

Complaints - Internal and External Complaints Policy

NSW SES is committed to fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement by providing clear, distinct pathways for managing internal and external complaints. We recognise the importance of resolving concerns promptly and fairly to maintain trust, uphold ethical standards, and ensure the well-being of our members and the satisfaction of the communities we serve.

We have established two separate procedures:

1. **Complaints - Internal Complaints Management Procedure:** Designed to provide guidance for the process of raising and resolving concerns and managing complaints as soon as possible when they arise.
2. **External Complaints - Procedures:** Tailored to address concerns raised by clients, customers, suppliers, or the general public regarding our services, products, or interactions with NSW SES.

1. Our commitment

- **Respecting All Voices:** Every complaint, whether internal or external, will be treated with respect and given appropriate attention.
- **Ensuring Fairness:** We will provide a fair, consistent, and impartial approach to all complaints, ensuring that outcomes are just and based on evidence.
- **Maintaining Confidentiality:** All complaints will be handled with the highest level of confidentiality to protect the privacy of all parties involved.
- **Timeliness:** We will ensure that all complaints are acknowledged and resolved within a reasonable time frame to minimise any negative impact.
- **Continuous Improvement:** We will use complaints as opportunities to improve our processes, policies, and services, thereby enhancing NSW SES performance and relationships.

2. Principles

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Our processes for handling both internal and external complaints will be clear and transparent, ensuring that all parties understand their rights and the steps involved in the resolution process. We will take accountability for any organisational shortcomings and address them through corrective actions.
- **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Both procedures will be easy to access and navigate, ensuring that individuals feel empowered to raise their concerns without fear of retaliation or disadvantage. We are committed to supporting individuals who may face barriers in lodging complaints, including providing assistance in languages other than English or through alternative communication methods.
- **Fairness and Impartiality:** We will approach all complaints with neutrality, ensuring that investigations and resolutions are conducted without bias or preconception. All parties will be given an equal opportunity to present their case, and decisions will be made based on facts and evidence.

- **Non-retaliation:** We commit to protecting complainants from any form of retaliation or adverse treatment as a result of raising a complaint. Members and external stakeholders should feel safe and supported when bringing concerns to our attention.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Information related to complaints will be kept confidential and only shared with individuals directly involved in the resolution process. This commitment ensures that both the complainant and the subject of the complaint are protected throughout the process.
- **Resolution and Learning:** The ultimate goal of our complaints handling processes is to resolve issues fairly and constructively. We will seek to address the root causes of complaints to prevent future occurrences, using insights gained to drive organisational improvement.
- **Compliance and Legal Alignment:** Our complaints procedures will align with all relevant laws, regulations, and standards, ensuring compliance with employment law, consumer protection laws, and other regulatory frameworks.

3. Key Responsibilities

3.1 Senior Executives

- a. **Oversight and Accountability:** Senior executives are responsible for providing oversight of the complaints management processes and ensuring they are implemented effectively. This includes endorsing the policy, promoting a culture of transparency, and reviewing reports on complaint outcomes and trends.
- b. **Ensuring Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** Executives must ensure that complaints procedures align with all applicable laws and regulations, particularly regarding employment, consumer protection, and data privacy.
- c. **Resource Allocation:** They are responsible for allocating the necessary resources, including personnel and systems, to support effective complaints handling and resolution.

3.2 Commanders / Managers / Supervisors

- a. **Complaint Resolution:** Managers play a key role in resolving both informal and formal complaints, particularly in relation to internal member grievances. They are responsible for fostering a positive work environment where complaints are addressed promptly at the local level.
- b. **Ensuring Fair Investigations:** Managers must ensure that complaints are investigated fairly and impartially, working closely with Professional Standards or relevant departments.
- c. **Escalation of Issues:** If a complaint cannot be resolved at the managerial level, it is the manager's responsibility to escalate the issue according to the established procedures.
- d. **Training and Support:** Managers should ensure that staff are aware of the complaints procedures and are trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation strategies when appropriate.

3.3 Members (Staff and Volunteers)

- a. **Raising Concerns in Good Faith:** Members are responsible for raising concerns or complaints through the appropriate channels, following the internal complaints procedure.

3.4 Participating in the Process: Members involved in complaints (as complainants, respondents, or witnesses) must engage constructively in the investigation and resolution process, providing accurate and timely information.

- a. Promoting a Respectful Environment: All members are expected to contribute to a respectful culture where concerns can be raised openly without fear of reprisal and are dealt with respectfully.

3.5 General Public (external stakeholders)

- a. Raising Complaints Appropriately: External stakeholders, including customers, clients, suppliers, and the public, are encouraged to raise complaints through the External Complaints Procedure. Complaints should be submitted clearly, outlining the specific concern and providing relevant information to support the investigation.
- b. Cooperation in Resolution: External stakeholders are expected to cooperate with the NSW SES resolution process, including providing additional information or clarification when needed.
- c. Respectful Communication: NSW SES expects that all external parties raising complaints will do so respectfully, ensuring that interactions with members remain professional and constructive.

4. RELATED DOCUMENTS

4.1 [Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy](#) (NSW SES members only)

4.2 [Complaints - Internal Complaints Management Procedure](#) (NSW SES members only)

4.3 [External Complaints - Procedures](#)

5. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Approved By:	Commissioner, NSW State Emergency Service		
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