

NRE Tas External Complaints Handling Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This policy sets out how the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) manages and responds to external complaints. The Policy applies to all NRE Tas employees.

2. Policy

- 2.1. NRE Tas recognises that the management of external complaints is an essential part of its function. The Department is committed to the early and effective resolution of complaints.
- 2.2. External complaints that fall within the scope of this policy will be handled in an accountable, transparent, timely, and fair way. The Department expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective, and efficient complaint handling.
- 2.3. The Policy Section of the Strategic Projects and Policy Branch will 'triage' external complaints, including those unresolved at the frontline, and will, in consultation with the relevant senior manager, determine their priority, how to, and who should respond.
- 2.4. The Department will continuously seek to improve its systems and processes and the way it works with the community, wherever possible, as an outcome of considering a complaint.

3. Scope

- 3.1 An external complaint is:

A formal expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, or service provided by the Department, or a delay or failure in providing a service, taking action or making a decision, which has been lodged with the Department, where a response is expected.

4. Out of Scope

4.1. The following will not be treated as a complaint under this policy:

- General commentary on the Department’s performance or feedback on improving a service.
- Website functionality or [content feedback](#)
- Internal staff grievances.
- State Service Code of Conduct matters.
- A request for a review or appeal under legislation (where a formal review process already exists).
- Public interest disclosures.
- Right to information applications.
- Requests for a service or a request for information.

5. Strategic alignment

5.1. The *NRE Tas Strategic Plan 2022-27* identifies a strategic priority to build a high-performance Department driven by our people and our systems. Ensuring that our customers and stakeholders remain our advocates is a key success factor. Our service is underpinned by:

- Our ‘How We Work’ Principles and Behaviours.
- Embracing innovation and driving continuous improvement in our work practices.
- Ensuring that we have an outcomes focused service delivery model.

6. Principles

6.1. The *External Complaints Handling Policy* provides a pathway for our customers and stakeholders to provide feedback on our services. To ensure that the external complaint handling process is effective, this policy is based on the following principles:

| Principle | Intent of Principle |
|---|---|
| We put Tasmania at the heart of everything we do | <p>The Department is committed to partnering with our community and stakeholders, welcomes feedback and seeks to be engaged and responsive to issues and concerns that can help improve service delivery for the Tasmanian community.</p> <p>The Department will communicate, as appropriate, the status and progress of a complaint review with parties and keep appropriate complaint records.</p> <p>The Department is committed to using our resources responsibly and will ensure that complaints are handled in a way that is proportionate and appropriate to the issues raised.</p> |



| Principle | Intent of Principle |
|---|---|
| <p>We act with integrity</p> | <p>The Department is committed to transparency in our decision making and processes. We will ensure that complaints and complainants are handled with impartiality, treated fairly and respectfully, with matters addressed within a reasonable timeframe.</p> <p>Any person can make a complaint. The Department seeks to make the complaint process accessible and easy to follow by providing information on how to make a complaint, the supporting management process, and access to support to help navigate the complaints process.</p> <p>All complainant information is handled in accordance with the <i>Personal Information Protection Act 2004</i> and other relevant legislation.</p> <p>The Department embraces, supports, and encourages diversity and inclusion. We will demonstrate respect for all people and all cultures and treat everyone fairly.</p> <p>Complaints will be managed with confidentiality as a focus, and Complaints Management Officers and other employees involved will maintain the confidentiality of complainants, where requested, as appropriate.</p> |
| <p>We pursue the extraordinary</p> | <p>The Department is committed to continuous improvement. Complaints serve as an opportunity to review our processes and operations, identify issues, and improve services.</p> <p>Departmental employees are accountable for their actions and decisions. We want to learn from our mistakes, and we, are open to exploring new ideas or ways of working that may arise.</p> |
| <p>We work together</p> | <p>Through this principle, and through genuine collaboration both between employees within the Department, and by employees with the Tasmanian community, we can achieve great things together.</p> <p>We acknowledge that by working together we can be more efficient, get things done faster, and develop a greater understanding of the issues at hand - which all contribute to better complaints management.</p> |



7. The Complaints Management Framework

NRE Tasmania has a three-stage framework for handling complaints as described in Figure 1 below.

