



# *Protected Disclosure Procedure*

**Document No. 053**

**Sponsor:** Corporate Services Manager

**Responsibility:** Management

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## 1. PURPOSE

This procedure establishes a system for reporting disclosures of improper conduct or detrimental action by WGCMA, its employee's officers or members. The system enables such disclosures to be made to Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC). Disclosures may be made by employees or by members of the public. WGCMA is not permitted to receive disclosures under the Protected Disclosure Act 2012. These disclosures need to be made directly to IBAC.

The objective of the *Protected Disclosure Act* is to encourage and facilitate the making of disclosures of improper conduct by public officers and public bodies. The Act provides protection for persons who make disclosures in accordance with the Act and establishes a system for the matters disclosed to be investigated and for rectifying action to be taken.

## 2. SCOPE

This procedure establishes a system for reporting disclosure of improper conduct or detrimental action by WGCMA employees, officers or members.

These procedures also cover how WGCMA will look after the welfare of a discloser, witnesses and subjects of disclosures, including maintaining confidentiality and protection from reprisal.

## 3. REFERENCES

- Protected Disclosure Act 2012
- Protected Disclosure Regulations 2013
- Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2011
- Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission Regulations 2013
- Freedom of Information Act 1982
- Privacy & Data Protection Act 2012
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees
- Information about protected disclosures or the Victorian Integrity System generally, also see <http://www.ibac.vic.gov.au/report-corruption-or-misconduct/protected-disclosure>.

## 4. DEFINITIONS

**Protected disclosure** - is a disclosure about improper conduct or detrimental action made to the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) or to the correct public body. It may be made orally, in writing, electronically or anonymously. It must be made by an individual and must relate to the conduct of a public body or public officer acting in their official capacity. It must be either about improper conduct or detrimental action taken against a person in reprisal for making a protected disclosure. The person making the disclosure must have reasonable grounds for believing the alleged conduct has occurred. All of these grounds must be satisfied for the disclosure to be a protected disclosure.

**Assessable disclosure** - a disclosure that must be made directly, or notified, to IBAC, that the notifier considers may be a protected disclosure.

**Belief** - a disclosure has to be more than a suspicion – the belief must be based on reasonable grounds.

**Discloser** - A person who makes a complaint, allegation or disclosure of improper conduct or detrimental action, in accordance with the requirements of Part 2 of the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* whose conduct adversely affects the honest performance of a public officer or public official.

**Investigating entity** - IBAC, the Ombudsman, the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Victorian Inspectorate. Only these entities can investigate a protected disclosure complain

**Protected disclosure complaint** - a disclosure that has been determined by IBAC under section 26 of the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* to be a protected disclosure complaint. A Protected Disclosure that has been determined warrants investigation.

**Public body** - a public body within the meaning of section 6 of the *Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Act 2011*, IBAC or any other body or entity prescribed for the purposes of this definition.

## 5. PROCEDURE

WGCMA is required to establish and publish procedures under s 58 of the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* (“Act”). WGCMA is required to ensure these procedures are readily available to members of the public as well as internally to all employees, staff and members of WGCMA.

These procedures are a resource for disclosers and potential disclosers, whether an internal member, employee or staff of WGCMA or an external member of the public; essentially, any individual who wants to find out how WGCMA will manage their welfare if they make a disclosure. In addition, these procedures cover how WGCMA will protect other people connected to a protected disclosure complaint from detrimental action being taken against them in reprisal for a discloser making a protected disclosure. Such persons can include individuals who are the subject of protected

disclosures and protected disclosure complaints; and others who are connected to protected disclosures, such as witnesses or persons cooperating with an investigation into a protected disclosure complaint.

## 5.1 Making a Disclosure

WGCMA is not permitted to receive disclosures made under the Act. Therefore, if you wish to make a disclosure about WGCMA, its officers, members or employees, this needs to be made directly to IBAC.

### 5.1.1 What is a disclosure and who can make a disclosure?

A disclosure may be made about 2 things under the Act:

- (i) improper conduct of public bodies or public officers; and
- (ii) detrimental action taken by public bodies or public officers in reprisal against a person for the making of a protected disclosure.

The term disclosure is interpreted under the Act in the ordinary sense of the word, for example, as a “revelation” to the person receiving it. IBAC considers that a complaint or allegation that is already in the public domain will not normally be a protected disclosure. Such material would, for example, include matters which have already been subject to media or other public commentary.

The conduct or action being disclosed about may be one which has taken place, is still occurring, or is believed is intended to be taken or engaged in. Disclosures may also be made about conduct that occurred prior to the commencement of the Act on 10 February 2013.

A disclosure may:

- only be made by a natural person (or a group of individuals making joint disclosures). Disclosures cannot be made by a company or an organisation;
- be made anonymously;
- be made even where the discloser is unable to identify precisely the individual or the organisation to which the disclosure relates; and
- also be a complaint, notification or disclosure (however described) made under another law.

### The following are *not* protected disclosures under the Act:

- a disclosure that has not been made in accordance with all of the procedural requirements of Part 2 of the Act and the prescribed procedures in the Regulations;
- a disclosure made by a discloser who expressly states in writing, at the time of making the

disclosure, that the disclosure **is not** a disclosure under the Act;

- a disclosure made by an officer or employee of an investigative entity in the course of carrying out his or her duties or functions under the relevant legislation, unless the person expressly states in writing that the disclosure **is a disclosure** and the disclosure is otherwise made in accordance with Part 2 of the Act.

