

ESA guidelines for Public Liaison activities

Background

External communication and outreach is an integral role of the Ecological Society of Australia, and this includes building community awareness. The ESA Business Plan 2007-2012¹ states that: *'The Society aims to create a community of knowledge and understanding amongst ecologists, and reach out to those working in related fields. The Society also aims to increase awareness in the broader community about relevant ecological issues and the role of the Society itself. In order to raise this awareness, the Society will increasingly become involved in:*

- *government processes relating to ecological issues (e.g. the development of standards, changes to legislation)*
- *submissions regarding ecologically relevant issues in the community; and*
- *media engagement, including the development of position statements.'*

This document provides guidelines for the public liaison activities of the Society, including the definition of ESA public liaison principles, and the formation of a Public Liaison Working Group.

ESA public liaison principles

ESA public liaison activities should adhere to the following principles:

- The ESA will encourage policy-makers and managers to use current ecological knowledge and scientific foundations when developing strategies and policies relating to biodiversity, the environment, and management.
- The ESA aims to encourage its membership to provide accessible ecological knowledge for policy makers, and to facilitate improved access to, and use of, ecological science.
- The ESA does not aim to engage in public liaison activities to lobby for a particular conservation or development outcome.
- Whilst representing the ESA, any member involved in the policy process must clearly understand the objectives of the society, and the distinction between advocating a robust scientific process and personal value judgements (see Lackey 2007 for a discussion).

The Public Liaison Working Group

The Public Liaison working group (PLWG) will be convened by the Vice President Public Liaison and will consist of up to 7 ESA members (including the VP Public Liaison and the Executive Officer). Members will have suitable qualifications and/or experience to enable them to undertake public liaison activities on behalf of the Society.

The VP Public Liaison will report to the ESA Council about the activities of the PLWG. PLWG activities will be assisted by the ESA Executive Officer, who will serve as a link between the PLWG and the ESA Council.

The Public Liaison working group will:

- Meet every 3 or 4 months, or when required;
- Identify and facilitate public liaison opportunities to promote the objectives of the society;
- Promote the role of the society and existence of the working group to policy makers;

¹ The Business Plan was developed by the society in 2005-2006 with engagement across the membership, before endorsement at the AGM in 2007.

- Provide a facility for policy makers to provide feedback to the society about how the intersection of ecological science and policy can be improved;
- Decide which public liaison opportunities for the ESA to pursue, and how best to do this;
- Advertise public liaison opportunities to ESA members;
- Select and request ESA members to undertake public liaison opportunities on behalf of the Society;
- Prepare guidelines, and provide support, to ESA members who wish to participate in public liaison activities on behalf of the Society;
- Comment on the draft guidelines for the preparation of ESA position statements;
- Align other public liaison activities with the creation / revision of position statements.

How will public liaison opportunities be identified?

PLWG members and the general ESA membership are invited to suggest public liaison opportunities for the Society to pursue. As part of their role, PLWG members are expected to seek out such opportunities.

Which public liaison opportunities to pursue

The Public Liaison working group will determine which public liaison opportunities to pursue by considering:

1. The alignment of the opportunity with the mission and objectives of the Society,
2. The alignment of the opportunity with the current Strategic Plan and Business Plan of the Society;
3. The potential benefits and risks for
 - a. the science of ecology,
 - b. the conservation of biodiversity,
 - c. the Society;
4. The expertise and suitability of members available to provide comment;
5. Whether the time frame given will allow an adequate response;
6. The relative costs and benefits of intervening, in light of members' limited resources; and
7. Any travel or other costs required.

Four approaches to public liaison

1. Invite members to contribute individually (not representing the ESA) by advertising public liaison opportunities to as many members as possible on the ESA website, at Council meetings, through the membership email list.
2. Endorse certain members to contribute/comment as individual experts, nominated by the Society but not representing the particular views of the Society.
3. Formulate comment on behalf of the Society - which would include, but not necessarily be limited to, the development of position papers.
4. Select members to represent the ESA at a meeting, or on a Committee or Board (see next section).

Formulating comment on behalf of the Society

A draft submission prepared on behalf of the ESA shall be circulated to ESA members via the ESA news list, before it is submitted, with at least 2 weeks allowed for members to submit comments. Comments will then be considered for inclusion in the final submission. Preparation of the submission on behalf of the ESA may be halted if there are significant contradictions in members' comments that cannot be resolved. The final draft submission will be reviewed by at least the ESA Vice President, Public Liaison, and 2 other members of the Public Liaison Working Group (who can also be the authors) before it is submitted.

A copy of the final submission is to be sent to the ESA Executive Officer, the ESA Vice President, Public Liaison, and the ESA President on submission. All submissions prepared on behalf of the ESA should be lodged on the ESA webpage unless there is a specific reason not to do this.

Selecting members to represent the ESA at a meeting, or on a Committee or Board.

The Public Liaison working group will select members to undertake specific public liaison activities based on merit and suitability for the role. 'Suitability' may include, but is not limited to, knowledge of a particular field/policy/procedure, and written and/or oral communication skills. Members may be required to submit a current curriculum vitae and a declaration of any known or potential conflicts of interest as part of their expression of interest. Approval by the Public Liaison working group will be required to allow a member to represent the ESA at a meeting, or on a Committee or Board. Members who represent the ESA in this way will report on their activities to the VP Public Liaison, who will include this in their report to the ESA Council.

Position statements

Position statements are regarded as important public policy documents for the ESA, but particular position statements lose currency over time. A disclaimer will be posted on the website to advise readers that the information in the position statements was current at the date of writing, and may not reflect new information that has since become available. Ideally, a position statement should be revised every 5 years and may be taken off the website if it is not revised after 7 years, or placed within an historical archive on the website.

It is the responsibility of the VP Public Liaison to coordinate the experts / champions who will be creating / revising position statements. The Public Liaison working group will also comment on the draft guidelines for position statements.

Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS)

The PLWG will review the nature of the Society's interaction with FASTS, and report back to the ESA Council.

Website

The ESA website will be expanded to present other public liaison material / info / submissions as well as position statements.

Reference:

Lackey, R.T. (2007) Science, Scientists and Policy Advocacy. *Conservation Biology* 21: 12-17.

This document was prepared by the ESA Public Liaison Working Group, and was endorsed by ESA Council December 2009.

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