

Customer complaint policy and procedure

Owner: People and Culture

CHA/2024/6656

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Version: 1.0

“Please note, when implementing this policy and procedure you must consider whether any human rights are engaged under the *Human Rights Act 2019* and whether any limitations on human rights are reasonable and justifiable. If you engage a human right you should conduct a proportionality assessment under the Act.”

1. Purpose

This policy and procedure is designed to ensure that customer complaints about departmental products, services, decisions and actions are managed through an effective and consistent process that meets the requirements of the *Public Sector Act 2022* and Queensland Public Service Customer Complaint Management Framework and Guideline.

2. Policy

The department recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to complaints. It accepts customer complaints as an opportunity to improve performance, systems, procedures, and processes to ensure a high level of customer service.

The department is committed to ensuring all customer complaints are managed in a responsive, efficient, effective and fair manner. Complainants will be treated with respect and will receive a professional level of service throughout the complaint management process.

3. Key principles for customer complaint resolution

1. Customer focus

Any person is able to make an honest complaint to the department if aggrieved about a departmental product, service, or action that is within the authority of the department to remediate. Persons are to be supported to enable them to participate in the complaint resolution process.

2. Timely and fair

All complaints will be handled in a clear, timely and impartial way. Appropriate confidentiality is to be observed in the management of the complaint and the privacy of personal information is respected and maintained.

3. Accountability, continuous improvement and prevention

Departmental employees and contractors are accountable for their acts, omissions and decisions. Complaints are to be viewed as an opportunity to review business processes and to improve existing, and inform new, quality services to avoid future customer complaints.

4. Communication

Communication will be clear and respectful. Parties to a complaint will be informed of the status of the complaint to enable the process of resolution to occur effectively. The department will maintain appropriate records of complaints and their resolution and publicly report complaint statistics in accordance with its legislative obligations.

4. Responsibilities of key participants

Complainant:

- provide a clear description of the problem and the desired solution or outcome
- provide all relevant information
- inform the department of any changes affecting their complaint
- understand that complex customer complaints can take time to assess, manage and resolve
- understand that some decisions cannot be overturned or changed using the customer complaints management framework
- co-operate with the department staff in a timely, respectful and reasonable way
- understand that abusive, aggressive or disrespectful conduct will not be tolerated.

All staff involved in managing a customer complaint:

- implement professional complaint management practices with customers
- manage customer complaints according to this procedure
- continuously develop their skills to facilitate effective complaint management.

Complaint management representative:

- is the business group's central point of contact for customer complaints
- provides advice and guidance about the management of customer complaints
- assumes point of contact for collating customer and human rights complaint data for their business group.

Respondent:

- respect the confidentiality of the process
- accept that the complaint process forms part of their accountability obligations as a professional public servant
- participate in the process and co-operate with the department's response to the complaint in a respectful and reasonable way
- remain accountable for their own acts and omissions.

Senior leaders, managers and supervisors:

- ensure professional complaint management is a priority for the department
- ensure staff who deal with complaints have received the necessary training prior to dealing with a complaint
- create a workplace culture of excellent customer service by promoting the value of customer complaints as opportunities to improve systems, procedures, and processes and customer experience.

All participants will behave in an acceptable manner that enables meaningful and respectful dialogue in compliance with the department's Stakeholder Engagement Charter.

5. What is a customer complaint?

A customer complaint is defined as a complaint about the service or action of a department, or its staff, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service or action; and includes, for example, a complaint about any of the following –

- (i) a decision made, or a failure to make a decision, by a public sector employee of the department
- (ii) an act, or failure to act, of the department
- (iii) the formulation of a proposal or intention by the department
- (iv) the making of a recommendation by the department
- (v) the customer service provided by a public sector employee of the department.