### 5.1.2 How can a disclosure be made?

A disclosure must be made in accordance with Part 2 of the Act.

Part 2 of the Act permits disclosures to be made anonymously, orally or in writing, and need not necessarily identify the person or organisation complained about.

A protected disclosure may be made:

- in person;
- by phone;
- by leaving a voicemail message;
- In writing by post. Personal delivery or email
- by any other form of electronic communication; and/or
- Anonymously.

Disclosures cannot be made by fax.

- A written disclosure to IBAC and the Ombudsman can be made via an online form available from their respective websites:
  - [How to make a complaint - IBAC](#)
  - [How to make a complaint - Victorian Ombudsman](#)

A disclosure made by email from an address from which the identity of the discloser cannot be ascertained will be treated as an anonymous disclosure.

An oral disclosure **must** be made in private. For a verbal disclosure, this means the discloser must reasonably believe that only the following people are present or able to listen to the conversation:

- the discloser him or herself (including any other individuals making a joint disclosure at the same time);
- any lawyer representing the discloser; and
- one or more people to whom a disclosure is permitted to be made under the Act or

the Regulations.

According to IBAC, a disclosure attempted or purported to be made to WGCMA will not be a disclosure made in accordance with Part 2 of the Act, because in IBAC's view Part 2 of the Act does not permit WGCMA to receive disclosures. If you wish to make a disclosure, please make that disclosure directly to IBAC.

### 5.1.3 How to make a disclosure to IBAC

#### ***Oral disclosures***

An oral disclosure to IBAC **must** be made in private and **may** be made:

- in person;
- by phone, to 1300 735 135;
- by leaving a voicemail message on the telephone number of one of the specified individuals below to whom an oral disclosure may be made; or
- by some other form of non-written electronic communication.

The oral disclosure must be made to one of the following persons:

- the Commissioner of IBAC;
- the Deputy Commissioner of IBAC;
- the CEO of IBAC;
- an employee referred to in s 35(1) of The IBAC Act;
- any staff referred to in s 35(2) of The IBAC Act.

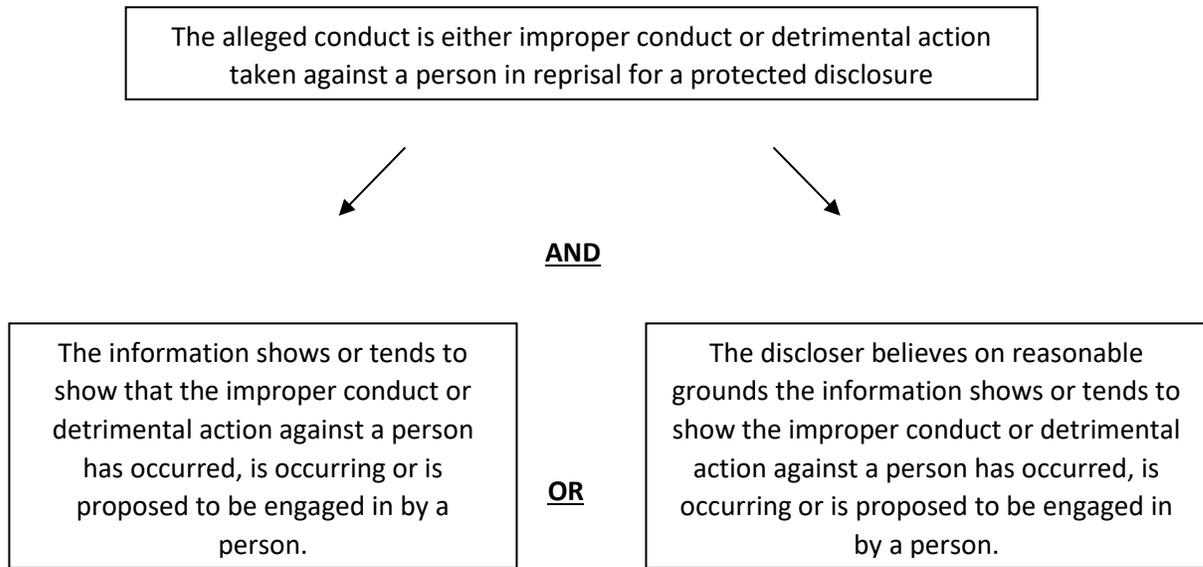
#### ***Written disclosures***

A written disclosure to IBAC **must** be:

- delivered personally to the office of IBAC, at Level 1, North Tower, 459 Collins Street, Melbourne, VIC 3001; or
- sent by post addressed to the office of IBAC, at GPO Box 24234, Melbourne, VIC 3000; or
- sent by email to the official email address of a person specified above to whom an oral disclosure may be made (i.e., the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner, the CEO, or employee or staff referred to in s 35 of The IBAC Act); or
- submitted by an online form available from [IBAC Complaints Form](#)

## 5.2 What can a disclosure be made about?

A disclosure must be about the conduct of a person, public officer or public body in their capacity as a public body or public officer as outlined in the following diagram:



### 5.2.1 Improper conduct

A disclosure may be made about improper conduct by a public body or public official in the performance of their functions as a public body or public officer.

Central to the notion of improper conduct is the notion of the “public trust”.

“Public trust” is a concept that provides the basis *‘for obligations of honesty and fidelity in public officers that exist to serve, protect and advance the interests of the public’*.

A person acting in their official capacity is exercising ‘public power’ that is derived from their public office holding and may be controlled or influenced by legislative provisions, administrative directions, or constitutional principles or conventions. There is an expectation that members of the community may rely on and trust their public bodies and officials to act honestly. The expectation is that public officers will not use their positions for personal advantage or use the influence of their public office for improper purposes where there is a duty to act objectively and impartially.

