

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

31 May – 2 June 2011

Question No: BET 95

Topic: ATO – ATO Media function

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Bushby asked:


1. Which Division and Branch of ATO is responsible for media and public relations?
2. What are the main functions of ATO's media function – which campaigns and issues are currently a priority? Which media is given priority?
3. What is the reporting line for this ATO function?
4. What are the total number of SES and non SES staff allocated to this function?
5. Where are these members located by city and regional centre?
6. What is the sectional break up of personnel in this division/branch?
7. What is the total annual budget cost for the ATO media and public relations function?
8. How many trained journalists does ATO employ?
9. Does ATO have its own media clipping and monitoring facility, and how many ATO officers perform this function?
10. What is the total cost of externally provided media clipping services?
11. How does ATO ensure that its media and public relations teams respect the statutory privacy obligations applicable to ATO staff?
12. Does the ATO have a 'Chinese wall' between its media and operational functions, and how does this operate and with what checks and balances?
13. Do non-media staff make contact with the media, if so for what reasons and with what checks and balances?
14. How does ATO educate, train and trains its media staff in their ATO privacy obligations?
15. During the past 5 years have there been any instances where media briefings by ATO officials have breached their statutory obligations, and if so what were the follow up procedures?

Answer:

1. The media and issues management function (which includes public relations) is the responsibility of the ATO's Public Affairs branch, part of the Corporate Relations business line under the Corporate Services and Law Sub-plan.
2. The media unit provides strategic media advice to ATO management and other areas within the ATO. It is responsible for monitoring media, providing information to journalists and responding to media inquiries, in addition to positioning new ATO initiatives in the media. At present, the media unit is engaged in Tax Time and compliance program media activity. The media unit engages and is engaged by various channels including radio, print and online.

3. The media and issues management function reports to First Assistant Commissioner Corporate Relations, Second Commissioner Corporate Services and Law, and ultimately, the Commissioner of Taxation.
4. Currently, one Senior Executive Service (SES) Band 1 officer along with eight non-SES officers are allocated to the media and issues management function. One member of staff is on maternity leave.
5. All of these officers are located in Canberra, in the ATO's national office.
6. The number of officers quoted in response to Question 4 work in the media and issues management team which is part of the Public Affairs branch. Officers work across all aspects as outlined in the response to Question 2.
7. The 2010-11 budget for the ATO media and public relations function is \$2.590 million, made up of \$1.732 million for media and issues management and \$858,000 for speech writing.
8. There are no specific journalist roles within the ATO.
9. The ATO uses Media Monitors for its clipping service. The clips are collated by ATO media officers on a roster basis.
10. In the 2010-11 financial year, the ATO spent \$74,891 on externally provided media clipping services.
11. The media and public relations teams receive the same training as all ATO officers regarding statutory privacy obligations (during induction and refresher courses during the year).
12. The ATO's media practice statement (PS CM 2007/03) sets out the principle for contact between the ATO and the media. All contact with the media is coordinated through the media and issues management function. Please see Attachment A.
13. No. As stated in the answer to Question 12, all contact with the media is coordinated through the media and issues management function. When requests for interviews are received, the media unit briefs the appropriate SES officer, attends the interview wherever practicable, and follows up with the journalist if necessary.
14. Media unit staff are trained in the application of tax secrecy laws as they relate to their role. Specifically, that they are unable to comment on individual taxpayers.
15. No.

Media Practice Statement PS CM 2007/03

 This Corporate Management Practice Statement is issued under the authority of the Commissioner and must be read in conjunction with PS CM 2003/01. Corporate Management Practice Statements are endorsed corporate policy and must be followed by ATO employees. Both ongoing and non-ongoing employees must comply with this Practice Statement, unless otherwise stated. Any direction given in a Corporate Management Practice Statement is a direction for the purposes of section 13(5) of the *Public Service Act 1999*. In circumstances where the anticipated impact is likely to result in unintended consequences, the matter must be referred to Corporate Directions.

Introduction

This Practice Statement sets out the principles for contact between the ATO and the media and replaces the existing media policy.

Context

A high profile, publicly accountable organisation such as the ATO cannot choose whether or not to participate in the media. Our activities will always be subject to media scrutiny.

Media coverage of tax issues can be positive and helpful, or negative and detrimental. Positive media exposure can significantly enhance our ability to meet corporate objectives such as increasing voluntary compliance levels and maintaining the community's confidence in Australia's revenue system.

A media practice statement gives the organisation clear principles for dealing with the media. Central to these principles is a single, centrally coordinated media function which manages relationships with media and ensures messages from the ATO represent the agreed position of the organisation.

This structure has proved to be the best mechanism for large, diverse organisations such as the ATO.

Key outcomes and outputs

The objectives of this practice statement are to:

- ensure that the ATO communicates with a single voice in the media using consistent, clear, well-timed and well-targeted messages
- maximise positive opportunities to give voice to ATO messages in the media
- provide a single ATO point of contact to deal with the media in an accurate, professional, timely and coherent manner, and
- provide a mechanism for managing our response to potentially damaging issues.

Policy

The ATO policy is that:

1. All contact with the media is coordinated through the Media Relations team, Reputation Management in the Corporate Relations line.
2. All business areas build mechanisms into their risk and issues management governance arrangements to ensure the Media Relations team is advised of issues likely to invite media attention or that need to be managed prior to public release.