For the purposes of this policy, the following features are also characteristic of a complaint:

- there is a clear expectation communicated by the customer that there is an act and / or omission by the department which has directly affected them; and
- the customer is aggrieved about that act and / or omission; and
- a reasonable person would conclude the customer had an expectation from their communication that the department will respond to the act and/or omission in a way that requires further departmental action, such as a written response to the customer from the department.

It is not a customer complaint when customers:

- are reporting a matter the department regulates i.e. fishing offences, an environmental or biosecurity matter
- request more information, a change in service or request a new service
- make a suggestion for improving the department's service delivery
- express a concern about a situation without any expectation of a formal departmental reply
- provide feedback on the department's performance without any expectation of a formal departmental reply
- do not have sufficient interest in the issue e.g. where a person's rights or interests would not be affected if the administrative action stood or continued.

If uncertain about whether a customer is making a complaint, or wanting to make a complaint, ask the customer, "*Are you wanting to make a complaint?*"

6. Complaints that are out of scope

Some complaints received by the department are not customer complaints and need to be managed a different way.

This policy and procedure does not apply to complaints made and/or managed pursuant to other legislation and/or complaint management processes. These include but are not limited to privacy complaints, allegations of corrupt conduct, public interest disclosures, employee grievances and/or contractual complaints.

7. Possible outcomes of a customer complaint

Remedies to resolve customer complaints may include but are not limited to:

- issuing of an apology
- providing an explanation of how and why the problem occurred and what steps have been taken to avoid its reoccurrence
- issuing a refund of a fee or charge
- seeking a negotiated or mediated outcome
- correcting records
- amending a decision, policy, procedure, or practice
- repairing property damage
- expediting work where a delay has occurred
- improving a system e.g. change in policy, process, or procedure / staff training etc.
- providing further details and/or explaining the reasons why the act, omission, or decision should stand.

8. Where and how a complaint can be received

There are a range of avenues for lodging a customer complaint with the department, including:

- in person at departmental offices open to the public or directly with frontline officers
- the [CSC](#) and/or associated services Hotlines
- the Queensland Government contact centre – 13QGOV (13 74 68) and [online complaints form](#)
- the department website or social media pages (e.g. Facebook) using the [complaint lodgment form](#)
- telephone, mail or email contact directly with the Director-General's office or the Minister's office
- contact with an employee or the ethics@daf.qld.gov.au mailbox
- direct referral from another agency or the Queensland Ombudsman's office
- anonymous complaints may also be made via the above avenues.

9. Assistance to complainants

Customers who are disadvantaged, have a disability, education and/or language difficulties or require additional assistance to lodge a complaint will be supported and provided with reasonable assistance. There is no financial charge for making a complaint to the department.

The following assistance is available:

- an interpreter to enable the complainant to be heard and understood. The department complies with the [Queensland Government Language Services Policy](#)
- the [National Relay Service](#) for the complainant to access call services for hearing impaired people
- if a customer is unable to make a written complaint, they may call 13 QGOV (13 74 68) or the department's Customer Service Centre (CSC) on 13 25 23.

This list is not exhaustive.

10. Responding to unreasonable complainant conduct

A complainant must participate with the department so that the customer complaint can be addressed, and the complainant's conduct must not be unreasonable. Unreasonable complainant conduct may include:

- persistence – prolonged unreasonable contact, which significantly impacts employee time or other resources
- demands – issuing unreasonable instructions, escalations or expectations of outcomes
- lack of cooperation – providing insufficient or irrelevant details, or actively hindering the complaints process
- arguments – irrational, false, inflammatory and defamatory complaints, not supported by evidence

- behaviour – conduct which compromises the health, safety and security of employees or others.

In these circumstances, a complaint management representative may advise senior management on the situation to inform their decision about the department’s duty of care to its staff, the appropriate use of resources and decide on a case-by-case basis if limiting the complainant’s contact with the department is required. That decision can take a number of forms, including:

- restricting the times for and/or frequency of contact
- advising no further written or verbal correspondence will be provided about the department’s decision on resolved matters that have exhausted internal review avenues and that further communication about those matters will be noted and filed
- designating a single officer with whom the complainant may have contact, such as a manager, and/or
- nominating the acceptable form of contact; for example, email communication to a central mailbox.

