



Public Interest Disclosure

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Audience

Public

Function area

Corporate

Purpose

This procedure outlines the roles, responsibilities and processes in assessing, and if required investigating, disclosed information about suspected wrongdoing in the public sector in compliance with the requirements of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010* (PID Act).

Overview

The Office of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner's (OQIC) is committed to fostering an ethical, transparent culture and values the disclosure of information about suspected wrongdoing in the public sector so it can be properly assessed and appropriately investigated if required. OQIC will support employees or others who make disclosures about matters in the public interest.

In supporting the commitment to assessing and responding to any public interest disclosure (PID), OQIC will:

- encourage reporting of wrongdoing
- support and provide feedback to disclosers
- provide protection from reprisal to the discloser
- offer protection from reprisals within OQIC to all OQIC officers
- take appropriate action in relation to any wrongdoing.

When making a PID the discloser receives the protections provided under the PID Act, including:

- confidentiality the discloser's name and other identifying information will be protected to the extent possible
- protection against reprisal the discloser is protected from unfair treatment by OQIC and employees of OQIC because of making the PID
- immunity from liability the discloser cannot be prosecuted for disclosing the information but is not exempt from action if they have engaged in wrongdoing
- protection from defamation the discloser has a defence against an accusation of defamation by any subject officer.

In compliance with Standard 1.3 of the <u>Public Interest Disclosure Standard 1/2019 - Public Interest Disclosure Management Program,</u> OQIC has a <u>PID management program</u> to further support and strengthen the reporting and handling of suspected wrongdoing in the public interest.

OQIC's Public Interest Disclosure Procedure is publicly available at integrity.qld.gov.au. The Public Interest Disclosure Procedure will be reviewed annually and updated as required to meet requirements of the PID Act and standards issued by the Queensland Ombudsman.

Responsibilities

Position	Responsibilities		
Integrity Commissioner	ensure all employees are aware of their requirement to comply with the OQIC Code of Conduct		
	 ensure OQIC develops, implements and maintains a PID management program 		
	 appoint the PID Coordinator, providing delegation and access required to undertake the role 		
	 make sure procedures for managing PIDs are established and publicly available 		
	 ensure PIDs are promptly and properly assessed, investigated and dealt with 		
	take appropriate action in relation to any wrongdoing disclosed		
	 provide support and protection from reprisal to disclosers 		
	 met legislative obligations in relation to reporting and investigating PIDs 		
	 all matters involving suspected corrupt conduct are assessed against the Crime and Corruption Act 2001 Section 40 guidelines and treated accordingly, including referral to the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) where appropriate 		
	 ensure effective systems and procedures are in place so that issues and outcomes from PIDs inform improvements to service delivery, business processes and internal controls 		
	 approve PID assessments and recommended actions as delegated decision maker. 		
Deputy Integrity	support the Integrity Commissioner in their duties relating to managing PIDs		
Commissioner	approve PID assessments and recommended actions as delegated decision maker.		
Executive	maintain an ethical culture and lead by example		
Leadership Team (ELT)	 endorse the value to OQIC of PIDs and the proper management of PIDs 		
	 ensure employees are aware of their obligations in relation to the requirements of this procedure and related policy 		
	 ensuring if PID allegations are substantiated, investigation recommendations are implemented quickly to reduce the risk of reoccurrence. 		
Manager,	undertake role of PID Coordinator		
Corporate Services	 provide clear guidance to employees on how to handle complex issues which may involve misconduct while maintaining confidentiality and natural justice 		
	 continually monitor and assess the workplace for signs of reprisal against a discloser and take actions to protect them. 		

OQIC Procedure: Public Interest Disclosure

Position	Responsibilities	
Supervisors and officers with functional responsibility	receive disclosures as a proper authority mentioned in s.17 of the PID Act.	

The Integrity Commissioner has delegated designated roles in managing PIDs at OQIC. As outlined in the OQIC Public Interest Disclosure Policy, these designated roles include:

- PID Coordinator
- PID Support Officer
- Investigator
- Delegated decision maker.

Process

Step 1 - Disclosure is made

The first step is for the disclosure to be made and received by the OQIC.

The Queensland Ombudsman provides a checklist for making a public interest disclosure.

Who can make a public interest disclosure?

The PID Act provides for any person to make a disclosure about a:

- a substantial and specific danger to the health or safety of a person with a disability, or
- a substantial and specific danger to the environment, or
- conduct of another person that could, if proved, be a reprisal.

