



NSWALC *Public Interest Disclosures Act* internal reporting policy

Under section 6D of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994* (the PID Act), public authorities are required to have a policy and procedures for receiving, assessing and dealing with public interest disclosures. This policy is based on this model policy and the NSW Ombudsman's guidelines.

NSWALC's internal reporting policy is supported by clear, easy to understand procedures and further advice on how to make a report are in the Ombudsman's factsheets:

[*Who can report wrongdoing? Guideline B1;*](#)

[*What should be reported? Guideline B2;*](#)

[*What's not a public interest disclosure? Guideline B3; &*](#)

[*Reporting pathways. Guideline B4.*](#)

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1. Purpose and context of the policy

The Protected Disclosures Act 1994 renamed the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994* (the PID Act) sets out the system under which people working within the NSW public sector including individuals who are engaged as contractors, can make complaints about the functioning of the public sector in a way that minimises the risk of reprisal.

This policy provides detailed information about how you can make complaints regarding “corrupt conduct”, “maladministration” and “serious and substantial waste” which you honestly believe occurs or occurred at New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) under the PID Act. The NSW Ombudsman has oversight of the PID Act and section 248 of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* makes the NSWALC a public authority that is reviewable by the NSW Ombudsman.

This policy addresses the relevant provisions of the PID Act that NSWALC must comply with and the policy has been approved by the NSWALC Chief Executive Officer who is responsible for ensuring compliance with the PID Act. From 1 January 2012, NSWALC must provide a half yearly report to the NSW Ombudsman on our compliance with the PID Act. NSWALC staff who come forward and report wrongdoing will help to promote integrity, accountability and good management within NSWALC.

2. Organisational commitment

As the State’s peak representative body in Aboriginal affairs, NSWALC aims to improve and protect the interest of its members and the broader Aboriginal community of NSW.

NSWALC is strongly committed to protecting staff (“whistleblowers”) who make disclosures concerning corrupt conduct, maladministration and serious and substantial waste of public money. NSWALC is also committed to ensuring the confidentiality of the identity.

NSWALC recognises that under the PID Act, it is an offence to take reprisal action against staff who report such matters, and it has put in place this internal reporting policy to assist and encourage staff to make such reports. NSWALC’s policy is based on the model policy recommended by the NSW Ombudsman.

In summary, to be protected under the PID Act, a disclosure must be made to:

- the Chief Executive Officer; or
- the Disclosure Coordinator (the Director of Corporate Governance Unit); or
- one of the investigating authorities, i.e.: NSW Ombudsman; or ICAC; or Auditor-General;

NSWALC will use all its best endeavours to deal with disclosures thoroughly and impartially and, if wrongdoing is found, take action to rectify it.

If there are any questions regarding this policy, contact the *Director of Corporate Governance* on (02) 9689 4415.

3. Roles and responsibilities of staff

This policy will apply to all persons employed and individuals contracted by NSWALC. Any persons employed and individuals contracted by NSWALC can make a report pursuant to the PID Act without any risks of reprisal.

NSWALC encourages staff to report known or suspected incidences of corrupt conduct, maladministration or serious and substantial waste in accordance with the NSWALC Code of Conduct and this policy.

Staff must not engage in any behaviour which may be perceived as victimisation, bullying or harassment of another person who raises a complaint under the PID Act.

The complainant or “whistleblower” has an obligation to behave in a manner that does not influence, obstruct or corrupt the process of the NSWALC investigation of his/her allegations, and to not make statements that are false or misleading.

4. What should be reported?

You should report any wrongdoing you see within NSWALC. Reports about the four categories of serious wrongdoing – corrupt conduct, maladministration, serious and substantial waste of public money, and government information contravention – will be dealt with under the PID Act as public interest disclosures and according to this policy.

a. Corrupt conduct

Corrupt conduct is the dishonest or partial exercise of official functions by a public official.

For example, this could include:

- the improper use of knowledge, power or position for personal gain or the advantage of others
- acting dishonestly or unfairly, or breaching public trust
- a member of the public influencing or trying to influence a public official to use their position in a way that is dishonest, biased or breaches public trust.

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

b. Maladministration

Maladministration is 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, this could include:

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

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

c. Serious and substantial waste of public money

Serious and substantial waste is the uneconomical, inefficient or ineffective use of resources that could result in the loss or wastage of public resources.

For example, this could include:

- not following a competitive tendering process for a large scale contract
- having bad or no processes in place for a system involving large amounts of public funds.

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

d. Government information contravention

A government information contravention is a failure to properly fulfil functions under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act).