Disclosers will need to identify that there is a link between the alleged improper conduct of a person or an organisation and their function as a public officer or a public body.

Improper conduct is defined in the Act to mean either corrupt conduct or specified conduct (both terms are also defined by the Act and The IBAC Act).

### Corrupt conduct

Corrupt conduct means any one of the following:

- conduct of any person that adversely affects the honest performance by a public officer or public body of his or her or its functions as a public officer or public body;
- conduct of a public officer or public body that constitutes or involves the dishonest performance of his or her or its functions as a public officer or public body;
- conduct of a public officer or public body that constitutes or involves knowingly or recklessly breaching public trust;
- conduct of a public officer or a public body that involves the misuse of information or material acquired in the course of the performance of his or her or its functions as a public officer or public body, whether or not for the benefit of the public officer or public body or any other person; *or*
- conduct that could constitute a conspiracy or an attempt to engage in any of the conduct referred to above; ***and***

if that conduct could be proved beyond reasonable doubt at a trial, amounts to:

- an indictable offence; *or*
- one of the following 3 types of common law offences committed in Victoria:
  - perverting the course of justice
  - attempting to pervert the course of justice
  - bribery of an official.

### **Specified conduct**

Specified conduct is any one of the above types of conduct, **or** conduct that involves substantial mismanagement of public resources, risk to public health or safety, or risk to the environment, which **would not** constitute “corrupt conduct” but would nevertheless, if proved, constitute either:

- a criminal offence; or
- reasonable grounds for dismissing or terminating the employment of the officer who engaged or is engaging in that conduct.

It should be noted the risk in relation to mismanagement or public health and safety or the environment must be “substantial”, requiring significant or considerable mismanagement, or significant or considerable risks to public health, safety or the environment.

### 5.2.2 Detrimental conduct

It is an offence under the Act for a public officer or body to take detrimental action against a discloser in reprisal for making a protected disclosure. There are two essential components here: whether there is in fact “detrimental action”, as defined by the Act, and whether that action is being taken in reprisal against a person for making or being connected with a protected disclosure.

#### Detrimental action

Detrimental action as defined by the Act includes:

- action causing injury, loss or damage;
- intimidation or harassment; and
- discrimination, disadvantage or adverse treatment in relation to a person’s employment, career, profession, trade or business, including the taking of disciplinary action.

In addition, a person can have taken detrimental action without having taken the action itself, but just by threatening to take such action. Further, the detrimental action need not necessarily have been taken (or threatened to be taken) against a person making a protected disclosure, but against any person connected with a protected disclosure.

Examples of detrimental action prohibited by the Act include:

- threats to a person’s personal safety or property, including intimidating or harassing a discloser or the discloser’s family or friends or otherwise causing personal injury or prejudice to the safety or damaging property of a discloser or the discloser’s family or friends;
- the demotion, transfer, isolation or change in duties of a discloser due to his or her having made a disclosure;
- discriminating or disadvantaging a person in their career, profession, employment, trade or business; or
- discriminating against the discloser or the discloser’s family and associates in subsequent applications for promotions, jobs, permits or tenders resulting in financial loss or reputational damage.

#### Taken in reprisal for a protected disclosure

The person (or the person incited to take detrimental action) must take or threaten the detrimental action, because, or in the belief that the:

- other person or anyone else has made, or intends to make the disclosure;
- other person or anyone else has cooperated or intends to cooperate with an investigation of the disclosure.

This belief must be a ‘substantial’ reason for taking that action, or it will not be considered to be detrimental action.

### **5.3 Assessment of a Disclosure**

Disclosures about WGCMA should only be made to IBAC. WGCMA is a public body that cannot receive disclosures. If WGCMA receives a complaint, report, or allegation of improper conduct or detrimental action that it believes may be a protected disclosure, it will advise the discloser to make their disclosure to IBAC.

Once a disclosure has been notified to IBAC, IBAC must determine whether it is a protected disclosure complaint. Such a determination must be made within a reasonable time after the disclosure is notified to IBAC.

If IBAC is of the view that the assessable disclosure is not a protected disclosure, then it is not a ‘protected disclosure complaint’. If IBAC is of the view that the assessable disclosure is a protected disclosure, then it must determine that the protected disclosure is a “protected disclosure complaint”.

### **5.4 If IBAC determines the disclosure is not a protected disclosure complaint**

If IBAC determines the disclosure is not a protected disclosure complaint, IBAC must advise the discloser in writing and within a reasonable time after the determination is made, that:

- IBAC has determined that the disclosure is not a protected disclosure complaint; and
- as a consequence of that determination:
  - the disclosure will not be investigated as a protected disclosure complaint; and
  - the confidentiality provisions under Part 7 of the Act no longer apply in relation to the disclosure; and
- regardless of whether IBAC has determined that the disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint, the protections under Part 6 apply to a protected disclosure.

In addition, if IBAC is of the view that the disclosure, although not a protected disclosure complaint, may be able to be dealt with by another entity, IBAC may advise the discloser that:

- the matter which is the subject of the disclosure may be able to be dealt with by that entity other than as a protected disclosure complaint; and
- if the discloser wishes to pursue the matter, make a complaint directly to that entity.

IBAC is also able to consider whether it wishes to treat the assessable disclosure as a notification

made to IBAC under The IBAC Act.

