



**THINK  
BEFORE  
YOU POST**

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) recently released a circular to help APS employees understand their responsibilities when making public comment.





*Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online* provides advice on the practical application of the APS Values and Code of Conduct for employees participating in online and public discussions. It is a revision of Circular 2009/6.

David Leslie, Assistant Commissioner, Publishing, said APS employees have the same right to freedom of expression as other members of the community, but they need to consider how comments impact on maintaining an impartial and effective public service.

'Identifying yourself as an ATO employee and making public comment without proper approvals could damage community confidence in

the ATO,' David said. 'You also shouldn't represent yourself as an official ATO representative or comment without prior authority in a public forum about ATO topics. If you are unsure whether you can respond, consult the Media Unit or your manager.'

Making public comment is broad, and includes comments about current affairs on radio, TV, in letters to the media, academic or professional journals and online (including blogs, social media sites and forums). This includes comments made in an official or unofficial capacity.

It's important for staff to remember that even work-related comments made in an unofficial capacity need to adhere to APS values as part of ATO employment conditions.

Employees should clearly state that any unofficial commentary made is personal opinion, while ensuring comments are reasonable in nature and support the perception that employees are unbiased in their duties.

David suggested tax officers reconsider listing the ATO as their employer on their social media profiles, such as Facebook and Twitter, to avoid misperceptions about whether comments are official or personal in nature.

'To prevent this, it may be better to list your employer as "public service" rather than the ATO and to ensure your profile states that opinions expressed are your own,' he said.

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‘There is also a risk that employees’ names can be used by scammers targeting members of the public who use ATO staff names to give credibility to their schemes.’

David noted this message was particularly timely given recent reports of scammers using information provided on staff Facebook profiles to legitimise phishing scams.

‘It’s a type of identity fraud that we want to protect our employees from, so we recommend staff members avoid identifying themselves as ATO employees, or at least be aware of the risks involved in doing so. Staff should also refrain from using their ATO email address on social media sites,’ he said.

A new Corporate Management Practice Statement (CMPS) is being developed and will provide further guidance on official and unofficial (both professional and private) use of digital media by staff. \*

## When using digital media, remember:

- Comments posted to social media sites that are work-related are considered public comment.
- Your comments can affect the community’s confidence in the ATO.
- If you wish to advertise your occupation on your social media profile, think about using a broader description such as ‘public servant’.
- You should not use your ATO-issued email address on social media sites, regardless of whether the registration is for private or professional use. ATO employees must comply with the Email security in the ATO CMPI.



## AT A GLANCE:

- The APSC recently released a circular to help APS employees understand their responsibilities when making public comment.
- Employees should not represent themselves as official ATO representatives or comment without prior authority in a public forum about the ATO.

To access Circular 2012/1, [click here](#).

To read the Media Practice Statement PS CM 2007/03 about making official public comment, [click here](#).

To access the Email security in the ATO CMPI 2006/07/09, [click here](#).

To read the guidelines on the Proper use of IT facilities, [click here](#).