Scope

3. This practice statement applies to all business lines, including the Australian Valuation Office and to all employees both ongoing, non-ongoing and to contractors, consultants and third party suppliers working for the ATO.

Corporate requirements

4. This policy outlines the corporate requirements of the ATO at all levels.
5. Unless otherwise stated in this policy, detailed procedural requirements referred to in this policy as Corporate Management Procedures and Instructions will be endorsed and issued by Deputy Commissioner Corporate Relations.
6. Employees who have been cleared to speak to the media must ensure the integrity of the ATO is upheld and due care is taken with dealing with the media.

Media enquiries

Guide note: All media enquiries must be referred to the Media Relations team.

7. All media enquiries must be referred to the Media Relations team in Corporate Relations.
8. When members of the media call, they must be provided with the Media Relations team phone number, or their name, media outlet and contact details referred to the Media Relations team.
9. Statements, answers or comments must not be provided to members of the media, nor should direct phone numbers be given.

Media spokespeople

10. To communicate effectively in the media, the ATO must select the most appropriate spokesperson for each occasion. This is usually the SES officer responsible and accountable for the particular activity or issue.
11. The most appropriate spokesperson will be determined through consultation between the Media Relations team and the relevant SES officer(s).

Media training

12. ATO spokespeople must be media trained.
13. There are times (usually project specific) when a non-SES officer who is media trained may be the most appropriate ATO spokesperson. This must be negotiated between the Media Relations team and the SES manager of the non-SES officer.
14. The Media Relations team coordinates media training for all ATO spokespeople.
15. Contact the Media Relations team to organise media training.
16. The cost of media training is passed on to the relevant BSL.

Media strategies

17. When developing communication, risk or issues management strategies contact the Media Relations team for assistance in developing a complementary media strategy.
18. The Media Relations team can assist with a wider communication strategy including communicating with key external stakeholders.

Media releases

19. ATO media releases are issued by the Media Relations team only.
20. Media releases must not be drafted on media release letterhead. Only the final version approved by the Commissioner, or a delegate of the Commissioner, is placed on letterhead.
21. To include a media release as part of a strategy, contact the Media Relations team for advice.
22. Media releases are generally for news only.

Placement of articles

23. All content provided to media must be coordinated through the Media Relations team.
24. If you want to place content with media outlets (not paid advertising that is covered by PS CM 2005/07) as part of a strategy you must contact the Media Relations team for advice on how to proceed.

Public Rulings and other administrative announcements

25. Media around public rulings and other administrative announcements (such as Law Administration Practice Statements) is managed by the Media Relations team on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the relevant SES officers.

Prosecutions and matters before the courts

26. Media around these events is managed by the Media Relations team on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the relevant SES officers and subject to legal advice.

More information

27. For more information contact the [Media Relations team](#).

Key roles and responsibilities

Media Relations team

- Provide first contact advice and assistance to employees regarding matters relating to media enquiries.
- Deal directly with media.
- Provide support and advice which supports our business intent.

Media Director

- Day to day management of the Media Relations team and daily media enquiries.
- Provide media advice on issues and potential issues.
- Deal directly with media and foster good relationships.
- Provide media advice which supports our business intent.

Senior Director Issues Management

- Provide strategic advice on issues and potential issues.
- Provide strategic communications advice which supports our business intent.
- Medium and long term strategies to support the business and address issues.

Assistant Commissioner Reputation Management

- Provide strategic reputation management on issues and potential issues.
- Provide strategic reputation management which supports our business intent.

First Assistant Commissioner Corporate Relations

- Ensure the Media Relations team is meeting business requirements.
- Provide assurance on conformance with this CMPS by working with other Deputy Commissioners and Assistant Commissioner, Reputation Management.
- Develop and maintain issues and media management procedures and instructions as required.

Commissioners or Deputy Commissioners with business responsibility

- Approval point for the issue of information to the media.
- Work with the Media Relations team to develop strategic responses to issues and potential issues.

Assistant Commissioners with business responsibility

- Approval point for the issue of information to the media where the Commissioners or Deputy Commissioners have delegated responsibility.

Conformance

Assurance of conformance with this practice statement will be provided through Certificate of Assurance 2A Communications.

Further advice

More information on this practice statement can be obtained by contacting the [Media Relations team](#), a part of Corporate Relations.

Definitions

Media

The media includes local, regional and national print media (including newspapers, magazines, specialty journals, industry publications and newsletters), television, radio, news services and internet media.

Media contact

Media contact includes:

- responding to media enquiries over the phone
 - interviews or briefings with the media
 - disclosing information to the media
 - comments on talk-back radio
 - addressing a seminar/conference where media is present
 - media activities for significant rulings, reports, position papers and events, and
 - articles written by staff for print and electronic media.

Note: Media Relations can provide advice on whether a particular activity falls within the definition of 'media contact'.

References

ATO policies and guidelines

- Replaces existing media policy

Version control

This CMPS was updated on 23 December to reflect changes in the job titles within the 'key roles'.

More information

A full list of [Corporate Management Practice Statements](#) is available on the intranet.

Modified Date: Tuesday, 8 June 2010