

Customer Complaints Management Policy

Owner Governance and Strategy
Last Reviewed 29/08/2018

CHC/2018/4137
Version 1.00

1. Purpose

This policy is designed to ensure that customer complaints about departmental products and services are managed through an effective and consistent process that meets the requirements of the *Public Service Act 2008* and the current Australian standard for handling customer complaints (AS/NZS 10002:2014).

Customer complaint definition, *Public Service Act, 2008, s 219A (4)*.

- (a) Means a complaint about the service or action of a department, or its staff, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service, or action: and
- (b) includes for example, a complaint about any of the following –
 - (i) a decision made or a failure to make a decision, by a public service employee of the department;
 - (ii) an act or failure to act, of the department;
 - (iii) the formulation of a proposal or intention by the department;
 - (iv) the making of a recommendation by the department;
 - (v) the customer service provided by a public service employee of the department

2. Policy

The department is committed to delivering high quality services and welcomes customer feedback on its products, services, performance and staff as a means of monitoring and improving service delivery to customers, as well as enhancing organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

The department is also committed to ensuring that all customer complaints are managed in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair manner. Complainants will be treated with respect and will receive a professional level of service throughout the complaint management process.

Together, the policy, procedure, personnel and technology used by the department to receive, record, respond to and report on customer complaints comprise the Customer Complaints Management System (CCCMS).

This policy deals with Customer Complaints as depicted in **Appendix 1**, the Complaint Management Framework. Each type of complaint is addressed within the appropriate complaint-handling process as detailed in **Appendix 1**.

3. Principles

Refer to **Appendix 2** for details regarding the principles for receiving, managing and responding to Customer Complaints.

4. Authority

Public Service Act 2008, section 219A.

5. Scope

This policy does not replace pre-existing processes for dealing with complaints, for example:

- (a) The review and appeal provisions in the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*
- (b) The review and appeal provisions in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
For the further details of these review provisions refer to the relevant section of the Act.
- (c) The internal review provision in the *Right to Information Act 2009* (RTI)

Further details on the RTI process can be found on the department's Right to Information internet page.

- (d) The complaint handling provision in the *Information Privacy Act 2009*;
- (e) The complaint process for *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2001*
- (f) The processes for dealing with an allegation of corrupt conduct under the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*;
- (g) The employee disciplinary process in accordance with the *Public Service Act 2008*.

Refer to the Complaint Management Framework for other complaint procedures (**Appendix 1**) or seek further advice by contacting the Director, Business and Professional Services, Governance and Strategy, Corporate Services.

6. Responsibilities

Responsibilities are detailed in the Customer Complaints Management Procedure.

7. Definitions and glossary of terms – refer to Appendix 3.

8. Related Documents

- Customer Complaints Management Procedure
- Customer Complaints – Step 1 - Complaint Receiving and Handling Guide
- Customer Complaints – Step 2 - Internal Complaint Assessment and Resolution Guide
- Customer Complaints – Step 3 – Complaint Internal Review Guide
- Customer Complaints – Step 4 – Complaint Reporting Monitoring and Reviewing Guide
- Customer Complaints Management Checklist
- Corporate Governance Framework
- Information Privacy Compliance Policy and Information Privacy Complaint Management Procedure
- Conflict of Interest and Engaging in Other Employment Procedure
- Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy and Procedure
- Employee Complaints Management Policy and Procedure
- Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service, Appropriate Behaviour Guidelines and Investigation and Discipline Procedure
- Corrupt Conduct Management Policy and Procedure
- Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Procedure

9. Further information

For further information please contact, Executive Director, Governance and Strategy, Corporate Services.

10. Review

This policy shall be reviewed within two years of the date of the policy.