A decision to limit a complainant’s contact with the department is to be communicated to the complainant in writing by the responsible senior executive. The above actions may also be appropriate when a person continues to contact the department after feedback has been provided about the complaint and all avenues of review have been exhausted.

There is no obligation upon an employee to continue to interact with a customer who is verbally/physically abusive or threatening. Under the department’s [Stakeholder Engagement Charter](#) an employee can disengage from those who abuse or cause offence. If de-escalation of a customer’s behaviour is unsuccessful or not viable, the interaction should be terminated with the customer invited to reengage when reasonable behaviour is exhibited. The department’s policy and procedure on [Preventing and Responding to Work-Related Violence](#) provides information on managing verbally/physically abusive and threatening behaviour.

A complainant may seek to “prosecute” their complaint by involving a wide range of people across different agencies, or across the department. The departmental employee who has the lead in responding to the complaint, supported by the complaint management representative, may be required to clarify and confirm the respective roles and responsibilities relevant to the management of the complaint with other recipients to the complaint.

11. Complaint management representatives

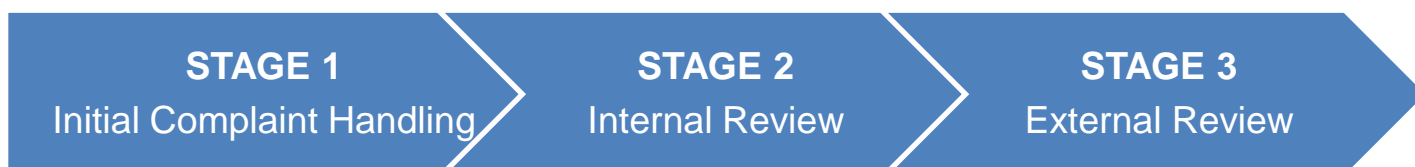
Each business area will nominate one or more complaint management representatives who will perform the following role on behalf of their business group:

1. act as a central point of contact for other areas of the department for receipt of customer complaints
2. act as a source of advice and guidance for their business area about the management of customer complaints
3. act as the point of contact for collating customer and human rights complaint data within their business group for reporting to Corporate
4. promote professional complaint management practice across their business area in cooperation with senior management.

Senior management are responsible for maintaining and fostering complaint management expertise within their business area. They will take into account the need for succession planning and coverage for any extended absence of a complaint management representative from the workplace.

12. Managing customer complaints

The department has adopted a three-stage process for resolving customer complaints.



Checklists to manage customer complaints at each stage of the complaint process can be found at Appendix 1.

Stage 1. Initial Complaint Handling

Complaints received via CSC, Customer Business Services or website:

If a complaint is received via Customer Business Services (CBS) either through face-to-face communication, the online complaint forms, its call centre, or through 13QGov (13 74 68 or a Smart Service Queensland (SSQ) online form), CBS will record the complaint into the Keystone CRM and forward the call to the nominated contact in the relevant business area. To avoid double counting in the recording of complaint statistics, the relevant business group that is managing the complaint is to count the complaint.

Complaints received by the Director-General or Minister's Office:

Correspondence received through the department's Executive Services Unit (ESU) which is identified either by ESU or the business group as a customer complaint, should be recorded in MECS as a customer complaint and written acknowledgement sent to the complainant by the business group. To avoid double counting in the recording of complaint statistics, the relevant business group that is managing the complaint is to count the complaint.

Complaints received by People and Culture, Employee Relations and Integrity

A customer may make a complaint via the ethics@daf.qld.gov.au mailbox. The Employee Relations and Integrity unit will make an initial assessment of the complaint and determine the appropriate action to be taken, which may include referring the matter to the complaint management representative for the relevant business area for their actioning. If the matter is referred to the relevant business area, the business area must provide a written acknowledgement and count the complaint for the purpose of recording complaint statistics.