In addition, public sector officers can make a disclosure about the following public interest matters:

- corrupt conduct
- maladministration that adversely affects a person's interests in a substantial and specific way
- a substantial misuse of public resources
- a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

A PID requires either the discloser to have a 'reasonable belief' wrongdoing has occurred, or the information disclosed indicates wrongdoing occurred regardless of the discloser's belief.

Who can a public interest disclosure be made to?

Under the PID Act, for information or a complaint to be considered a PID and attract the protections of the Act, the information must be disclosed to a proper authority relating to the information being disclosed.

Disclosers are encouraged to make a disclosure to the most appropriate of these officers of OQIC in the first instance:

- Manager, Corporate Services (PID Coordinator)
- any member of the OQIC executive leadership team (ELT).

If the matter is not resolved or the discloser is concerned about confidentiality, the disclosure can be made to another appropriate agency:

- Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) corrupt conduct including reprisal
- Queensland Ombudsman maladministration
- Queensland Audit Office substantial misuse of resources
- Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety health and safety danger to a person with disability
- Office of the Public Guardian health and safety danger to a person with disability
- Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation danger to the environment
- Member of the Legislative Assembly (MP) any wrongdoing or danger
- Chief Judicial Officer of a court or tribunal wrongdoing by a judicial officer
- Queensland Human Rights Commission complaint under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* about a reprisal related to the PID Act.

A disclosure can also be made to a journalist if:

- a valid PID was initially made to a proper authority, and
- the proper authority:
 - o decided not to investigate or deal with the disclosure, or
 - o investigated the disclosure but did not recommend takin any action, or
 - o failed to notify the discloser within six months of making the disclosure about how the disclosure will be dealt with.

How to make a public interest disclosure

A disclosure can be made to a proper authority in any way, including anonymously. It can be made verbally though in writing is preferred.

It is up to the discloser if they wish to remain anonymous, though remaining anonymous can make it difficult to progress enquiries into the matter and can be a barrier in providing protections under the PID Act.

To assist assessment and any subsequent investigation the discloser provides in writing:

- contact details –could be a phone number or an anonymous email created for the purpose of disclosing the information (to be monitored for response from OQIC)
- as much information as possible about the suspected wrongdoing, including:
 - o who was involved
 - o what happened
 - when it happened
 - o where it happened
 - o whether there were any witnesses and who they are
 - o any evidence supporting the PID and where it is located
 - o any further information which could assist investigation of the PID.

Roles in this step

Discloser	Initiates the disclosure, preferably in writing to OQIC.	
OQIC recipient of	If an employee receives a disclosure, it must be treated seriously and confidentially.	
PID	The disclosure can be referred to:	
	their supervisor	
	 member of the OQIC Executive Leadership Team (ELT) 	
	OQIC PID Coordinator.	
	The PID Coordinator (Manager, Corporate Services) must be advised either by the discloser or the recipient of the disclosure without unreasonable delay.	
PID Coordinator	Provide an acknowledgement of receipt to the discloser with a timeframe for a response.	

Step 2 – Determining if a disclosure is a PID

The second step requires assessment to determine whether the disclosure is a PID.

Deciding if a matter is a PID

Using the <u>Public Interest Disclosure Assessment Guide</u>, the PID Coordinator will decide if the matter is a PID.

If there is any doubt as to whether a matter is a PID, further information may be obtained to inform the decision.

If doubt remains, the matter will be considered and managed as a PID.

To determine if a disclosure is a PID, the PID Coordinator will consider if:

- the disclosure is something a PID can be made about
- the discloser can receive the protection of the PID Act
- the discloser honestly believes the information shows wrongdoing or the information indicates wrongdoing
- the disclosure is made to an individual or entity as the proper authority in accordance with this procedure or permitted by the PID Act.

The PID Act protections may not be available to a person if they:

- fail to follow the correct disclosure process
- intentionally give false or misleading information
- make a PID directly to or through the media instead of, or before following this procedure.

Mere disagreements over policy do not meet the threshold for a PID under the PID Act.

The PID Coordinator will provide the outcome of the assessment and any proposed actions to an appropriate delegate for approval.

Outcome of assessment

Once the matter has been assessed as a PID, OQIC will advise the discloser:

their information has been received and assessed as a PID

- the action to be taken by OQIC in relation to the disclosure, which could include referring the matter to an external agency, or investigating
- the likely timeframe involved
- the name and contact details of the PID support officer they can contact for updates or advice
- of the discloser's obligations regarding confidentiality
- the protections the discloser has under the PID Act
- the commitment of OQIC to keep appropriate records and maintain confidentiality where permitted
- how updates regarding intended actions and outcomes will be provided to the discloser
- contact details for OQIC's Employee Assistance Program.