11. Approval

Signed: *B Klaassen*

Ben Klaassen
Acting Director-General
Department of Environment and Science

Date: 15 January 2019

12. Version history

Date	Version	Action	Description / comments
15 January 2019	1.00	Approved by the Acting Director General	New policy document

13. **Keywords:** Customer; complaint; dissatisfaction; review; external review; Ombudsman; service

14. Appendix

Appendix 1. – Complaints Management Framework

Appendix 2. – Customer complaints principles

Appendix 3. – Definitions and Glossary

Appendix 1 Complaints Management Framework

Type of Complaint	<u>Category 1</u> Customer complaints - DES products and services	<u>Category 2</u> Customer complaints – breaches of privacy	<u>Category 3</u> Customer Complaints - Employee misconduct complaints	<u>Category 4</u> Employee corrupt conduct/Public Interest Disclosures	<u>Category 5</u> Employee complaints	<u>Category 6</u> Other complaints
Definition / description	Customer expression of dissatisfaction about DES services, products, decisions or actions of staff	Expression of dissatisfaction relating to a breach in respect of privacy information	Employee conduct that contravenes the expected behaviours of the Code of Conduct E.g. Employee was rude to a customer	Employee conduct that meets the <i>Crime and Corruption Act 2001</i> definition E.g. Fraud or Corruption	Staff complaints about their employment circumstances; a decision or action perceived as unfair, workplace harassment	Examples include: wildlife or environment regulation/legislation /offences Complaints about a grants process Pollution or Wildlife incident Complaints related to statutory processes
Key contact	Client Engagement Unit, Governance and Strategy	Principal Governance Officer, Privacy, Governance and Strategy	Workforce Relations and Safety, Corporate Services, Human Resources	Director, Executive Services, Governance and Strategy Director, Business and Professional Services, Governance and Strategy	Manager, Supervisor, or Corporate Services, Human Resources	Refer to the DES Internet General Enquiries page

Appendix 2 - Customer Complaints Principles

Enabling Complaints

People Focus

- The department has a strong commitment to addressing any issues raised within a reasonable timeframe
- Everybody has a right to complain
- The department will have a proactive approach to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints
- Customers who have made a complaint will be treated with respect and as far as practicable and appropriate will be involved in the complaints process

Ensuring No Detriment to Complainant

- The department will take all reasonable steps to ensure that complainants are not adversely affected because they or their authorised representative on their behalf have made a complaint

Visibility and Transparency

- Information about how to lodge a complaint and the complaints process will be published on the department's website, intranet site and at publically accessible offices

Accessibility

- Complaints can be made verbally or in writing, and in person, over the phone, by letter, email or online form. Complaints can also be made anonymously or by an authorised representative
- Assistance making a complaint will be provided to customers with specific needs, such as those from non-English speaking backgrounds and people with a disability

No Charges

- Complainants will not be charged a fee to lodge a complaint with the department

Managing Complaints

Responsiveness

- Customer complaints about departmental products and services will be promptly assessed, categorised, recorded electronically in the department's Ministerial and Executive Correspondence System (MECS), and allocated to the business area responsible for the policy, product, service or staff member for investigation and response within set timeframes
- The department will endeavour to resolve complaints in as timely a manner as possible, with consideration given to the complexity of the complaint and other relevant issues
- Complaints will be resolved informally at the first point of contact in the relevant business area wherever possible
- Complainants will be promptly informed where the department is unable to deal with a part or all of a complaint
- Complaints received will be promptly acknowledged, and reasonable progress updates will be provided on request
- To minimise complaints and facilitate early resolution, the department will endeavour to explain policies, procedures and decisions when communicating with a complainant
- Complainants will be advised about –
 - The complaint process;
 - Expected timeframes;
 - Complainant involvement in the process;
 - The possible or likely outcome of their complaint, where practicable
- There are some circumstances in which it is appropriate for the department not to investigate a complaint, or refuse to investigate a complaint. The circumstances where this may occur is detailed in the Customer Complaints Management Procedure. In those circumstances, the complainant will be informed of the reasons for the decision in writing and advised of any options for having the decision reviewed.