## 5.5 If IBAC determines the disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint

### 5.5.1 Notification to the discloser

If IBAC determines the disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint, IBAC must advise the discloser in writing and within a reasonable time after the determination is made, that:

- IBAC has determined that the disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint;
- regardless of the determination, the protections available to a discloser of a protected disclosure under Part 6 of the Act apply;
- the discloser has rights, protections and obligations under the Act as contained in sections 72, 74 and Parts 6 and 7 of the Act, including an explanation of the effect of those sections and Parts of the Act; and
- it is an offence under s 74 of the Act to disclose that IBAC has determined that the disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint.

Whether or not IBAC determines the disclosure to be a protected disclosure complaint, the protections under Part 6 of the PD Act apply to the discloser.

Once IBAC has determined that a disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint, the discloser cannot withdraw that disclosure. However, under The IBAC Act, IBAC can decide not to investigate a protected disclosure complaint if the discloser requests that it not be investigated.

### 5.5.2 Further actions IBAC may take

Under the IBAC Act, IBAC may dismiss, investigate, or refer a protected disclosure complaint.

If IBAC dismisses a protected disclosure complaint, then it must do so on one of the grounds specifically set out in The IBAC Act. In particular, IBAC **must** dismiss a protected disclosure complaint if the matter disclosed is a matter that neither IBAC nor an investigating entity may investigate.

IBAC may choose to investigate the alleged conduct if it is reasonably satisfied that it is “serious corrupt conduct”.

IBAC may also choose to refer the protected disclosure complaint to other appropriate and relevant investigative entities.

Depending on the action IBAC decides to take, IBAC must also provide certain other information to the discloser. That information is set out at the chart on p 24 of IBAC’s Guidelines for Making and Handling Protected Disclosures.

### 5.5.3 Other information about investigative entities’ investigations of a protected disclosure

## **complaint**

If IBAC or another investigative entity is conducting an investigation of a protected disclosure complaint, it may be in contact with WGCMA or a person about which the disclosure has been made. This will be for the purpose of conducting investigative enquiries.

WGCMA or that person will be able to disclose information about the protected disclosure complaint to the investigative entity without breaching the confidentiality requirements of the Act.

The relevant investigative entity may also disclose the identity of the discloser and the content of the disclosure if necessary, to do so for the purposes of their investigative action. If this is the case, then WGCMA or person to whom the information has been disclosed, is bound by the confidentiality requirements of Part 7 of the PD Act.

In addition, if WGCMA is advised of the identity of the discloser, then it will be required to look after the welfare of the discloser and provide protection against possible detrimental action.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the relevant investigative entity must generally provide the discloser with information about the results of its investigation, including any action taken by the investigative entity and any recommendation by the investigative agency that action or further action be taken.

The investigative entity may provide written information about the commencement, conduct or result of an investigation, including any actions taken and any recommendation made that any action or further action be taken to the relevant principal officer. However, the investigative entity must not provide any information that is likely to lead to the identification of a discloser.

The investigative entity does not have to provide this information to either the discloser or the relevant principal officer in specified circumstances set out in The IBAC Act or the *Ombudsman Act 1973*.

## **5.6 Welfare Management**

WGCMA is committed to the protection of genuine disclosers against detrimental action taken in reprisal for the making of protected disclosures.

The protection of persons making genuine protected disclosures about improper conduct or detrimental action is essential for the effective implementation of the Act. In addition, the Act extends the need for welfare management to people who have cooperated or intend to cooperate with an investigation of a protected disclosure complaint (“**co-operators**”). Persons who are the subject of allegations will also have their welfare looked after.

It is the view of IBAC that WGCMA cannot receive disclosures, and therefore may not know that a person has made a protected disclosure. Confidentiality obligations require a person who has made a protected disclosure not to discuss the matter with any other person except with IBAC (or another investigative entity to which IBAC may have referred the disclosure). Therefore, WGCMA will only be

made aware that a person requires protection under the Act if that information has been provided to WGCMA by IBAC or the VI (when assessing whether a disclosure is a protected disclosure complaint), or by the investigative entity investigating a protected disclosure complaint.

Once WGCMA has been made aware of the identity of a discloser, and any other relevant information about the protected disclosure, WGCMA will keep all information it receives confidential, and will manage the welfare of any relevant persons in accordance with its obligations under the Act.

WGCMA must, where it is aware of or has been provided the identities of disclosers and co-operators, ensure they are protected from direct and indirect detrimental action being taken against them in reprisal for the protected disclosure. WGCMA will ensure its workplace culture supports disclosers and co-operators. Such support will extend to the relevant persons regardless of whether they are internal to the organisation (e.g., employees, Members, other officers) or external members of the public. However, different legislative responsibilities (including those external to the Act) apply to persons internal to the organisation, and to persons who may be clients or users of WGCMA's services. These responsibilities derive from various legislative and administrative obligations to:

- ensure the health and wellbeing of employees of a public sector body under laws including those relating to Occupational Health and Safety, the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, the *Public Administration Act 2004*, and various Victorian Public Sector Codes of Conduct (as relevant); and
- comply with various relevant laws, policies and practices when making administrative and other decisions or taking particular actions affecting a customer, client or user of the public body's services. IBAC uses the example of a public housing tenant client of the Department of Human Services to illustrate this point. If the tenant makes a disclosure about an officer of the Department allocating a house to a relative of the officer, without them having to go through the normal application process, then IBAC's view is that the Department has legislative and administrative obligations to meet in handling the welfare of the discloser.