Frontline/local complaints handling - early resolution

Wherever appropriate, resolution of customer complaints should occur at the point of service or point of first contact. Frontline/local employees who receive complaints should aim to resolve all matters raised within the complaint. The department acknowledges that it may not be practicable to record frontline/local complaints that are addressed immediately at point of service for reporting purposes. The employee should still maintain an appropriate record i.e. Keystone CRM record, email to the customer, file note.

If the matter cannot be resolved at the point of service, the complainant should be provided with information about the complaints process and the complaint should be referred to the relevant complaint management representative for recording and an initial assessment to determine what further action is required and by whom.

Employees responding to a customer complaint should be aware that:

- timely action can reduce escalation in severity which necessitates further expenditure of resources to finalise and resolve complaints
- actions and decision-making on a complaint may be subject to internal and external review.

Written Acknowledgement

Written acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint must be provided to the complainant within three business days, unless a complaint is received anonymously.

If a written acknowledgement is unable to be provided within three business days, verbal acknowledgement should be provided to the complainant with written confirmation to follow.

The written acknowledgement must provide:

- the details of a contact officer
- the proposed timeframe for response
- a copy or link to this policy and procedure on the department's website; and
- a reference number for use in future communication on the matter.

Assessing and resolving a complaint

In assessing a complaint, consider if the matter is within the jurisdiction of the department. Where it is not:

- if received from SSQ, immediately return the complaint to SSQ for reallocation
- if received via some other avenue, advise the complainant of the correct public sector entity and seek consent to refer the complaint to the appropriate agency.

If the matter is within the department's jurisdiction, consider whether it is in scope or whether it falls under another policy and procedure. The department's *Complaint Management Framework* can assist with these considerations.

If the complaint or information:

- involves, or may involve, corrupt conduct the matter should be referred to the Employee Relations and Integrity unit. The department's [Corrupt Conduct Policy and Procedure](#) shall apply
- gives rise to a possible breach or unreasonable limitation of human rights, the provisions of the [Human Rights Act 2019](#) may apply. A complainant does not need to specify that they are making a human rights complaint
- relates to the department's handling of personal information, the department's [Information Privacy Complaint Management Procedure](#) outlines the process for the department to respond.

The complainant should be advised of these assessments and any amended timeframes.

In assessing a complaint, determine the level of associated severity and complexity to inform the level of management required for an appropriate departmental response. The expected resolution timeframe will vary according to the nature of the complaint and the duration of the action required to resolve it.

For moderate and major complaints, a decision-maker and parties appointed to deal with the complaint should not have had any prior involvement in the decisions or actions taken that are the subject of the complaint.

Severity/ complexity	Description of nature of complaint	Recommended assigned officer/ decision maker level	Expected resolution timeframe
Minor matter	Minor complaints are matters that are generally clearly defined, are not complex in nature, and can often be quickly resolved at point of service. Examples may involve misunderstandings, an error in a record requiring correction, or a minor departure of protocol.	Frontline/local employees that receive the complaint.	Minor complaints should be resolved within five business days .
Moderate matters	Complaints that are moderate in severity and complexity are matters that require a more detailed departmental level response and/or investigation to be undertaken to determine what has occurred.	Middle management (e.g. Program Manager, District Manager, Director or Science Leader).	Within 20 business days . If more time is required, the complainant should be advised of the projected resolution timeframe.
Major matters	Major matters are higher risk and are complaints that may have serious consequences for either the complainant, other persons, property or the environment, or the department if the complaint was substantiated.	Middle management or Senior Executive.	Within 30 business days . If more time is required, the complainant should be advised of the new projected resolution timeframe.

Investigating a complaint

A decision to investigate a complaint occurs if the matter has a level of complexity and/or severity that requires more than preliminary enquiries to understand what has occurred and then what reasonable action should follow.

