



GUIDELINE

Use of social media

Direction to staff

Instructional material, including guidelines, is nationally endorsed and in accordance with Section 13(5) "An APS employee must comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in the employee's Agency who has authority to give direction" of the *Public Service Act 1999* must be followed by all Department of Agriculture (the department) employees.

Summary of main points

This document outlines the requirements for the use of social media by Department of Agriculture employees, in both an official and unofficial capacity.

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Purpose of this document

This document describes the standards expected of employees of the Department of Agriculture in their use of social media; it should be read in conjunction with the department's [IT Security Policy](#).

Definitions

The following table defines terms used in this document.

Term	Definition
Social media	<p>Includes social networking sites, blogs and other online media that allow user participation and interaction.</p> <p>Note: Use of social media by Australian Public Service (APS) employees can be split into two categories: official use and unofficial use.</p>
Official use	<p>Means use by persons authorised as departmental spokespersons and representatives for official purposes, who are permitted to post content within an approved scope on external social media channels.</p>
Unofficial use	<p>Unofficial use of social media falls into one of two (2) categories: professional or private.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Professional use is when an employee is a subject matter expert in a field that may relate to their APS employment—or that may be wholly separate from it—and uses social media to comment in that capacity. For example, an APS employee who is a scientist might use social media in their own time to discuss academic work.Private use means use of social media in any other capacity.

Policy statement

The use of social media by departmental staff must be conducted in accordance with the [APS Values](#) and [APS Code of Conduct](#).

Legislative framework

Public Service Act 1999, s 13(11).

- The APS Code of Conduct requires APS employees to behave at all times 'in a way that upholds the APS Values and APS Employment Principles, and the integrity and good reputation of the employee's Agency and the APS'.
- The APS Values and Code of Conduct apply to using social media both officially and unofficially. The requirements include:
 - behaving with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
 - dealing appropriately with information, recognising that some information needs to remain confidential
 - delivering services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public
 - being sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public
 - taking reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest
 - making proper use of Commonwealth resources
 - upholding the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS and one's agency
 - not acting in a way that would call into question the APS employee's ability to be apolitical, impartial and professional in the performance of their duties.

This is a CONTROLLED document. Any documents appearing in paper form are not controlled and should be checked against the IML version prior to use.

Roles and responsibilities

The following table outlines the roles and responsibilities undertaken in this guideline.

Role	Responsibility
Departmental officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking approval prior to using social media in an official capacity. Using social media in accordance with the APS Values and APS Code of Conduct.
SES officers	Approving the official use of social media by their staff.
Assistant Secretary, Governance Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approving the official use of social media by all departmental staff. Setting communication and content standards for the official use of social media.

All social media use

Department of Agriculture employees should understand that the [APS Values](#) and [APS Code of Conduct](#) standards apply to all social media use.

The APS Values and APS Code of Conduct apply even if material is posted anonymously or using a pseudonym and employees should be mindful that at some point their identity and employment may be revealed.

Possible sanctions, including termination, may apply if employees are found to have breached the APS Values or APS Code of Conduct through their use of social media.

- Note:** [APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online](#)—discusses the APS Code of Conduct and its relationship to social media in more detail.

Official social media use

The following table outlines the process for undertaking official use of social media.

Note: Acceptable official use by APS employees may include representing the department online, monitoring issues relevant to departmental business and engaging in authorised professional development forums or activities.

Stage	What happens	Responsible party
1.	Written approval to use social media in an official capacity is sought from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a relevant SES officer; and the Assistant Secretary, Governance Branch. 	Employee
2.	Written approval is provided. Note: Communication and content standards that apply to official use of social media will be established as part of this approval.	Relevant SES officer; and Assistant Secretary, Governance Branch

Stage	What happens	Responsible party
3.	Social media is used in accordance with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APS Values • APS Code of Conduct • APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online. 	Employee

Unofficial social media use

When using social media in an unofficial capacity, employees must comply with the requirements in the following table.

Note:

- Acceptable unofficial use of social media while at work will include reasonable private use, consistent with this guideline and other relevant policies including the department's *IT Security Policy*.
- Employees in doubt about acceptable use of social media as an APS employee, whether at work or not, should speak to their manager in the first instance.

Requirement	What to do
Always	Ensure that any comment made is not (or could not be perceived to be): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • made on behalf of the Department of Agriculture • so harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Government, a member of parliament from another political party, or their respective policies, that it raises questions about the APS employee's capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially. Such comment does not have to relate to the employee's area of work • so strong in its criticism of an agency's administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace • a gratuitous personal attack that might reasonably be perceived to be connected with their employment • compromising the employee's ability to fulfil their duties in an apolitical, impartial and professional manner • compromising public confidence in the agency or the APS.
Unless specifically authorised	Do not develop or provide content for social media channels that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to speak, or could be interpreted as speaking, on behalf of the department or the Australian Government • commits the department or the Australian Government to any action or initiative.

Related material

- [Department of Agriculture IT Security Policy](#)
- [APS Code of Conduct](#)
- [APS Values](#)
- [APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online](#)

Document information

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1.0	01/08/2014	First publication of guideline.
1.1	12/08/2014	Name change from Parliamentary and Executive Business Branch to Governance Branch.



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Using social media



A guide to making comments about the department and the government online

New technology is testing traditional boundaries when it comes to how we, as Australian Government employees, need to behave when making comments publicly about the work our department does, about the government and about the Australian Public Service (APS) more generally.

In 2012 new guidance was provided to public servants about making public comment and participating online. This issue arose again in 2013 and is reflected in the revised APS Code of Conduct and Values; it remains a grey area that requires consideration by all of us before commenting.