Generally, for internal persons, WGCMA will ensure a supportive work environment and respond appropriately to any reports of intimidation or harassment against these persons. For external persons, WGCMA will take reasonable steps to provide appropriate support. WGCMA will discuss reasonable expectations with all persons receiving welfare management in connection with a protected disclosure.

#### **5.6.1 Support available to disclosers and cooperators**

WGCMA will support disclosers and co-operators by:

- keeping them informed, by providing:

- confirmation that the disclosure has been received, if the relevant investigative agency has provided this information to WGCMA;
- the legislative or administrative protections available to the person;
- a description of any action proposed to be taken;
- if action has been taken by WGCMA, details about results of the action known to WGCMA;
- providing active support by:
  - acknowledging the person for having come forward;
  - assuring the discloser or co-operator that they have done the right thing, and WGCMA appreciates it;
  - making a clear offer of support;
  - assuring them that all reasonable steps will be taken to protect them;
  - giving them an undertaking to keep them informed as far as WGCMA is reasonably able to;
- managing their expectations by undertaking an early discussion with them about:
  - what outcome they seek;
  - whether their expectations are realistic;
  - what WGCMA will be able to deliver;
- maintaining confidentiality by:
  - ensuring as far as is possible that other people cannot infer the identity of the discloser or co-operator;
  - reminding the discloser or co-operator not to reveal themselves or to reveal any information that would enable others to identify them as a discloser or co-operator;
  - ensuring that hardcopy and electronic files relating to the disclosure are accessible only to those who are involved in managing disclosures in WGCMA;
- proactively assessing the risk of detrimental action being taken in reprisal (rather than reactively waiting for a problem to arise and a complaint to be made by the discloser or co-operator), that is, actively monitor the workplace, anticipating problems and dealing with them before they develop as far as is possible;
- protecting the discloser or co-operator by:

- examining the immediate welfare and protection needs of the person and seeking to foster a supportive work environment;
  - listening and responding to any concerns the person may have about harassment, intimidation or victimisation in reprisal for their actions;
  - assessing whether the concerns the person may have about harassment, intimidation or victimisation might be due to other causes other than those related to the protected disclosure;
- reducing the likelihood of gossip and rumours about any investigation into the protected disclosure where WGCMA is aware of any investigation being undertaken or about to be undertaken; and
- Keeping contemporaneous records of all aspects of the case management of the person, including all contact and follow-up action.

### **Appointment of a Welfare Manager**

In appropriate circumstances, WGCMA will appoint a suitable welfare manager to protect a discloser or a co-operator. The following matters will be taken into consideration by WGCMA when deciding whether to appoint a welfare manager in a particular case:

- are there any real risks of detrimental action against the discloser or co-operator, taking into account their particular circumstances?
- whether WGCMA can will take the discloser or co-operator seriously and treat them with respect?
- whether WGCMA will give the discloser or co-operator effective support, including keeping the discloser informed of the status of the disclosure (as far as WGCMA has been provided with such information by a relevant investigative entity)?
- can WGCMA protect the person from suffering repercussions, by dealing with the matter discreetly and confidentially, and responding swiftly and fairly to any allegations that the discloser or co-operator has in fact suffered retribution?

If the answer to the first question is 'yes' then IBAC recommends the appointment of a dedicated welfare officer. If the answer to the first question is 'no' and WGCMA can meet the needs set out in the remainder of the questions, IBAC suggests there may be no need for a dedicated welfare officer to be appointed for that particular case.

In most circumstances, a welfare officer will only be required where a protected disclosure complaint proceeds to investigation, but each protected disclosure received by WGCMA will be assessed on its own merits. In particular, a Welfare Manager will be appointed where WGCMA believes that one is required to ensure that the appropriate support as set out in

section 7.1 above can be provided to the discloser or co-operator.

If appointed, the Welfare Manager will, in addition to providing the general support set out above at section 5.6.1:

- advise the discloser or co-operator of the legislative and administrative protections available to him or her, including providing practical advice;
- listen and respond to any concerns of harassment, intimidation or victimisation in reprisal for making a disclosure;
- not divulge any details relating to the protected disclosure to any person other than the Protected Disclosure Coordinator;
- ensure all meetings between the Welfare Manager and the discloser or co-operator are conducted discreetly to protect the person from being identified as being involved in the protected disclosure; and
- ensure the expectations of the discloser are realistic and reasonable, and that the discloser or co-operator understands the limits of the support WGCMA is able to reasonably provide in the particular circumstances. This is particularly the case where a Welfare Manager has been appointed in relation to an external discloser or co-operator.

#### **5.6.2 Welfare management of persons who is the subject of protected disclosures**

WGCMA will also meet the welfare needs of a person who is the subject of a protected disclosure. It is important to remember that until a protected disclosure complaint is resolved, the information about the person is only an allegation.

WGCMA will make a decision about whether or when the subject of a disclosure will be informed about a protected disclosure involving an allegation made against him or her. It is possible that the subject of the disclosure may never be told about the disclosure if it is not determined to be a protected disclosure complaint, or if a decision is made to dismiss the disclosure. This may also depend on the stage at which the relevant investigative entity actually informs WGCMA of the identity of the subject of a disclosure.

The Act limits the disclosure of information about the content of an assessable disclosure and the identity of the discloser to certain specified circumstances set out in Part 7 of the Act. WGCMA may give information about the disclosure to the subject of the disclosure if it is directed or authorized to do so by the investigative entity investigating the protected disclosure complaint, or for the purpose of taking action with respect to the conduct alleged, including disciplinary action.