The Complaints Management Framework

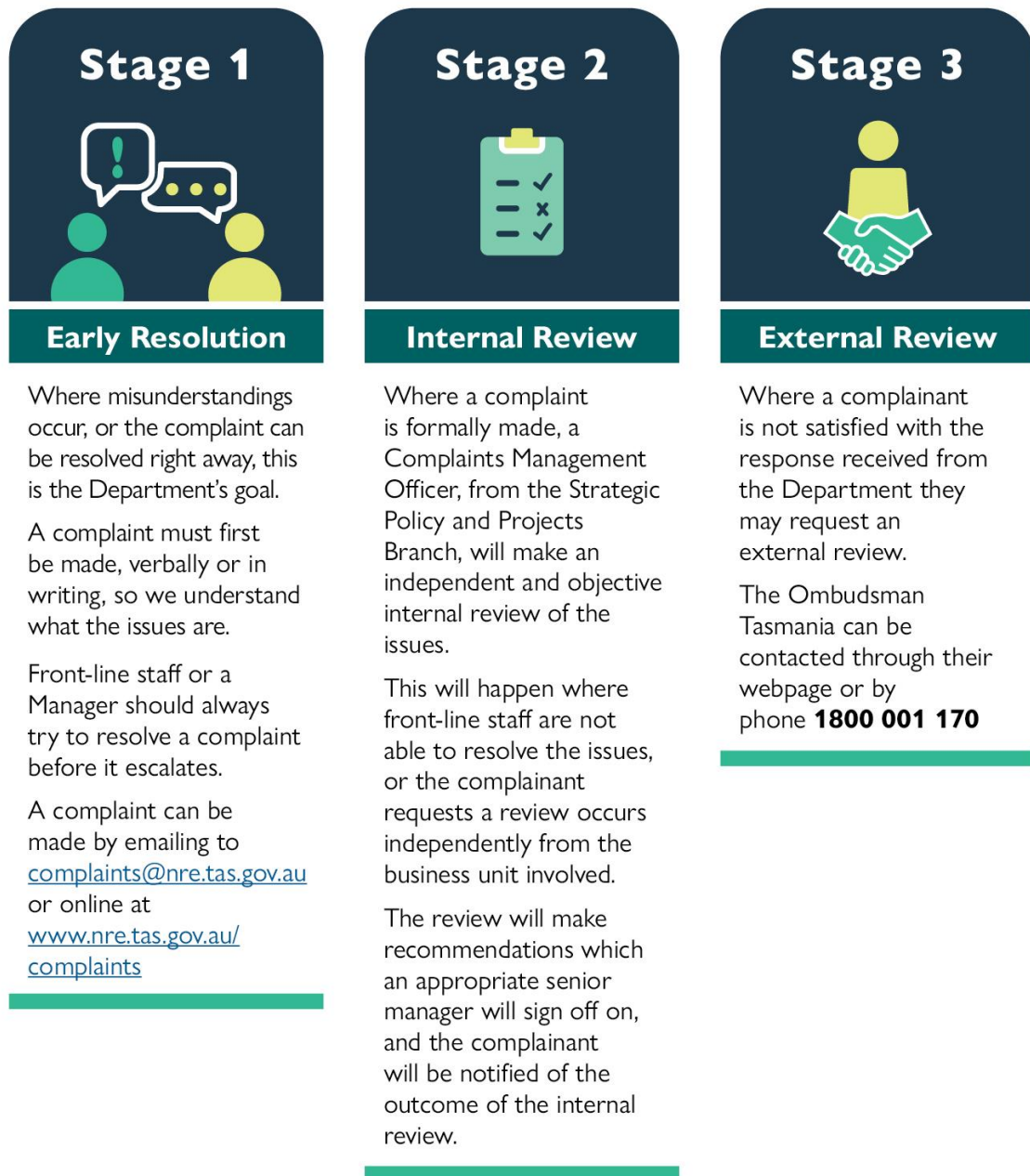


Figure 1: The NRE Tas Complaints Management Framework



8. Complaints received by the Secretary or a Minister's Office

- 8.1 External complaints received directly by the Secretary or a Minister's Office will be referred to a Complaints Management Officer within the Strategic Policy & Projects Branch, to be carefully assessed to determine the most appropriate way to manage the complaint.
- 8.2 Issues such as potential conflict of interest or bias will be considered throughout the complaints management process.

9. Things to consider before making a complaint

- 9.1. An external complaint may be made by one or more people, or by their representative(s) (with appropriate supporting documentation supplied).
- 9.2. **Response times** - we respond to complaints as quickly as possible and aim to acknowledge your complaint within three working days.
 - Sometimes a complaint can be resolved quickly, often over the phone or by email.
 - More serious complaints are usually resolved within 15 to 30 business days.
 - More complicated complaints can take longer to resolve, sometimes up to 60 business days.
- 9.3. **Behavior Expectations** - both complainants and Departmental staff will cooperate in good faith, with courtesy, and respect to resolve issues as quickly as possible. Abusive language or behaviour is not acceptable.