An investigation should be conducted by a person with the necessary expertise and capability to conduct an investigation without bias or conflict of interest. For moderate and major complaints, the investigator should provide a decision-maker with a report to review. The decision-maker will accept or not accept the investigator's findings and recommendations. The decision-maker must be free from bias and any conflict of interest while making their decision.

An investigator will conduct an investigation, honestly, ethically and within their authority and powers. They will adhere to principles of natural justice, take into account relevant considerations and ignore irrelevant considerations.

An investigator will prepare a report that is objective, factual and uses language proportionate to the matters being addressed. Findings of fact and recommendations will be based on the balance of probabilities, underpinned by sound reasoning on the material available. Where a decision is potentially adverse to a party to the complaint, procedural fairness may need to be extended to that party prior to a final decision being made.

An employee who is a respondent to a complaint may be supported by a support person and the department's [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP).

Communication with the parties to the complaint

Professional and tailored communication with parties to the complaint is central to effectively managing the complaint through to its resolution. The parties should be proactively and regularly informed of the status of the complaint and explanation provided if there are delays to the process i.e. staff unavailability due to natural disaster response. Projected timeframes should be communicated if these are known.

As parties to the complaint may be unfamiliar with the department's complaint resolution processes, it can be helpful to provide a description of the process to be undertaken and what further action may be required from them, if any.

Outcome communications/letters by a decision-maker will state at a minimum:

- a summary of the primary issues/substance of the complaint
- the action taken by the department in response to the complaint
- the decision made in response to the issues raised
- clear and meaningful reasons for decision, including reference to any relevant material i.e. policy, legislation
- the action taken because of the complaint
- the contact officer for further information
- information about the internal review avenue, including:
 - a. the timeframes to lodge an internal review is 20 business days from receipt of the complaint outcome
 - b. how to make their submission i.e. in writing and to a specific mailbox/person
 - c. that they are required to outline that they are asking for an internal review
 - d. that they are to outline what outcomes(s) are being sought.

Stage 2. Internal Review

If a complainant is aggrieved about a decision made for their complaint at Stage 1, the complainant may seek an internal review of the decision within 20 business days from receipt of the complaint outcome. The internal review will be conducted, and outcome communicated to the complainant within 20 business days from receipt of the review request.

The aim of an internal review is to ensure the process has complied with the department's policy and procedural requirements and that the right outcome was reached. An internal review is not an investigation or re-investigation of a complaint. It is an impartial review of the complaints process and outcome.

The internal reviewer will be a decision-maker independent of the original decision and free of any conflict of interest. The internal reviewer will be at least as senior as the initial decision-maker and have the broad discretion to overturn/change the original decision and apply remedial action(s).

The internal reviewer will acknowledge the complainant's request and review the request to ensure sufficient information has been provided to enable the internal review to be undertaken and:

- contact the complainant to request additional information if it is required, or the review issues need to be confirmed, or to provide information about the internal review process
- where the complainant does not outline the grounds of review or provides insufficient information, the internal review officer may advise the complainant that the internal review request will not be examined unless this information is provided. If the complainant does not cooperate, the remainder of this procedure does not need to be followed and the internal review is closed
- if the complainant's request raises new customer complaint issue(s), the internal review officer must tell the complainant the issue is out of scope for the internal review, and advise the complainant that these can be lodged as a new customer complaint.

The internal reviewer must analyse the original complaint to determine if the complaints management process and/or the outcome reached was appropriate by considering and assessing:

- information provided with the internal review request
- material considered as part of managing the original complaint
- other information provided by relevant parties, such as the original complaints officer or complainant.

Where necessary, the principles of natural justice will be applied prior to a final decision being made.

Based on the assessment undertaken, the internal reviewer should identify a suitable internal review outcome. This may include, but is not limited to:

- finding the original decision was appropriate and that the complaint does not require further investigation
- finding the original decision was unreasonable and should be amended without further investigation
- re-opening the original matter
- providing a clearer explanation of the original decision to the complainant
- amending a policy, procedure or practice, or recommending that such documents be amended
- offering an apology or some other remedy; or
- providing further assistance to address a service delivery complaint.