For example, this could include:

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

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

e. Other wrongdoing

Although reports about the previous four categories of conduct can attract the specific protections of the PID Act, you should report all activities or incidents that you believe are wrong.

For example, these could include:

- harassment or unlawful discrimination
- reprisal action against a person who has reported wrongdoing
- practices that endanger the health or safety of staff or the public.

These types of issues should be reported to a supervisor, in line with NSWALC's policies. All NSWALC's policies and procedures can be accessed from the NSWALC Intranet: <http://intranet/pp/Pages/default.aspx>

Even if these reports are not dealt with as protected disclosures, NSWALC will consider each matter and make every attempt to protect the staff member making the report from any form of reprisal.

5. When will a report be protected?

NSWALC will support any staff who report wrongdoing. For a report to be considered a public interest disclosure, it has to meet all of the requirements under the PID Act. These requirements are:

- The person making the disclosure must honestly believe on reasonable grounds that the information shows or tends to show wrongdoing.

For example, you come across documentation that shows payment for a staff member's personal expenses instead of it being a legitimate NSWALC expense.

- The report has to be made to one or more of the following:
 - a position nominated in this policy – see section 9 (b) & (c) below
 - the *Chief Executive Officer*
 - one of the investigating authorities nominated in the PID Act – see section 10 below

Reports by staff will not be considered to be public interest disclosures if they:

- mostly question the merits of government policy
- are made with the sole or substantial motive of avoiding dismissal or other disciplinary action.

6. How to make a report

You can report wrongdoing in writing or verbally. You are encouraged to make a report in writing as this can help to avoid any confusion or misinterpretation.

If a report is made verbally, the person receiving the report must make a comprehensive record of the disclosure and ask the person making the disclosure to sign this record. The staff member should keep a copy of this record.

If you are concerned about being seen making a report, ask to meet in a discreet location away from the workplace.

7. Can a report be anonymous?

There will be some situations where you may not want to identify yourself when you make a report. Although these reports will still be dealt with by NSWALC, it is best if you identify yourself. This allows us to provide you with any necessary protection and support, as well as feedback about the outcome of any investigation into the allegations.

It is important to realise that an anonymous disclosure may not prevent you from being identified. If we do not know who made the report, it is very difficult for us to prevent any reprisal action.

8. Maintaining confidentiality

NSWALC realises many staff will want their report to remain confidential. This can help to prevent any action being taken against you for reporting wrongdoing.

We are committed to keeping your identity, and the fact you have reported wrongdoing, confidential. However there may be situations where this may not be possible or appropriate. We will discuss with you whether it is possible to keep your report confidential.

If confidentiality cannot be maintained, we will develop a plan to support and protect you from risks of reprisal. You will be involved in developing this plan.

If you report wrongdoing, you should only discuss your report with those dealing with it. This will include the *Director of Corporate Governance* and the *Chief Executive Officer*.

9. Who can receive a report within NSWALC?

You are encouraged to report general wrongdoing to your supervisor. However the PID Act requires that – for a report to be a protected disclosure – it must be made to a public official in accordance with the organisation’s disclosure procedures. For NSWALC, this means this policy and any supporting procedures.

Any supervisor who receives a report that they believe may be a public interest disclosure must refer the staff member making the report to one of the positions listed below.

The following positions are the only staff within NSWALC who can receive a public interest disclosure.

a. Chief Executive Officer

You can report wrongdoing directly to the *Chief Executive Officer*. They are responsible for:

- deciding if a report is a public interest disclosure
- determining what needs to be done next, including referring it to other authorities
- deciding what needs to be done to correct any problem that has been identified.

The *Chief Executive Officer* must make sure there are systems in place in NSWALC to support and protect staff who report wrongdoing.

They are also responsible for referring actual or suspected corrupt conduct to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

The disclosure coordinator for NSWALC is *the Director of Corporate Governance*. The Director of Corporate Governance is located on Level 5, 33 Argyle Street, Parramatta and can be contacted on (02) 9689 4415.

b. Disclosures coordinator

The disclosures coordinator has a central role in dealing with reports made by staff. They receive them, assess them, and refer them to the people within NSWALC who can deal with them appropriately.

The disclosure coordinator for NSWALC is *the Director of Corporate Governance*. The Director of Corporate Governance is located on Level 5, 33 Argyle Street, Parramatta and can be contacted on (02) 9689 4415.

c. Disclosures officers

Disclosures officers are responsible for receiving, forwarding and/or dealing with reports made in accordance with this policy.