10. Child and Youth Safe Standards

- 10.1 Where a complaint involves Reportable Conduct as defined in the Reportable Conduct Scheme, the Department will handle that complaint in line with the Reportable Conduct Scheme. Further information can be found here: [Resources | carcru \(justice.tas.gov.au\)](https://www.justice.tas.gov.au/carcru/resources)

11. What to expect from making a complaint

- 11.1. The outcomes of making a complaint may include and are not limited to:
 - An apology.
 - A change in procedure, service or practice, or improvement to a system or procedure to avoid the recurrence of the issue.
 - The amendment of a record.
 - An undertaking of immediate works such as repairing damage to a property, making an on-site assessment or removing a hazard.
 - An explanation of any changes or improvements to practices that were made because of the complaint.
 - A potential outcome may be that after review of a complaint the Department may decide to take no further action and you will be advised accordingly.
 - That your personal information is handled in accordance with the requirements of the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004*.



12. How to make a complaint

12.1. Complaints (including anonymous complaints) can be made in several ways.

In person at Departmental offices that are open to the public, and to frontline officers.

By mail – Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

Policy Section, Strategic Projects and Policy Branch

GPO Box 44

Hobart, Tasmania 7001

By email – complaints@nre.tas.gov.au or direct email to an employee, or to a business unit of the Department.

Via the External Complaints Form available at [Making a Complaint to NRE Tas](#)

12.2. Sufficient information should be provided to enable the Department to understand the issues surrounding the complaint. Incomplete information may cause delays in resolving the complaint.

12.3. Key points to consider in making and reviewing a complaint include:

- What specifically is the issue – is there one key issue or more?
- What day, time, and location are involved?
- Is the complaint about a service, decision, omission, process, or activity?
- How has the complainant been affected?
- Complainants should include any relevant documents with the complaint, such as emails, pictures and photos, as evidence to the complaint.
- What outcome or action is sought from the complainant?

13. Support for complainants

13.1. Any person wishing to make a complaint to the Department is encouraged to do so. Complaints can be made by family, friends, relatives, or other representatives who have permission to act on behalf of, or support, a person who themselves might have limited capacity to make a complaint.

13.2. Complainants are encouraged to be accompanied by a family member, friend, or other representative if they are making a complaint to the Department in person.

13.3. The Department is responsible for assisting a person to make a complaint when requested to do so. A person requesting assistance could someone who uses English as a second language, be experiencing a disability, or be a vulnerable person (including a child).

13.4. The National Relay Service provides support and services to persons with hearing and speech impairment. It can be contacted through the [National Relay Service](#). The Translating and Interpretation Service can be contacted via 131 450 (charges apply).



14. Definitions

| Term | Meaning |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Bias | Bias means an inclination of the mind or a preconceived opinion about something or someone. A bias may be favourable or unfavourable making people be in favour of, or against, an idea. |
| Child | A person under 18 years of age. |
| Complainant | A person / member of the public external to the Department who makes a complaint. |
| Complaints Management Officer | A NRE Tas employee nominated to manage the external complaint – who will generally be from the Strategic Projects & Policy Branch. |
| Conflict of Interest | Conflict of interest means a situation arising from a conflict between the performance of a public duty and a private or personal interest. A conflict may be personal, financial or political. |
| External complaint | A formal expression of dissatisfaction with an action taken, decision made, or service provided by the Department, or a delay or failure in providing a service, taking action or making a decision, which has been lodged with the Department, where a response is expected. An external complainant is not an employee, consultant, contractor, volunteer, school-based trainee (essentially a ‘worker’) of the Department, as these complaints should be managed in accordance with the Issue Resolution Policy and Procedure. |
| Resolved | Means that an appropriate resolution is identified, communicated to the complainant, and where possible implemented. |
| Vulnerable person | A child or any person who is or may be unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma or disability, or any other reason. |

15. Review

This policy will be reviewed within three years of its approval date.

16. Approval

Approved by Vanessa Pinto, Chief Operations Officer, NRE Tas, 17 November 2023.

17. Version history

| Date | Version | Action | Description |
|------------|---------|--------|--|
| 17/11/2023 | 1.0 | Update | Revision of previous policy dated 10 November 2021 |



18. Contact

For further information, please contact:

Section: Strategic Projects & Policy Branch

Email: complaints@nre.tas.gov.au

Web: nre.tas.gov.au/complaints