Where a disclosure is determined to not be a PID, OQIC will advise the discloser:

- their information has been received but was not assessed as a PID
- the reasons for the decision
- the review rights available if the discloser is dissatisfied with the decision and how to request review
- any action OQIC proposes to take in relation to the matter
- any other options the discloser has in relation to the matter.

If the PID has been made anonymously and the discloser has not provided any contact details, OQIC will not be able to acknowledge the PID or provide any updates.

Risk assessment and protection from reprisal

Disclosers and other affected parties should not suffer detriment because of a PID.

Upon receiving a PID, OQIC will use the <u>Public Disclosure Risk Assessment and Risk Management Guide</u> to assess the likelihood of the affected parties suffering reprisal action because of having made the disclosure. This assessment will consider the actual and reasonably perceived risk of the affected parties suffering detriment and will include consultation with the discloser.

If the discloser is anonymous, the risk assessment will be undertaken based on information available in the PID and consider the risk to anyone who may be suspected of making the PID.

Consistent with the assessed level of risk, OQIC will develop and implement a risk management plan and arrange any required support or protection for affected parties.

OQIC will regularly reassess the risk of reprisal while the PID is being managed, in consultation with the discloser, and review the risk management plan if required.

In the event of reprisal action being alleged or suspected, OQIC will:

- attend to the safety of the affected parties as a matter of priority
- review its risk assessment, risk management plan and any protective measures needed to mitigate any further risk of reprisal
- manage any allegation of a reprisal as a separate PID.

Roles in this step

Discloser	Provides information to the PIC Coordinator if required.
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PID Coordinator	Using the <u>Public Interest Disclosure Assessment Guide</u> , reviews the disclosure to determine if the disclosure is a PID and proposed further actions including to refer the PID to the CCC.	
	If the disclosure is not a PID, OQIC may decide to deal with the disclosure as a complaint or grievance.	
	Uses the <u>Public Disclosure Risk Assessment and Risk Management Guide</u> to determine if a risk management plan and any other protective measures against reprisal are required.	
	Provides the outcomes of the assessment and any proposed actions to the appropriate delegate for approval. If it is not appropriate to involve any internal delegates, the PIC Coordinator will refer the matter to an external entity for action.	
	Advises the discloser as to the status of the PID.	
PID Support Officer	Support the PID Coordinator if required.	
Delegate Reviews the assessment of the PID and approves any propose or provides alternative actions.		

Step 3 - Further action

The third step is undertaking action in relation to the disclosure/PID.

Referring a PID

If OQIC decides another proper entity is better able to deal with the PID, the PID may be referred to that entity.

This may be because:

- the PID concerns wrongdoing by that entity or an employee of that entity, or
- another entity has the power to investigate or remedy the matter.

Before referring the PID to another agency, OQIC will conduct a <u>risk assessment</u> and will not proceed with the referral if there is an unacceptable risk of reprisal.

It may also be necessary to refer the PID to another agency due to a legislative obligation, such as referring a matter to the CCC where there is a reasonable suspicion the matter involves or may involve corrupt conduct (as required by section 38 of the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*).

The confidentiality obligations of the PID Act permits appropriate officers of OQIC to communicate with another agency about the referral of a PID. Officers will exercise discretion in their contacts with any other agency.

The discloser will be advised of the action taken by OQIC.

Declining to act on a PID

Under the PID Act, OQIC may decide not to investigate or deal with a PID in various circumstances, including:

- the information disclosed has already been investigated or dealt with by another process
- the information disclosed should be dealt with by another process

- the age of the information makes it impractical to investigate
- the information disclosed is too trivial and dealing with it would substantially and unreasonably divert OQIC from the performance of its functions
- another agency with jurisdiction to investigate the information has informed OQIC an investigation is not warranted.

If a decision is made not to investigate or deal with a PID, OQIC will give the discloser written reasons for the decision.

If the discloser is dissatisfied with the decision, they can request a review by writing to the Integrity Commissioner within 28 days of receiving the written reasons for decision.

Investigating a PID

OQIC will use the <u>Managing Workplace Investigations</u>: a practical guide for the <u>Queensland public sector</u> to assist in determining if an investigation is appropriate and how any investigations would be conducted.

If the information about wrongdoing provided in the PID is substantiated through an investigation, appropriate action will be taken.

Where the investigation does not substantiate wrongdoing, OQIC will review systems, policies and procedures to identify if there are improvements that can be made and consider if staff training is required.