Objectivity and Fairness

- Each complaint will be managed in an objective and impartial manner
- Conflicting interests will not interfere with, or be perceived to interfere with the management and resolution of complaints. For example, if an internal review is requested by the complainant the review will be undertaken by an employee not involved in the original decision
- Where relevant, any perceived, or actual conflicts of interest will be managed in accordance with the department's Conflict of Interest and Engaging in Other Employment Procedure
- Where appropriate the department will defer actions that might have significant detrimental impact on the complainant until the complaint has been finalised

Equity

- All complaints will be addressed in an equitable manner and in accordance with the department's Customer Complaint Management policy

Privacy and Disclosure

- Personally identifiable information about individuals will only be disclosed or used in compliance with the *Information Privacy Act 2009* and the *Public Records Act 2002*
- In accordance with the department's Information Security Policy, information provided by complainants as confidential will not be made available or disclosed to unauthorised individuals

Communication

- The department will provide explanations for policies, procedures and decisions when communicating with complainants

Managing the Parties

Conduct of Parties

- Complainants who act in an unreasonable manner will be managed in accordance with the Customer Complaints Procedure

Complaint Involving Multiple Parties

- Complaints that involve more than one division within the department will be coordinated by a complaint manager/complaint decision maker mutually agreed by the divisions and a combined response prepared
- Complaints involving more than one agency will be facilitated by the receiving agency communicating the multi-jurisdictional responsibility to the complainant and obtaining consent to share the other aspects of the complaint with relevant agencies
- Each agency will be responsible for resolving their area of responsibility and maintaining communication with other agency/agencies if necessary

Empowerment of Staff

- The department will ensure that staff are provided with access to appropriate information and training relevant to their role within the CCMS
- Staff feedback on the operation of the CCMS is encouraged and will be used when reviewing the system's effectiveness

Feedback

- Customers will receive appropriate, courteous and timely responses to their complaints
- Complainants will be notified of available review options. If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, it may be further investigated via internal or external review where appropriate
- If a review will not change the outcome of the complaint the complainant will need to be informed of the reasons and advised that the next option is an external review by the Queensland Ombudsman

Accountability, Learning and Prevention

Accountability

- Accountability for the operation of the CCMS will be made clear through the policy, procedure and associated guides

Continuous Improvement

- The department acknowledges that responding to and learning from complaints is essential to continual improvement of service delivery

Prevention of Ongoing Disputes

- Where practicable, the department will endeavour to mitigate the likelihood of escalating or ongoing disputes regarding a complaint matter

Monitoring Effectiveness

- Responding to and learning from complaints will form an essential part of the department's ongoing efforts to implement continual quality improvement. Complaint resolutions, systemic issues and trends will be monitored and reported to Executive Management to enable improvements in services, processes and systems at the local and departmental levels.
- Information on complaints and resolutions will be published in the department's Annual Report and on its website

Resources and training

- Appropriate resources and staff training will be provided to support the effective implementation of the Complaints Management System and operationalisation of specific complaints management roles and authorisations.
- Where complaint handling is a significant part of an employee's role, achievement of complaint handling related matters (e.g. timeframes) will be included in the employee's Performance and Development Planning Agreement.

Appendix 3 Definitions and Glossary

Anonymous complaint – A complaint received by the department from a person whose identity is unknown.

Bias - An inclination or prejudice, for or against one person or group, that is real or perceived, and which a third party would consider unfair.

Complaint - Customer complaint definition, *Public Service Act, 2008, s 219A (4)*.

- (c) Means a complaint about the service or action of a department, or its staff, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service, or action: and
- (d) includes for example, a complaint about any of the following –
 - (vi) a decision made or a failure to make a decision, by a public service employee of the department;
 - (vii) an act or failure to act, of the department;
 - (viii) the formulation of a proposal or intention by the department;
 - (ix) the making of a recommendation by the department;
 - (x) the customer service provided by a public service employee of the department

Customer Complaints Management System - The policy, procedures, personnel and technology used by the department to receive, record, respond to and report on customer complaints.

Conflict of Interest – A conflict between a public official's duties and responsibilities in serving the public interest, and the public official's personal interests (including interests of the public official's partner and/or the public official's dependents), which can arise due to avoiding personal losses, as well as gaining personal advantage, whether financial or otherwise.

Customer – A person, company or organisation with whom the department has dealings.

External review – When a customer remains dissatisfied and has exhausted the department's complaints management process they can seek an external review from the Queensland Ombudsman.

Internal review of a customer complaint – If a complainant is not satisfied with the department's response to their complaint they can request an internal review. An internal review involves a senior officer revisiting the original process and the outcome.

Systemic issue or problem – A failure of a product, service, system, policy or procedure which causes or contributes to a complaint, as opposed to a staff member's error in judgement.