
Managing complaints about EPA staff or services¹

This policy is intended to ensure that the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) handles complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively. Our complaint management system is intended to:

- provide information about how to lodge a complaint and how that complaint will be managed by us
- enable us to respond in a timely and effective way to issues raised by people making complaints
- promote public confidence in our administrative process, and
- provide information that can be used by us to deliver quality improvements in our services, systems and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance on the key principles of our complaint management system and assists us build an organisational culture that is receptive to, and values, complaints from members of the public and learning from the insights they provide.

1. Policy statement

We are committed to responding in a timely and effective manner to complaints we receive about our staff or services. Responding effectively and efficiently to complaints assists us to improve our services and deliver better outcomes.

Our Complaints Management Policy is consistent with the principles of the *Australian Standard – Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations AS/NZS 10002:2014* and Premier and *Cabinet Circular 039 – Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector*.

2. Scope

We will manage your complaint under this policy where it involves your dissatisfaction with the service or action of the EPA or its staff², and you are directly affected.

Some complaints about certain decisions we make under legislation are required to be managed in different ways using the relevant legislation, policy or procedure. We will advise you where this is the case and the appropriate way to raise any issues or complaints.

¹ This policy does not include the management of environmental reports or complaints that the EPA receives in its role as an environmental regulator (eg complaints about noise from a licensed site).

² Complaints concerning the conduct of public officers in South Australia, relating to corruption, misconduct and maladministration, can be reported to the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) www.icac.sa.gov.au.

3. Principles

The following principles guide our management of complaints:

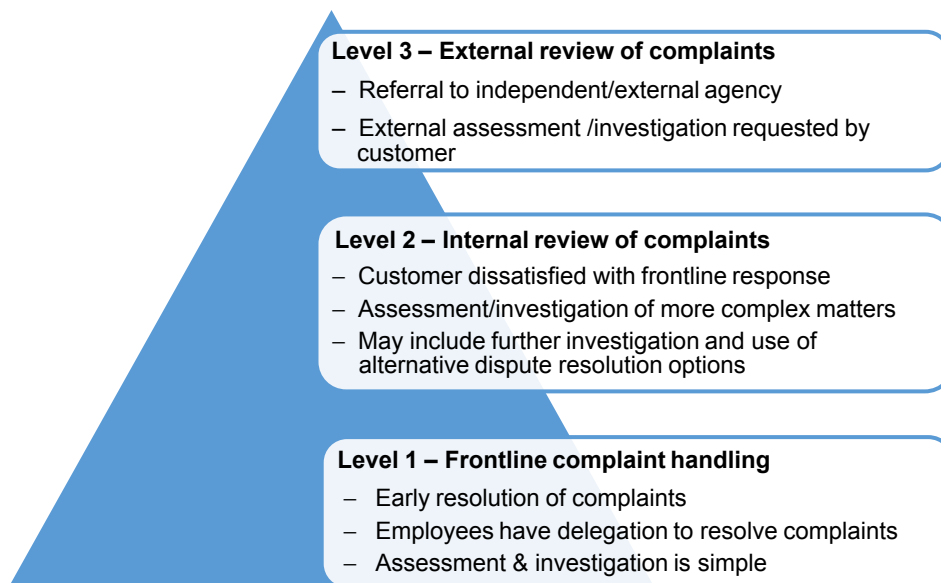
Principles	This means we will...
1. People focus	• recognise and respect everybody's right to complain • demonstrate a commitment to addressing complaints in a timely manner and without charge • involve the complainant in the process as far as is practicable and appropriate • recognise everyone's right to work in a respectful, safe and healthy workforce free from all forms of violence, harassment and discrimination
2. Remedies	• attempt early, informal resolution wherever possible, at the lowest level possible (ie front line resolution) • seek to provide remedies that are fair to all parties, minimising the possibility of ongoing dispute
3. Visibility and access	• provide clear information on our website about how and where to lodge a complaint and how complaints are managed • provide assistance to complainants with special needs in making complaints • recognise and address complaints provided anonymously, or through an authorised third party, in the same manner as any other complaint • ensure there is no charge or fee associated with making a complaint to the EPA
4. Responsiveness	• record, track, acknowledge and process complaints in a timely manner • ensure that the complainant is aware of the process, timeframes, their likely involvement, the possible outcomes of the complaint and any other necessary information
5. Objectivity and fairness	• manage complaints objectively and deal with them fairly, respectfully, consistently, in accordance with the principles of natural justice and without bias • take all reasonable steps to ensure that a complainant is not adversely affected by lodging a complaint • protect the rights of our staff where they are the subject of a complaint • deal with complaints confidentially to the extent possible and with personal information in accordance with the <i>Privacy Principles</i>³ • manage any abusive or unreasonable complaint appropriately to ensure that EPA staff health and safety is paramount
6. Feedback	• provide adequate and timely feedback on complaints to all parties • notify complainants of their internal and external review options
7. Monitoring, reporting & improvement	• record and report complaints in accordance with legislative and other requirements • commit to using complaints data for continuous improvement of services and programs
8. Resources and training	• ensure adequate resources (including training) are available • empower staff to implement our complaint management system