Confidentiality

While OQIC will make every attempt to protect confidentiality, a discloser's identity may need to be disclosed through investigations or other actions to:

- provide natural justice to subject officers, or
- respond to a court order, legal directive or court proceedings.

OQIC will ensure communication with all parties involved will be arranged discreetly to avoid identifying the discloser wherever possible.

Disclosers should be aware that while OQIC will make every attempt to keep their details confidential, it cannot guarantee others will not try to deduce their identity.

Support for disclosers

OQIC recognises that providing appropriate support to a discloser is an important feature of effective PID management.

Any support needs of the discloser during an investigation or other actions will be identified through the risk assessment. Where appropriate, a PID Support Officer will be assigned to the discloser. The PID Support Officer will assist the discloser to access information about PIDs, protections available under the PID Act and the PID management process. The PID Support Officer will proactively contact the discloser to offer support.

Information and support will be provided to the discloser until the matter is finalised.

Making a PID does not prevent reasonable management action. The discloser will continue to be managed in accordance with normal, fair and reasonable management practices during and after the handling of the PID.

Rights of subject officers

OQIC acknowledges officers who are the subject of a PID may find the experience stressful. OQIC will protect their rights by:

• assuring them the PID will be dealt with impartially, fairly and reasonably in accordance with the principles of natural justice

- confirming the PID is an allegation only until information or evidence obtained through an investigation substantiates the allegation
- providing them with information about their rights and the progress and outcome of any investigation
- referring them to the Employee Assistance Program for support.

Information and support will be provided to a subject officer until the matter is finalised.

Review rights

If a discloser is dissatisfied with the decision relating to the PID they made, they can request a review by writing to the Integrity Commissioner within 28 days of receiving the written reasons for decision.

Unless the Integrity Commissioner has been involved in the assessment or investigation of the disclosure, the Integrity Commissioner may conduct a review of the decision or action taken when the written request for review is received. In some cases it may be appropriate to refer the request for review to the <u>Queensland Ombudsman</u>.

Employees who are the subject to a decision or action and are dissatisfied with the outcome may be entitled to lodge:

- an appeal under the <u>Public Sector Commission (PSC) Directive Appeals</u> or
- a complaint with an external oversight body such as the <u>Queensland Human</u> <u>Rights Commission (QHRC)</u> or the <u>Queensland Ombudsman</u>.

The PID Act provides a right to apply to the Queensland Industrial relations Commission or the Supreme Court for an injunction about a reprisal in certain circumstances.

A right of review to the Supreme Court under the *Judicial Review Act 1991* may be available in respect to a question of law arising out of a decision made.

Roles in this step

Discloser	Provides further information if requested and liaises with the PID Support Officer regarding the risk assessment. Maintains confidentiality.
Other affected parties	Provides further information if requested. Maintains confidentiality. If necessary, liaises with the PID Support Officer regarding risk assessments.
PID Coordinator	PID to another Queensland Government agency.
	Appoints a PID Support Officer, provides resources to the PID Support Officer and notifies the discloser of that appointment.
	If appropriate, the PID Coordinator will also notify other parties involved in the PID and direct the PID Support Officer to conduct risk assessments.
	Use the Managing Workplace Investigations: a practical guide for the Queensland public sector to guide PID investigations.

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PID Support Officer	Where required, liaises with the affected parties to conduct a risk assessment.	
Officer	Proactively monitors the situation and risk assessment.	
	Takes proportionate steps to manage risks.	
	Maintains regular contact with the discloser.	

Step 4 – Finalisation of the process

The fourth step signals the end of the reporting process and the finalisation of the process.

Communication

In accordance with the PID Act, after finalising action in response to the PID, OQIC will advise the discloser in writing of the action taken and the results of the action.

Reporting

OQIC has responsibilities to provide statistical information about PIDs under the Public Interest Disclosure Data Recording and Reporting Standard.

OQIC will provide the oversight agency the information as outlined in Standard 3.2.

Record keeping

As outlined in Standard 3.1 of the Public Interest Disclosure Data Recording and Reporting Standard, OQIC will ensure that:

- accurate data is collected about the receipt and management of PIDs
- anonymised data is reported to the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman in their role as the oversight agency, through the PID reporting database.

Records about disclosures, investigations, and related decisions will be kept secure and accessible only to appropriately authorised people involved in managing the PID.