The written internal review decision to the complainant will include:

- the action taken by the department in response to the request for internal review
- the decision on the review of the action taken at Stage 1
- reasons for the decision
- external review avenues, including contact details.

Stage 2 correspondence will be recorded in the department's Ministerial and Executive Correspondence System (MECS) with restricted access as appropriate. All documentation should be retained on file in the event that a Stage 3 External Review is sought.

Requests for internal review will count as an additional separate complaint for the purposes of counting the number of customer complaints received and action taken or not taken.

Stage 3. External Review

If a complainant is aggrieved about the final departmental decision on the internal review, the complainant may seek a review of the decision to an appropriate external body if the matter is of a type that can be considered by that entity.

For example, if the nature of the complaint involves alleged maladministration, the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman is an appropriate entity to receive that type of complaint. If the nature of the complaint involves an

alleged breach of human rights, the Queensland Human Rights Commission is an appropriate entity to receive that type of complaint.

If the decision is one of an administrative character that has been made under an enactment, or a non-statutory scheme or program involving funds appropriated by Parliament, the complainant may seek judicial review of the decision from the Queensland Supreme Court pursuant to the [Judicial Review Act 1991](#).

The department will co-operate with any entity that is authorised to review a decision made by the department.

13. Monitoring, reviewing and reporting

Business group reporting

Details of the complaint and resolution are to be captured as per local business group recording arrangements such as in MECS or a business group register.

All departmental business groups are to implement a recording system that enables the quarterly collation of the number of customer complaints received and the number of those complaints resulting in further action and the number of complaints resulting in no further action. The department must publish its complaint data in its annual report by 30 September each year. This information will be available on the department's public facing website.

The department is also required to publish in its annual report:

- (a) details of any actions taken during the reporting period to further the objectives of the *Human Rights Act 2019*; and
- (b) the number of human rights complaints received and the outcome of those complaints.

Information about the reporting of customer complaints and human rights complaints and their outcomes is contained in Appendix 2.

Business group monitoring and review

Business groups should periodically review complaints data and ensure trends and systemic issues result in business and service delivery improvement. Changes should focus on reducing the reoccurrence of a similar complaint wherever possible. Trends may include:

- the nature/trends of complaints
- the geographic or organisational location of complaints
- anomalies in complaint numbers/patterns
- characteristics of complainants – what they have in common.

Senior management of each business group are to ensure the coordination, development, implementation and regular review of business group procedures, systems and resources to guide a high quality and professional customer complaints management function.

Employees authorised by senior management may request access to complaints information and registers to undertake this review activity. Review steps may include:

- a review of these procedures
- consultation with staff and management
- feedback from customers and complainants about the process
- auditing a sample of complaints from different stages for compliance with the framework, policy and procedures and assess the reasonableness of outcome and implementation of systemic improvements.

Recommendations from periodic reviews may result in but are not limited to recommendations for:

- staff training
- business and approval process improvement/changes
- clarification of roles in complaint management
- a focus on reducing resolution timeframes
- efficiencies for reporting complaint data.

14. Recordkeeping

The department's [Recordkeeping Policy](#) highlights responsibilities as stated in the [Public Records Act 2002](#). All formal incoming and outgoing correspondence in relation to the management of a complaint should be recorded in MECS with restricted access as appropriate. All information received is to be stored in a secure manner and disposed of in accordance with Queensland State Archives Disposal Schedule.

15. Definitions and glossary of terms

The words and meanings defined below are for the purpose of this policy and procedure only.