To help you navigate the current environment, the department's social media policy is a good starting point for advice on acceptable use of social media, both in the workplace and in a private capacity. It includes information on employee conduct, access and publishing content.

This factsheet provides additional guidance on making comments about the department and the government in your personal use of social media and as an official spokesperson.

It all starts with the APS Code of Conduct

The APS Code of Conduct and Values apply to the use of social media by APS employees in the same way that they apply to all other aspects of professional and personal behaviour. They are your starting point when it comes to deciding how you will behave online – even in your personal life.

Regulation 2.1 of the Public Service Regulations 1999 refers to employees' duty not to disclose information that is not publicly available.

These are reflected in the department's social media policy. Together, the APS Code of Conduct and Values form part of your conditions of employment and define what is acceptable when you use social media and other online forums that enable you to make comments publicly.

Key points

When engaging in a private capacity

Do

- include a clear disclaimer on your platform: 'views expressed are my own'
- assume your work place can be identified
- always abide by the APS Values and Code of Conduct
- know how the platform works and have privacy settings in place
- think before you post
- talk to your manager if in doubt.

Don't

- be seen to speak on behalf of the department or government
- release information that is not otherwise publicly available
- link your account to a departmental email address or website.

What do we mean by making comments publicly?

Departmental employees, like other members of the community, have the right to freedom of expression. However, this is subject to the public maintaining confidence in both the department and government to deliver services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously. If this ability is compromised or is perceived to be compromised, the reputation of the department, the government and/or the APS as a whole is weakened.

Making comments publicly can come about by using social media or other media systems that are available outside our workplace to share information or opinions. APS employees using social media and making comments about the department and government means thinking about how the Code of Conduct applies to the following issues:

- sharing articles that comment on government policy or departmental business and adding your own opinion or point of view
- 'liking' or following groups or organisations that are critical of government policy and/or the department and/or the APS
- commenting about the work you or your colleagues do
- criticising the department or the government.

Private capacity

APS employees may generally make public comment in a private capacity, so long as it is apparent that you are expressing your own personal views and are not a representative of the department or the Australian Government when making them.

In using social media privately, you should remember to behave in a way that demonstrates you will act apolitically in your work and that your ability to fulfil your duties in an unbiased manner could not be seen to be compromised.

What about public comment associated with my profession? If you want to participate in discussions or forums that are about a specific profession that relates to your APS employment—or which may be wholly separate from it—you may make comment in that capacity. For example, if you're a scientist you may use social media to discuss academic work in your own time and outside your APS role. Or you may participate in a social media group run by your professional association or industry group.

Whenever making comments publicly using social media it is important that it is made clear that you are not representing the department or the government.

Official capacity

Sometimes employees use social media as part of their job. This involves providing comments on behalf of the department on social media or in other public forums online. Approval by the Governance Branch and your SES is required to make public comments in an official capacity.



Quick Fact

- If you wouldn't put it on the office noticeboard or say it in the elevator, think twice about posting it online.
- When commenting online in a private capacity be mindful that if you mention or identify the department, it could be seen to connect your private online comment to your employment.
- All APS employees are subject to the APS Code of Conduct and values at all times. 'Anonymously' posted material does not remove the expectation that you will abide by the APS Code of Conduct. Always remember it can still be traced to a particular individual. Security settings do not guarantee privacy, and online material can be easily replicated.
- Be mindful that even if you don't identify yourself as an employee of the department or the APS, you could still be easily recognised. You should assume that at some point your identity and the nature of your employment will be revealed.
- Material posted online is effectively permanent, and may be replicated endlessly and sent to recipients who you never intended to see it, or who may view it out of context.
- The department's social media policy is the best place to start if you are looking for more information on use of social media. This also links to other resources to guide you in your social media activities.



Social Media

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Guideline on use of social media

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources' [Guideline on use of social media](#) is important reading for all employees.

The Guideline on use of social media sets out clear guidance for employees using social media, whether for official departmental business or for personal use.

Like the APS Values and Code of Conduct, this guideline applies at all times to all employees and contractors of the department, whether at home or in the office.

The guideline is supported by a factsheet on [using social media](#) for all employees that discusses the implications of using social media as a Departmental employee.

Code of Conduct

Staff are reminded that when they are engaging online, either at work or at home, they are still governed by The [Public Service Act 1999](#) (the Act). This means that at all times, staff must uphold the standards of behaviour and conduct expected of all Australian Public Service (APS) employees that are expressed in the [APS Code of Conduct](#) (the Code) and Values. The Code may apply whenever there is a connection between the employee's behaviour and its effect on the workplace or employees, the reputation of the department, the APS or the Commonwealth.

An emerging issue within the APS, is suspected misconduct that occurs in connection with the use of social media and social networking sites. Some examples of potential misconduct include:

1. Uploading photos of yourself on a social networking site showing you engaged in inappropriate behaviour or behaving illegally. If you are identifiable as a DAWR employee (e.g. you wear a uniform) you are required to act and behave in a professional manner at all times.
2. Making derogatory comments about your colleagues or managers on a social networking site.
3. Making comments criticising the work of the Department on a social networking site.

If an APS employee is found to have breached the Code, the possible sanctions for breaching the Code of Conduct are:

- termination of employment
- reduction in classification
- reassignment of duties
- reduction in salary by way of fine (which must not be more than 2% of annual salary)
- a reprimand

More than one sanction can be imposed for a breach of the Code.

More information about the Code and how suspected misconduct is managed in the department is available on the [conduct and behaviour](#) page.

The Australian Public Service Commission's [Ethics Advisory Service](#) can also provide guidance on how to apply the Values and Code and strategies and techniques for ethical decision-making in the APS.