The disclosures officers for NSWALC are:

Deputy Chief Executive Officer: The Deputy Chief Executive Officer is located on Level 4, 33 Argyle Street, Parramatta and can be contacted on (02) 9689 4445.

Principal Legal Officer: The Principal Legal Officer is located on Level 7, 33 Argyle Street, Parramatta and can be contacted on (02) 9689 4413.

10. Who can receive a report outside of NSWALC

Staff are encouraged to report wrongdoing within NSWALC, but internal reporting is not your only option ([Reporting pathways. Guideline B4](#)). If you follow the guidance below, your report can still be a public interest disclosure.

You can choose to make your report to an investigating authority. You can do this first, or at any stage after your initial report to NSWALC. If your report is about the *Chief Executive Officer*, you should make it to an investigating authority.

You can also choose to make a report to a Member of Parliament or a journalist, but only in limited circumstances.

a. Investigating authorities

The PID Act lists a number of investigating authorities in NSW that staff can report wrongdoing to and the categories of wrongdoing each authority can deal with.

These authorities are:

- the Auditor-General — for serious and substantial waste
- the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) — for corrupt conduct
- the Ombudsman — for maladministration
- the ICAC Inspector — for disclosures about the ICAC or its staff
- the Information Commissioner — for disclosures about a government information contravention.

You should contact the relevant authority for advice about how to make a disclosure to them. Contact details for each investigating authority are provided at the end of this policy.

You should be aware that it is very likely the investigating authority will discuss the case with NSWALC. We will make every effort to assist and cooperate with the investigating authority to ensure the matter is dealt with appropriately and there is a satisfactory outcome. We will also provide appropriate support and assistance to staff who report wrongdoing to an investigating authority.

b. Members of Parliament or journalists

To have the protections of the PID Act, staff reporting wrongdoing to a Member of Parliament (MP) or a journalist must have already made substantially the same report to one of the following:

- the *Chief Executive Officer*
- a person nominated in this policy
- an investigating authority in accordance with the PID Act.

Also, NSWALC or the investigating authority that received the report must have either:

- decided not to investigate the matter
- decided to investigate the matter, but not completed the investigation within six months of the original report
- investigated the matter but not recommended any action as a result
- not told the person who made the report, within six months of the report being made, whether the matter will be investigated.

Most importantly – to be protected under the PID Act – if you report wrongdoing to an MP or a journalist you will need to be able to prove that you have reasonable grounds for believing that the disclosure is substantially true and that it is in fact substantially true.

If you report wrongdoing to a person or an organisation that is not listed above, you will not be protected under the PID Act. This may mean you will be in breach of legal obligations or NSWALC's code of conduct – by, for example, disclosing confidential information.

For more information about reporting wrongdoing outside NSWALC, contact the *Director of Corporate Governance* or the NSW Ombudsman's Public Interest Disclosures Unit. Their contact details are provided at the end of this policy.

11. Feedback to staff who report wrongdoing

Staff 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 the people who can tell you what is happening.

The PID Act requires that you are provided with an acknowledgement letter and a copy of this policy within 45 days after you have made your report. We will attempt to get this information 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
- likely timeframes for any investigation
- information about the resources available within NSWALC to handle any concerns you may have
- information about external agencies and services you can access for support.

This information will be given to you 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 purposes of investigating the matter, and an opportunity to talk about this.

At the end of any investigation, you will be given:

- 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 that was identified
- advice about whether you will be involved as a witness in any further matters, such as disciplinary or criminal proceedings.

12. Protection against reprisals

The PID Act provides protection for people reporting wrongdoing by imposing penalties on anyone who takes detrimental action substantially in reprisal for them making the public interest disclosure.

NSWALC will not tolerate any reprisal action against staff who report wrongdoing. The criminal penalties that can be imposed include imprisonment or fines. Detrimental action is also misconduct that justifies disciplinary action. People who take detrimental action against someone who has made a disclosure can also be required to pay damages for any loss suffered by that person.

Detrimental action means action causing, comprising or involving any of the following:

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

a. Responding to reprisals

NSWALC will act to protect staff who report wrongdoing from reprisals.

When a report is received, we will ensure that a thorough risk assessment is conducted. This will identify any risks to the member of staff who reported the wrongdoing, as well as strategies to deal with those risks.

If you believe that detrimental action has been or is being taken against you or someone else who has reported wrongdoing in reprisal for making a report, you should tell your supervisor, the *Director of Corporate Governance* or the *Chief Executive Officer* immediately.

All supervisors must report any suspicions they have that reprisal action against a staff member is occurring, or any reports that are made to them, to the *Director of Corporate Governance* or the *Chief Executive Officer*.