4. Complaint management framework

We aim to resolve complaints quickly at the frontline or the point where the complaint is received. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint you may request an internal review. If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome after internal review you may seek an external review. Complaints that require more complex assessment may escalate directly to internal review on receipt of the complaint (see Appendix A).

³ As set out in Premier and Cabinet Circular PC012 — Information Privacy Principles (IPPS) Instruction.

The following diagram outlines our complaint management framework.



5. Complaint management process

Any member of the public may make a complaint. To enable timely consideration of a complaint, specific details of the incident, conduct or behaviour giving rise to the complaint should be provided. Complaints can be made over the phone, in writing or by completing the form on the [EPA website](#).

When we receive a complaint we will:

- attempt to resolve the complaint at first point of contact with the relevant officer or business area, or if this is not satisfactory refer the complaint to the relevant manager
- acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days
- where necessary we will contact you to ensure we understand the issue correctly
- aim to resolve your complaint and respond to you within:

- 10 working days for minor complaints
- up to 28 days for more complex complaints

Where these timeframes cannot be met you will be contacted to negotiate a revised response date and provided with reasons for the delay.

Where a complaint involves multiple parties/organisations, we will work with these parties where possible, to ensure that communication with the complainant is clear and coordinated.

We are committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for all complainants and to resolving complaints in an unbiased, fair and timely manner. In the event you are not satisfied with the outcome of your initial complaint you may request an internal review and, if still dissatisfied with the outcome, may seek external review of our decision (by the [Ombudsman](#) for example).

Anonymous complaints will be accepted and assessed, but it should be noted these may be difficult to investigate due to lack of information.

6. Unreasonable complainant conduct

We will always address a complaint where it concerns a valid issue. However, if complainant conduct is seen to be abusive, threatening, unreasonable, or is making inappropriate demands on our resources and staff then we will assess the level of risk and any other relevant factors to determine the action we take. Staff safety and wellbeing are paramount and unreasonable complainant conduct will not be tolerated.

Occasions when a complainant's conduct could be considered unreasonable may include:

- frequent, lengthy, repeated or abusive letters, emails or telephone calls, which occupy significant staff time and resources
- any contact which involves abusive or threatening language or behaviour
- the complainant continues to contact the department after feedback has been provided regarding the complaint and all avenues of review have been exhausted.

We will consider the relevant circumstances, including staff welfare and appropriate use of agency resources and make a decision regarding our contact with the complainant, for example restricting the times for and/or frequency of contact, designating a single officer with whom the complainant may have contact, such as a manager, or nominating an acceptable form of contact, for example written communication only.

Decisions regarding limiting contact with a complainant will be communicated to the person in writing. Conduct which involves violence or aggression will be also be managed in accordance with relevant human resource and work, health and safety policies and procedures.

Where a complainant feels they have been unfairly dealt with they are able to seek external review, through the [SA Ombudsman](#) for example.

7. Definitions

Complainant: Person, organisation or their representative, making a complaint.

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of an action taken, decision made, or service provided by the EPA or its contractor by a person or organisation directly affected by the service or action where a response or resolution is expected or required.

Complaints coordinator: a position assigned to a senior EPA officer, who oversees the process for the resolution of formal complaints and provides regular reports on complaints management to the EPA Executive Leadership Team.

Complaint management system (CMS): the policies, procedures, organisational culture, and the systems needed to manage complaints and feedback in a responsive, timely and effective manner.

Policy: A statement of instruction that sets out how we should fulfil our vision, mission and goals.

Procedure: Instructions that set out how policies will be implemented and by whom.

Unreasonable complainant conduct: A complainant whose behaviour is unreasonably persistent or, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the EPA, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints.

Appendix A – EPA complaints handling flowchart