Investigative entities may also inform the subject of the protected disclosure complaint in the course of their investigation for the purposes of conducting that investigation, or any actions that they propose to take as a result of the investigation.

### **Protected Disclosure Coordinator**

WGCMA's Protected Disclosure Coordinator has a central role in the way the organisation deals with all protected disclosure matters, and in particular for ensuring that the welfare of any persons connected with a protected disclosure is properly managed.

The Protected Disclosure Coordinator is:

- the contact point for general advice about the operation of the Act and for integrity agencies such as the IBAC;
- responsible for ensuring that WGCMA carries out its responsibilities under the Act, any regulations made pursuant to the Act and any guidelines issued by the IBAC;
- WGCMA's chief liaison with the IBAC in regard to the Act;
- to take all necessary steps to ensure information received or obtained in connection with a disclosure, including the identities of the discloser and the person(s) to whom the disclosure relate, are kept secured, private and confidential at all times;
- responsible for arranging any necessary and appropriate welfare support for the discloser;
- to collate statistics required to be reported by WGCMA in its annual reports under the Act.

The Protected Disclosure Coordinator is:

Corporate Services Manager

☎: 1300 094 262

### **Welfare services**

A person the subject of a disclosure who is made aware of their status as such may have a welfare manager appointed by WGCMA or be referred to WGCMA's EAP program for welfare assistance. Alternatively, the Protected Disclosure Coordinator will provide support and advice to a person the subject of a disclosure, particularly in relation to their rights and obligations under the Act, these procedures, and any other relevant law or code of conduct. WGCMA will consider each matter on a case by case basis, taking into account the information it has been provided by the investigative entity and the person's particular circumstances.

### **Confidentiality**

Consistently with WGCMA's confidentiality obligations under the Act as outlined in these procedures, the fact that a disclosure has been made, any information received from IBAC or

another investigative entity and the identities of persons involved will not be divulged.

WGCMA will take all reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of the subject of a disclosure at all times. Where the disclosure is dismissed or investigations do not substantiate the allegations made against the person, the fact that the investigation was undertaken, its results, and the identity of the person subject of the disclosure (to the extent that WGCMA has been provided that information by an investigative entity) will still be kept confidential by WGCMA.

### **Natural justice**

WGCMA will afford natural justice to the subject of a disclosure prior to any decision being made about the allegations. If the matter has been investigated by an investigative entity, then the investigative entity will be responsible for ensuring consultations with the subject include the provision of natural justice to him or her. IBAC has noted that affording a subject of a disclosure natural justice in this context means that if a decision is to be made about their conduct this person has the right to:

- be informed about the substance of the allegations against them;
- be given the opportunity to answer the allegations before a final decision is made;
- be informed about the substance of any adverse comment that may be included in any report arising from an investigation; and
- have his or her defence set out fairly in any report.

### **If the allegations are wrong or unsubstantiated**

WGCMA will give its full support to a person who is the subject of a disclosure where the allegations contained in a disclosure are wrong or unsubstantiated. In those circumstances, WGCMA and any investigative entity involved will ensure that there are no adverse consequences for this person arising out of the disclosure or its investigation. This is particularly crucial in a situation where there has been publicly disclosed information identifying the subject, but also where such information has become well-known across WGCMA and the subject is an employee, member or staff of WGCMA.

Further, if the matter has been publicly disclosed by WGCMA, the Chief Executive Officer will consider any request by that person to issue a statement of support setting out that the allegations were clearly wrong or unsubstantiated.

#### **5.6.3 If detrimental action is reported**

If any person reports an incident of harassment, discrimination or adverse treatment that may amount to detrimental action apparently taken in reprisal for a disclosure, the Welfare Manager or Protected Disclosure Coordinator must record details of the incident and advise the person of their rights under the Act to make a disclosure to IBAC.

A person takes detrimental action against another person in reprisal for a protected disclosure if:

- the person takes, or threatens to take, detrimental action against the other person because, or in the belief that:
  - the other person or anyone else has made, or intends to make, the disclosure; or
  - the other person or anyone else has cooperated, or intends to cooperate, with an investigation of the disclosure; or
- for either of the reasons above, the person incites or permits someone else to take or threaten to take detrimental action against the other person.

All persons are reminded it is a criminal offence to take detrimental action against another person in reprisal for a protected disclosure under the Act. The penalty for committing such an offence in contravention of the Act is a maximum fine of 240 penalty units, (\$34,646.40 from 1 July 2013, usually increasing 1 July every year in accordance with arrangements made under the *Monetary Units Act 2004*), two years imprisonment or both.

In addition, the taking of detrimental action in reprisal for making a disclosure can be grounds for a person to make a further disclosure with respect to that conduct. The disclosure of this allegation should be made to IBAC as a new disclosure under Part 2 of the Act. Where the detrimental action is of a serious nature likely to amount to a criminal offence and WGCMA will also consider reporting the matter to the police or IBAC.

A discloser of a protected disclosure may also:

- take civil action against the person who took detrimental action against the discloser and seek damages;
- take civil action against WGCMA jointly and severally to seek damages if the person who took detrimental action against the discloser took that action in the course of employment with, or while acting as an agent of WGCMA; and
- apply for an order or an injunction from the Supreme Court.

