General Manager</b> Vaughan Macdonald Phone 02 6660 0300
<b>Disclosure Coordinator</b>	<b>Director Organisational Services</b> Ryan Gaiter Phone 02 6660 0368
<b>Disclosure Officer</b>	<b>Director Community Service Delivery</b> Angela Jones Phone 02 6660 0262
<b>Disclosure Officer</b>	<b>Manager People and Culture</b> Luke Fleming Phone 02 6660 0241
<b>Mayor</b> For reports about the General Manager or Councillors only	<b>Mayor</b> Cr Robert Mustow Phone 0407 624 224
<i>Disclosure Officers nominated by location:</i>	
<b>Evans Head Administration Office</b>	<b>Development Assessment Planner</b> Cherie Smith Phone 02 6660 0222
<b>Richmond Upper Clarence Regional Library</b>	<b>Manager Regional Library</b> Gary Ellem Phone 02 6660 0359
<b>Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange</b>	<b>NRLX Redevelopment &amp; Operations Manager</b> Bradley Willis Phone 0408 203 654
<b>Water Treatment Plant</b>	<b>Operations Coordinator Water &amp; Sewer</b> Sandeep Chugh Phone 02 6660 0224
<b>Sewerage Treatment Plant</b>	<b>Operations Officer – Water &amp; Sewer Services</b> David Cash Phone 02 6660 0343
<b>Depot (Casino)</b>	<b>Senior Mechanic</b> Luke Barber Phone 02 6662 6811
<b>Depot (Evans Head)</b>	<b>Senior Mechanic</b> Gordon King Phone 02 6682 5522
<b>Depot (Coraki)</b>	<b>Workshop Supervisor</b> Scott Robinson Phone 02 6683 2763
<b>Landfill</b>	<b>Overseer Waste Management</b> Malcolm Massey Phone 0436 609 412
<b>Visitor Information Centres</b>	<b>Manager Community Connection</b> Sharon Davidson Phone 02 6660 0257

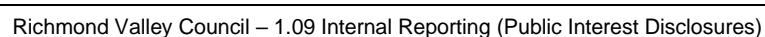
*Note: In addition to the above nominated officers, a report can be made to your **manager** — this is the person who directly, or indirectly, supervises you. It can also be the person who you directly, or indirectly, report to. You may have more than one manager. Your manager will make sure that the report is communicated to a Disclosure Officer on your behalf or may accompany you while you make the report to a Disclosure Officer.*

*Notification can be made via telephone or via correspondence in a sealed envelope marked “Disclosure Coordinator/ Disclosure Officer – Confidential”.*

## 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)	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 451 524 between 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday <b>Writing:</b> Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:info@ombo.nsw.gov.au">info@ombo.nsw.gov.au</a>
The Auditor-General	Serious and substantial waste of public money by auditable agencies	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9275 7100 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 12, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:governance@audit.nsw.gov.au">governance@audit.nsw.gov.au</a>
Independent Commission Against Corruption	Corrupt conduct	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 8281 5999 or toll free on 1800 463 909 (callers outside Sydney) between 9am and 3pm, Monday to Friday <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 500, Sydney NSW 2001 or faxing 02 9264 5364 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au">icac@icac.nsw.gov.au</a>
The Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption	Serious maladministration by the ICAC or the ICAC officers	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9228 3023 <b>Writing:</b> PO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au">oiicac_executive@oiicac.nsw.gov.au</a>
The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the NSW Police Force or the NSW Crime Commission	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9321 6700 or 1800 657 079 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 3880, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au">contactus@lecc.nsw.gov.au</a>
The Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	Serious maladministration by the LECC and LECC officers	<b>Telephone:</b> 02 9228 3023 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:oilecc_executive@oilecc.nsw.gov.au">oilecc_executive@oilecc.nsw.gov.au</a>
Office of the Local Government	Local government pecuniary interest contraventions	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:olg@olg.nsw.gov.au">olg@olg.nsw.gov.au</a>
The Privacy Commissioner	Privacy contraventions	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 472 679 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au">ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au</a>
The Information Commissioner	Government information contraventions	<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 472 679 <b>Writing:</b> GPO Box 7011, Sydney NSW 2001 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au">ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au</a>

## Annexure D: Record of Public Interest Disclosure





**RICHMOND VALLEY COUNCIL  
RECORD OF PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Details of Disclosure:**

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**Signature of reporter:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of receiver:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Action taken:**

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**Result of action:**

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**Notice/knowledge of any detrimental action:**

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**Signature of Mayor / General Manager / Disclosure Coordinator / Disclosure Officer (select one):**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_