Roles in this step

Discloser	notified of the conclusion of any organised support arrangements ellowing finalisation of action taken. In notified of the outcome if appropriate.	
Other affected parties	Is notified of the outcome and the conclusion of any organised support arrangements following finalisation of action taken.	
PID Coordinator	Provides the Discloser with reasonable information in writing about the action taken on their disclosure and the results.	
	Reports de-identified statistical information to the QO about PIDs and PID management.	
PID Support Officer	Supports the PID Coordinator if required.	

OQIC Procedure: Public Interest Disclosure

Definitions

Term	Definition	
Affected parties	Any person who may be affected by the disclosure of information. Includes the discloser, subject officer, witnesses and other affected third parties.	
Corrupt conduct	Section 15 of the <i>Crime and Corruption Act 2001</i> defines corrupt conduct.	
Discloser	A person who makes a disclosure in accordance with the <u>Public</u> <u>Interest Disclosure Act 2010</u> .	
Employees	Employees refers to employees and office holders of the OQIC including any contractors, volunteers, students of others engaged to deliver the services and performs any functions of the OQIC.	
Journalist	A person engaged in the occupation of writing or editing material intended for publication in the print or electronic news media.	
Maladministration	Schedule 4 of the <i>Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010</i> defines maladministration.	
Natural justice	Natural justice, also referred to as 'procedural fairness' applie to any decision that can affect the rights, interests or expectations of individuals in a direct or immediate way. Natural justice is at law a safeguard applying to an individual whose rights or interests are being affected.	
	The rules of natural justice, which have been developed to ensure that decision-making is fair and reasonable, are:	
	avoid bias	
	give a fair hearing	
	 act only on logically probative evidence. 	
Proper authority	A person or organisation that is authorised under the <u>Public</u> <u>Interest Disclosure Act 2010</u> to receive disclosures.	
Public interest	Acting for the common good of the entire community — not the sum of individual interests nor the interest of a particular group.	
Public officer	A public officer of a public sector entity is an employee, member or officer of the entity.	
Reasonable belief	A view which is objectively fair or sensible.	
Reprisal	The causing, attempting to cause or conspiring to cause detriment to another in the belief they or someone else: • has made or intends to make a disclosure; or	

Term	Definition	
	 has been or intends to be involved in a proceeding under the PID Act against any person. 	
	Reprisal under the <i>Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010</i> is a criminal offence and investigations may be undertaken by the Queensland Police Service.	
Subject officer	An officer who is the subject of allegations of wrongdoing made in a disclosure.	
Substantial and specific	Substantial means 'of a significant or considerable degree'. It must be more than trivial or minimal and have some weight or importance.	
	Specific means 'precise or particular'. This refers to conduct or detriment that can be identified or particularised as opposed to broad or general concerns or criticisms.	

Legislation and Standards

- Crime and Corruption Act 2001
- Ombudsman Act 2001
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010
- Public Records Act 2002
- Public Sector Ethics Act 1994
- <u>Public Interest Disclosure Standard No. 1/2019 Public Interest Disclosure Management Program</u>
- <u>Public Interest Disclosure Standard No. 2/2019 Assessing, Investigating and Dealing with Public Interest Disclosures</u>
- <u>Public Interest Disclosure Standard No. 3/2019 Public Interest Disclosure Data Recording and Reporting</u>

Delegations/Authorisations

- Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010 Proper authority
- OQIC Public Interest Disclosure policy Delegated decision maker; PID Coordinator

Policies and procedures in this group

- OQIC Public Interest Disclosure policy
- OQIC Complaints about the Integrity Commissioner policy
- OQIC Complaints Management policy

Supporting information for this policy

- Public Interest Disclosure Assessment Guide
- Public Disclosure Risk Assessment and Risk Management Guide
- Managing Workplace Investigations: a practical guide for the Queensland public sector

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Other resources

- All agencies Natural justice, disclosure, and privacy | OIC
- Applying for workplace investigation documents | OIC
- Applying for complaint documents | OIC
- Managing unreasonable complainant conduct | QO
- Assessing complaints of corrupt conduct: A guide for assessors and decisionmakers | CCC
- When does workplace bullying reach the threshold for corrupt conduct? | CCC

Key data

Item	Note/relevant information	As at [date]
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Document history

Date	Version number	Author	Description of changes
01/08/2024	1.0	Ruth May	Initial draft based on previous PSC version
21/11/2024	1.1	Cyrilla Eastwood	Review of procedure to reflect model procedure from Queensland Ombudsman and place into new OQIC template
2/12/2024	1.2	Cyrilla Eastwood	Incorporate feedback from Queensland Ombudsman

Approval

Role	Name	Position	Date
Approver	Linda Waugh	Integrity Commissioner	25/05/2025

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