#### **5.6.4 Protections for persons making a protected disclosure**

##### **Part 6 protections available to disclosers**

Part 6 of the Act sets out the protections provided to persons who make a disclosure that is a

'protected disclosure', i.e., one that is made in accordance with Part 2 of the PD Act. In summary, they are as follows:

- the discloser is not subject to any civil or criminal liability for making the protected disclosure;
- the discloser is not subject to any administrative action (including disciplinary action) for making the protected disclosure;
- by making the protected disclosure, the discloser is not committing an offence against the *Constitution Act 1975* or any other law that imposes obligations of confidentiality or otherwise restricts the disclosure of information;
- by making the protected disclosure, the discloser is not breaching any other obligation (made by oath, rule of law or practice) requiring him or her to maintain confidentiality; and
- the discloser cannot be held liable for defamation in relation to information included in a protected disclosure made by him or her.

The protections in Part 6 apply from the time at which the disclosure is made by the discloser. They apply even if IBAC has determined that the protected disclosure is not a protected disclosure complaint.

The protections also apply to further information relating to a protected disclosure made by the original discloser, if the further information has been provided, verbally or in writing, to:

- IBAC; or
- any investigative entity investigating the protected disclosure.

Sections 52 and 53 of the Protected Disclosure Act refer specifically to confidentiality obligations of persons receiving information connected with an assessable disclosure or leading to the identification of a discloser. Those confidentiality obligations do not apply to disclosers.

### **Transfer of employees**

An employee of WGCMA who has made a protected disclosure and believes on reasonable grounds that detrimental action will be, is being, or has been taken against them may request a transfer of employment.

After making a disclosure an employee can be transferred internally to another part of WGCMA, or to another public service body or public entity on similar terms and conditions of employment. This can only happen if they request, or consent to, a transfer and the following other conditions apply:

- the head of WGCMA has reasonable grounds to suspect detrimental action will be, is

being, or has been taken against the employee;

- the head of WGCMA considers that the transfer will avoid, reduce or eliminate the risk of detrimental action;
- if transfer to another public body is proposed the head of that other public body consents to the transfer.

The transfer can be temporary or permanent, and if the employee is moved to another public body, the employee's service in the new body is regarded as continuous with their pre-transfer service at WGCMA.

### **Actions of the discloser constituting offences and leading to protections being lost**

However, a discloser is not protected if they commit an offence under s 72 or s 73 of Act, as follows:

- provide false or misleading information, or further information that relates to a protected disclosure, that the person knows to be false or misleading in a material particular, intending that the information be acted on as a protected disclosure (maximum penalty: a fine of 120 penalty units (\$17,323.20 from 1 July 2013), usually increasing 1 July every year in accordance with arrangements made under the *Monetary Units Act 2004*), 12 months' imprisonment, or both);
- claim that a matter is the subject of a protected disclosure knowing the claim to be false (maximum penalty: a fine of 120 penalty units, 12 months' imprisonment, or both);
- falsely claim that a matter is the subject of a disclosure that IBAC has determined to be a protected disclosure complaint (maximum penalty: a fine of 120 penalty units, 12 months' imprisonment, or both).

Similar provisions set out in the IBAC Act, such as in s 184, also make it a criminal offence to disclose certain information received from IBAC. The penalties for such offenses are a fine of 60 penalty units, 6 months' imprisonment, or both.

### **Other limitations on protections afforded to disclosers**

A discloser is not protected against legitimate management action being taken by WGCMA in accordance with the Act.

In addition, although the discloser of a protected disclosure is not subject to criminal or civil liability for making the disclosure, the Act specifically provides that a person remains liable for their own conduct even though the person has made a disclosure of that conduct under the Act. Therefore, the discloser will still be held liable for their own conduct that they disclose as part of making a protected disclosure.

**If the person making the disclosure is implicated in the improper conduct or detrimental action that is the subject of the disclosure**

Where a discloser is implicated in improper conduct, and an investigative entity has provided the necessary information to WGCMA, WGCMA will protect the discloser from reprisals in accordance with the Act, IBAC's guidelines and these procedures. WGCMA acknowledges that the act of disclosing should not shield disclosers from the reasonable consequences flowing from any involvement in improper conduct. However, in some circumstances, an admission may be a mitigating factor when considering disciplinary or other action.

The management of the welfare of a discloser may become complicated when that person is implicated in misconduct, whether or not that misconduct is related to the disclosure.

Taking disciplinary or other action against a person who has made a protected disclosure invariably creates the perception that it is being taken in reprisal for the disclosure. The Chief Executive Director will make the final decision on the advice of the Protected Disclosure Coordinator or Welfare Manager as to whether disciplinary or other action will be taken against a discloser. Where disciplinary or other action relates to conduct that is the subject of the disclosure, the disciplinary or other action will only be taken after the disclosed matter has been appropriately dealt with. In all cases where disciplinary or other action is being contemplated, any such action will not be taken without WGCMA ensuring that:

- the fact that a person has made a protected disclosure is not a substantial reason for WGCMA taking the action against the employee;
- there are good and sufficient grounds that would fully justify action against any other person in the same circumstances;
- there are good and sufficient grounds that justify exercising any discretion to institute disciplinary or other action.

WGCMA will take all reasonable steps to thoroughly document its decision-making process, including recording the reasons why the disciplinary or other action is being taken, and the reasons why the action is not being taken in retribution against the discloser for making the disclosure, so that it will be able to clearly demonstrate that the disciplinary or other action was taken for the appropriate and permitted reasons under the Act.

The discloser will be clearly informed of any action proposed to be taken, be afforded natural justice, and inform and be informed of any mitigating factors that have been taken into account. Such communications with the discloser will be made in plain English and reasonable steps to provide appropriate support will be offered where appropriate.

