



National Council of Churches in Australia

Policy and Procedure on Public Statements & the Media

Adopted in Principle as a Working Document by the NCCA Executive – June 2005

General Principles

1. The NCCA is a privileged instrument of the movement for Christian unity, and in making any public comment it will uphold the principles of Christian unity that undergird the life and purpose of the Council (see the NCCA Constitution Article 4 – Objectives).
2. The National Forum and the Executive, through the General Secretary, have oversight of all matters relating to Public Statements and media comment by the Council.
3. Public or media comment made by the NCCA must fall within the provisions of the NCCA Constitution and any relevant resolutions of the National Forum and Executive.
4. NCCA statements and media releases dealing with Indigenous issues should be prepared in partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission. A draft copy of any proposed documents should be presented to the NATSIEC for endorsement, in accordance with the 2005 Memorandum of Understanding.

Public Statements

Guidelines

5. NCCA statements should focus on the general directions of social policy-making, and the values the Churches want to see reflected in such policies. They should avoid the finer details of policy work where there is legitimate variance over matters of fact, judgement, and interpretation.
6. NCCA statements should encourage the free interplay of debate and opinion in the spirit of ecumenical dialogue and an open and democratic society.
7. NCCA Commissions, Networks, task based groups, and committees have a role in advising the Council on public issues within their areas of expertise. In framing their advice they should focus on identifying and developing goals and principles the Churches can affirm together and agree on.

Statements developed at meetings of the National Forum and Executive

8. During meetings of the National Forum and Executive, any proposal for a public statement shall be dealt with, first, by ascertaining whether a substantial measure of agreement exists among the member Churches on the issue in question and, if such agreement is found, by deciding whether to make a public statement and/or take some other appropriate action.
9. When the National Forum or Executive has decided to make a public statement, the National Forum or Executive shall approve the public statement and attach the names of all member Churches which are represented at that meeting, except where the representatives of any member Church have indicated otherwise.

Statements developed outside or between meetings

10. At any time the head of any member Church, the President or General Secretary may initiate a public statement by:
 - a. securing the support of the head of at least one other member Church, the President or General Secretary; and
 - b. providing the General Secretary with the proposed text and if necessary a rationale for the stance suggested.

11. If, after having received the draft public statement of a new policy, a head of Church does not respond within seven days the name of his/her Church shall not be associated with the statement.

Media Comment

General Secretary

12. The General Secretary or his/her official designate is authorised to make comment to the media as he/she considers appropriate always respecting the views of member Churches on the matter concerned.

Other Executive Officers

13. Other Executive Officers and senior members of staff, with consent and delegation from the General Secretary, may represent their respective Commission or department in media comment on matters directly relating to their area of work.

Emergencies and disasters

14. In the event an emergency situation and of the General Secretary being unable to be contacted for more than 24 hours, and there being no other delegated person contactable, NCCA managers should contact the President of the NCCA who may grant permission for comment to be made within the guidelines of this policy.
15. The Secretariat must receive a copy of all written media comment and a report on all verbal media comment made from any source within the NCCA.

Media Releases

Content

16. Media releases may contain the following types of material
 - a. Public Statements of the NCCA, released on behalf of all member Churches, in full or in summary.
 - b. Comment by the President, heads of Churches, General Secretary, or authorised staff members explaining or applying an existing statement and/or policy of the NCCA in a timely manner.
 - c. Information about specific campaigns, programmes, appeals or events being organised by the NCCA, or in which the NCCA is a participant.
 - d. Information disseminated on behalf of member Churches at their request.
 - e. Relevant information prepared by ecumenical partner organisations, e.g. State Ecumenical Bodies, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the World Council of Churches.
17. Media releases made on behalf of the NCCA may not contain viewpoints or offer comments that go beyond or contradict the policies of the Council as established by the National Forum and the Executive.

Authorisation

18. The General Secretary, or his/her delegate according to this policy, is responsible for authorising all media releases from any NCCA source for distribution.
19. The General Secretary may delegate this authority to the following people:
 - a. **Executive Officers:** Executive Officers may be delegated to authorise media releases from their department/s that are part of an ongoing policy, campaign, or initiative, and that fall within established and accepted guidelines.
 - b. **Communications Officer:** If the General Secretary has appointed a Communications Officer, that person may, in the event of the General Secretary being unable to be contacted for more than 24 hours, and with

the consent of the Acting General Secretary (*who shall be one of the Executive Officers appointed by the General Secretary for the period of his/her absence*) or the President, authorise a release falling within established polices or practices of the NCCA.

- c. **Acting General Secretary:** If there is no Communications Officer, or he/she is out of contact, the Acting General Secretary (if appointed) may, with the consent of the President, authorise media releases falling within established polices or practices of the NCCA.

Emergency situations

20. In the event an emergency situation (e.g. the South Asia Tsunami of December 2004) and of the General Secretary or relevant delegated persons being unable to be contacted for more than 24 hours, the Communications Officer (if appointed) or the Acting General Secretary, should contact the President who may authorise a release within the guidelines of this policy if he/she deems the matter to be urgent. If both the Communications Officer and the Acting General Secretary are unavailable the available unit managers of the NCCA should meet and may take the matter to the President.

Distribution

21. No NCCA media release may be distributed until it has been authorised according to the provisions of this policy.
22. A central, up to date database of organisations and persons to whom media releases are to be sent is to be maintained in the Secretariat and Business Services department. The relevant data on this list is to be used each time a release is distributed.
23. The Secretariat, the President, and members of the Executive must receive a copy of all media releases from any source within the NCCA at the time of their release.

'Signing on' to statements by other organisations

24. At the discretion of the General Secretary, the NCCA may add its name to statements or activities of compatible organisations when what they say or do fits within established statements and practices of the NCCA. In making such a decision, the General Secretary will use his/her knowledge of the views of member Churches on the subject.

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John Henderson*