Assigned Officers	The staff member responsible for managing and resolving the complaint, and includes decision makers.
Business Group	A unit of organisational management within the department.
Complainant	The customer who makes the complaint.
Complaint Management Representative	An employee who has undertaken complaint management training or has experience in customer complaint management nominated by a business group to promote professional complaint management practices across that business group.
Conflict of Interest	A conflict between a public official's duties and responsibilities in serving the public interest, and the public official's personal interests (including interests of the public official's partner and/or the public official's dependents), which can arise (or reasonably be perceived to arise) due to avoiding personal losses, as well as gaining personal advantage, whether financial or otherwise.
Corrupt Conduct	The meaning given under s15 Crime and Corruption Act 2001 (Qld).
Customer Complaint	Same as s264(4) Public Sector Act 2022 (Qld). A complaint about the service or action of a department, or its staff, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service or action.
Directly Affected	A person is considered directly affected when they have an interest that is greater than an interested bystander, a decision or service that affects a person personally rather than generally as a member of a community and that if allowed to stand will impact them directly.
MECs	The department's correspondence management system.
Respondent	A person who is the subject of a complaint

Approval

Signed:

Bernadette Ditchfield
A/Director-General
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Date: 31 January 2024

16. Version history

Date	Version	Action	Comments
23/09/2015	1.0	Endorsed DAF and DTESB procedure	Combined DEEDI and DTESB Service Delivery Complaints Management Procedures into BCP template for DAF and DTSEB. Minor formatting edits. Included s.219A of the PSA and updated CMC references to CCC. Minor changes for point of service complaints to be recorded and Performance and Planning unit to assist in monitoring of complaints trends and data. MECs approved complaints register and updated role of CSC in receiving complaints. Removed flow chart to be a separate document.
13/01/2020	2.0	Approved policy and procedure for DAF	Replaced the Service Delivery Complaints Management Procedure. Ensured the policy and procedure complied with the <i>Human Rights Act 2019</i> .
31/01/2024	3.0	Approved policy and procedure for DAF	Updated to reflect critical updates to comply with QG Complaints Management Framework and Guideline

17. Keywords

CHA/2024/6656; complaints; code of conduct; service delivery complaints; natural justice; visibility; access; responsiveness; assessment; complainant; respondent; complaint resolution; resolution; investigation

Checklists to assist assigned officers and decision-makers

Stage 1. Minor complaints – Frontline/local employees’ procedures and guidance:

Early Resolution	Action to be taken	Completed
Receive	Confirm receipt of complaint – verbal or written with reference number.	
Provide assistance	Consider any assistance to the complainant to lodge the complaint.	
Explain the process	Provide detail on complaints process to complainant.	
Resolve the complaint	Is the complaint within DAF jurisdiction or legislative responsibilities? If not, complaint is to be declined and advice provided on alternative jurisdiction to respond to the complaint. If eligible for resolution, select and action an appropriate remedy.	
Report and record	Where practical, complaint details are to be retained, as part of DAF’s business operations. Registers include local level recording arrangements such as business group spreadsheets.	

Stage 1. Moderate and major customer complaints

Initial Assessment	Action to be taken	Completed
Receive	Confirm receipt of complaint – verbal or written with reference number.	
Provide assistance	Consider any assistance to the complainant to lodge the complaint and collect any additional information to assist with the assessment process.	
Manage expectations and process	Address any expectations by complainant or other parties and communicate what process will be followed.	
Escalate as appropriate	Notify the appropriate level of management according to the severity/implications of the complaint.	
Conduct preliminary enquiries / investigation to determine what further action is required	Confirm background information that can be used to further investigate or review. Determine how complaint is to be managed and who is to be involved. Obtain approval to proceed as proposed.	
Considerations when no further action is proposed	If complaint is not within DAF jurisdiction – inform complainant of alternate jurisdiction. Further investigation or review is unnecessary or not justified due to an absence of merit to the claims; complaint is a continuation of a previous complaint which has already been finalised and no new evidence has presented to re-open; it is not feasible to investigate due to the passage of time since the alleged events occurred, lack of relevant witnesses etc.; no practical resolution to the problem is available. Complaint is trivial and/or inconsequential or lacking in substance with no feasible avenue for resolution.	
Outcome of assessment	Complaint is not amenable to further action due to stated reason/s. Matter is finalised and communicated to complainant. Further action is required e.g. investigation; detailed review.	