## **5.7 CONFIDENTIALITY**

### **5.7.1 General obligation of confidentiality on WGCMA and all individuals**

WGCMA will take all reasonable steps to protect the identity of the discloser and the matters disclosed by a discloser. Maintaining confidentiality in relation to protected disclosure matters is crucial, among other things, in ensuring detrimental actions are not taken in reprisal against a discloser.

Disclosers may consider whether it is in their best interests not to discuss any related matters other than with officers of IBAC, another investigative entity, or other persons authorised by law.

### **5.7.2 Steps taken by WGCMA to ensure confidentiality**

#### **Information management**

WGCMA will ensure all files, whether paper or electronic, are kept securely. Those files will be accessible only by the Protected Disclosure Coordinator and the Welfare Manager assigned to a particular person. Printed materials will be kept in files clearly marked as Protected Disclosure Act matters and warn of the penalties that apply to unauthorised access or use of the information within. Electronic files will be given specific password protection.

WGCMA will not email documents relevant to a protected disclosure matter.

The Welfare Manager will not divulge any details relating to the disclosed matter to any person other than the Protected Disclosure Coordinator or an investigator appropriately authorised under the Act or The IBAC Act. All meetings between any relevant persons will be conducted discreetly to protect the confidentiality of the person making a protected disclosure.

#### **Exemption from the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic) (“FOI Act”)**

The FOI Act provides a general right of access for any person to seek documents in the possession of WGCMA.

However, the Act provides that certain information related to protected disclosures as contained in documents in the possession of WGCMA will be exempt from the application of the FOI Act.

Such information excluded from the operation of the FOI Act includes:

- any information relating to a disclosure made in accordance with the Act; and
- any information that is likely to lead to the identification of a discloser.

WGCMA is required to contact IBAC prior to providing any document originating from IBAC or relating

to a protected disclosure, if that document is sought under the FOI Act.

### **Training for all staff, employees, officers and members**

WGCMA will:

- ensure that staff, employees, officers and members have access to a copy of these procedures in hard or soft copy;
- incorporate into its induction procedures training about WGCMA's general obligations under the Act and the rights and obligations of all employees, staff and members;
- introduce periodic refresher courses for existing staff, employees and members about their rights and obligations under the Act;
- provide additional training and assistance to:
  - any members of WGCMA with specific responsibilities and functions to handle and manage protected disclosures under the Act, including the Protected Disclosure Coordinator and people involved in welfare management; and
  - any staff with functions and duties under the FOI Act or with responsibilities for information management, to ensure that no prohibited information is disclosed under the Act and to ensure there is appropriate liaising with the staff of IBAC or other investigative agencies where required in response to a request for access under the FOI Act.

#### **5.7.3 Limited exceptions permitted by the act**

The Act makes it a crime to disclose information connected with a disclosure made in accordance with the Act. Limited exceptions to the prohibition on disclosure are specified by the Act, include circumstances such as:

- where disclosure is required by WGCMA (or one of its officers) in the exercise of functions of WGCMA under the Act;
- where necessary for the purpose of the exercise of functions under the Act;
- by an investigating entity for the purpose of exercising that entity's functions under The IBAC Act;
- in accordance with a direction or authorisation given by the investigating entity that is investigating the disclosure;
- to the extent necessary for the purpose of taking lawful action in relation to the conduct that is the subject of an assessable disclosure including a disciplinary process or action;
- where IBAC or the VI has determined that the assessable disclosure is not a

protected disclosure and the discloser or WGCMA subsequently discloses the information;

- when an investigating entity had published a report to Parliament, in accordance with its confidentiality obligations;
- for the purpose of obtaining legal advice in relation to matters specified in the Act;
- in order to enable compliance with the Act:
  - where a person does not have a sufficient knowledge of the English language, to obtain a translation from an interpreter;
  - where a person is under 18 years of age, to a parent or guardian;
  - where a person is suffering a disability and is not able to understand, to an independent person;
- in disciplinary actions or legal proceedings for certain offences in the Act or other specified Acts.

The Act prohibits the inclusion of any details, in any report or recommendation that is likely to lead to the identification of a discloser. The Act also prohibits the identification of the person who is the subject of the disclosure in any particulars included in an annual report or any reports to Parliament.

#### **5.7.4 Penalties apply for unauthorised disclosure of information**

The Act contains a number of offence provisions relating to unauthorised disclosure of information by either disclosers or persons who have received disclosures. The relevant penalties for breaching the confidentiality required by the Act include imprisonment, financial payments or both.

The criminal offences set out in the Act relating to confidentiality include:

1. Divulging information obtained in connection or as a result of the handling or investigation of a protected disclosure without legislative authority. Maximum penalty: 60 penalty units (\$8,661.60 from 1 July 2013), six months imprisonment, or both.
2. Disclosing that a disclosure has been notified to IBAC for assessment under the Act. Maximum penalty: 60 penalty units, six months imprisonment, or both.
3. Disclosing that a disclosure has been assessed by IBAC or the VI to be a protected disclosure complaint under the Act. Maximum penalty: 60 penalty units, six months imprisonment, or both.

## **5.8 Collating and Publishing Statistics**

WGCMA is required to publish information about how these procedures may be accessed in its annual reports.

## **5.9 Review**

These procedures will be reviewed regularly or upon significant change to the Act, the Regulations or IBAC's guidelines to ensure they comply with the requirements of the Act, the Regulations and IBAC's guidelines.

## **6. ATTACHMENTS**

Links to Important Websites:

<https://www.ibac.vic.gov.au/home>

<https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/>