If the *Director of Corporate Governance* becomes aware of reprisal action against a person who has made a disclosure, they will:

- ensure a senior and experienced member of staff, who has not been involved in dealing with the initial disclosure, will investigate the suspected reprisal
- give the results of that investigation to the *Chief Executive Officer* for a decision
- if it has been established that reprisal action is occurring against someone who has made a disclosure, take all steps possible to stop that activity and protect the member of staff who made the disclosure
- take appropriate disciplinary or criminal action against anyone proven to have taken or threatened any action in reprisal for making a disclosure.

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

The *Chief Executive Officer* may issue specific directions to help protect against reprisals, including:

- issuing warnings to those alleged to have taken reprisal action against the member of staff who made the disclosure
- relocating the member of staff who made the disclosure or the subject officer within the current workplace
- transferring the member of staff who made the disclosure or the staff member who is the subject of the allegation to another position for which they are qualified
- granting the member of staff who made the disclosure or the subject officer leave of absence during the investigation of the disclosure.

These directions will only be taken if the member of staff who made the disclosure agrees to it. The *Director of Corporate Governance* will make it clear to other staff that this action was taken in consultation with the staff member and with management support – and it is not a punishment.

If you have reported wrongdoing and feel that any reprisal action is not being dealt with effectively, contact the Ombudsman or the ICAC – depending on the type of wrongdoing you reported. Contact details for all these investigating authorities are included at the end of this policy.

b. Protection against legal action

If you make a disclosure in accordance with the PID Act, you will not be subject to any liability and no action, claim or demand can be taken against you for making the disclosure. You will not have breached any confidentiality or secrecy obligations and you will have the defence of absolute privilege in defamation.

13. Support for those reporting wrongdoing

NSWALC will make sure that staff who have reported wrongdoing, regardless of whether they have made a public interest disclosure, are provided with access to any professional support they may need as a result of the reporting process – such as stress management, counselling services, legal or career advice.

We also have staff who will support those who report wrongdoing. They are responsible for initiating and coordinating support, particularly to those who are suffering any form of reprisal.

The support officer for NSWALC is the *Manager, Human Resources and Training*. The Manager, Human Resources and Training is located on Level 4, 33 Argyle Street, Parramatta and can be contacted on (02) 9689 4406.

All supervisors must notify the *Director of Corporate Governance* if they believe a staff member is suffering any detrimental action as a result of disclosing wrongdoing.

14. Sanctions for making false or misleading disclosures

It is important that all staff are aware that it is a criminal offence under the PID Act to wilfully make a false or misleading statement when reporting wrongdoing.

15. Support for the subject of a report

NSWALC is committed to ensuring staff who are the subject of a report of wrongdoing are treated fairly and reasonably. If you are the subject of a report, you will be:

- treated fairly and impartially
- told your rights and obligations under our policies and procedures
- kept informed during any investigation
- given the opportunity to respond to any allegation made against you
- told the result of any investigation.

16. Review

This policy will be reviewed by NSWALC every twelve/eighteen months. For any advice or guidance about this review, contact the NSW Ombudsman's Public Interest Disclosures Unit.

17. More information

More information around public interest disclosures is available on our intranet. Staff can also access advice and guidance from the *Director of Corporate Governance* and the NSW Ombudsman's website at www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.

18. Resources

The contact details for external investigating authorities that staff can make a public interest disclosure to or seek advice from are listed below.

For disclosures about corrupt conduct:

Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)
Phone: 02 8281 5999
Toll free: 1800 463 909
Tel. typewriter (TTY): 02 8281 5773
Facsimile: 02 9264 5364
Email: icac@icac.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.icac.nsw.gov.au
Address: Level 21, 133 Castlereagh Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

For disclosures about maladministration:

NSW Ombudsman
Phone: 02 9286 1000
Toll free (outside Sydney metro): 1800 451 524
Tel. typewriter (TTY): 02 9264 8050
Facsimile: 02 9283 2911
Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
Address: Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000

For disclosures about serious and substantial waste:

Auditor-General of the NSW Audit Office
Phone: 02 9275 7100
Facsimile: 02 9275 7200
Email: mail@audit.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.audit.nsw.gov.au
Address: Level 15, 1 Margaret Street, Sydney NSW 2000

For disclosures about breaches of the GIPA Act:

Information Commissioner
Toll free: 1800 463 626
Facsimile: 02 8114 3756
Email: oinfo@oic.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.oic.nsw.gov.au
Address: Level 11, 1 Castlereagh Street, Sydney NSW 2000