	Parties to complaint are informed of outcome of initial assessment and proposed course of action.	
Document and Record	Document trail is maintained; incoming and outgoing correspondence is recorded in MECS with restricted access as appropriate.	

Stage 2 - Customer complaints – internal review.

Internal Review	Action to be taken	Completed
Provide assistance	Acknowledge receipt of request for review. Consider any assistance to be given to the complainant to ensure clear statements are collected regarding the dissatisfaction about the initial decision and collect any additional information to assist with the review process. Provide details on the review process to all parties involved.	
Designating an Assigned Officer for internal review	The internal reviewer is at least an Executive Director, equal to or more senior than the initial decision-maker; has no conflict of interest in performing the task; is capable and capable of overturning the original decision or taking remedial action.	
Assess the grounds for the request for internal review	The grounds for the request for internal review are understood. Examples of grounds for requesting review may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reported facts are incorrect that have materially influenced the decision relevant considerations have been ignored and/or irrelevant considerations have been made procedural fairness has not been extended and therefore relevant additional information has not been considered the stated reasons for decision cannot be reasonably concluded on the established and agreed facts of the matter. 	
Conducting the internal review	Examine primary documents including the complainant's latest submission and any previous outcomes and associated records. Additional information sought if the information is relevant to the considerations before the decision-maker. Initial decision-making process has been reviewed and any deficiencies in the process have been corrected. All parties have been notified of any new or critical/adverse issues are now being considered. Reasonable opportunity is to be given to the parties to respond to any potentially adverse finding/decision before a final decision is reached.	
Outcome and remedies	Decision on the review may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> that the initial decision is confirmed and remains the departmental position the initial decision is confirmed but an alternative remedy is offered the complaint's appeal is partially or fully upheld and a new decision replaces the previous decision the new decision may apply the same or different remedy. 	

Communicating the outcome	The parties to complaint and relevant departmental officers involved are advised of the outcome, the reasons for the decision, and the avenues for external appeal if a party remains aggrieved at the decision.	
Implementing and recording remedies	Any new or different remedies are implemented and recorded. The complainant is notified when the remedy has been implemented and the matter has been finalised.	
Closing the complaint	Documents have been secured and correspondence recorded in MECS with restricted access as appropriate. Complaint has been registered in the local business area and counted as one where further action was taken.	



REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

1. Reporting Customer Complaints – Section 264 of the *Public Sector Act 2022*

By 30 September after each financial year, the chief executive of the department must publish the following information for the financial year on the department's website—

- (a) the number of customer complaints received by the department in the year
- (b) the number of those complaints resulting in further action
- (c) the number of those complaints resulting in no further action.

NB. For the purposes of reporting, a request for an internal review of an initial departmental decision on a customer complaint will count as an additional and separate complaint resulting in either further action or no further action.

2. Reporting Human Rights Complaints – Section 97 of the *Human Rights Act 2019*

Recording complaints and outcomes with sufficient detail is important for identifying trends within an agency, including whether there are particular areas or practices that result in more human rights complaints than others.

In each annual report, the following information must be included:

- activities during the reporting period that further the objects of the *Human Rights Act 2019*
- human rights complaints received, including:
 - the number
 - the outcome
 - any other information prescribed by regulation relating to complaints.
- reviews of policies, programs, procedures, practices or services for their compatibility with human rights.

To meet these requirements, DAF business areas should record:

- details of each human rights complaint
- actions taken in dealing with the complaint
- the outcome of all complaints
- improvements in services, policies or procedures made as a result of the complaint

NB. For the purposes of reporting, a request for an internal review of an initial departmental decision on a human rights complaint will count as an additional and separate complaint resulting in either further action or no further action.