

PROTECTED DISCLOSURE POLICY

Responsible person Executive Officer Scheduled review date **June 2021**

VERSION CONTROL

VERSION NO.	DATE	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DETAILS
1	22 Nov 2017	K Holmes	Creation of policy, biannual review. Next review June 2019
2	21 Jun 2019	K Holmes	Updated policy with minor changes
	13 Aug 2021	K Holmes	No changes proposed

REFERRING DOCUMENTS

- Code of Conduct
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- WHS Policy & Procedure Manual
- **Employee Handbook**

PURPOSE

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) - Gippsland is committed to operating ethically and within relevant legislation; regulation and in accordance to its funding deed; policies and procedures.

The purpose of the Protected Disclosure Act 2012 (the Act), and this policy as required under the Act, is to encourage and facilitate the making of disclosures of improper conduct by RFCS Gippsland Board members, employees and contractors directly to the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC).

RFCS Gippsland will ensure that employees or contractors reporting improper ¹conduct within RFCS Gippsland operations will not be penalised in any way.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- encourage the reporting of matters that may cause harm to individuals, or cause financial and/or non-financial loss to RFCS Gippsland, or damage to its reputation;
- enable RFCS Gippsland to deal with reports from protected disclosures in a way that will protect the identity of the informant, and provide secure storage of the information provided;
- ensure the protection of informers against reprisal by any person internal or external to RFCS Gippsland;
- help to ensure RFCS Gippsland maintains the highest standards of ethical behaviour and integrity.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all RFCS Gippsland, Employees, Board members, Contractors, Clients and members of the public.

LEGISLATION

Protected Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic)

¹ Improper conduct is defined as unethical, unlawful or non-compliant with policies and procedures.

POLICY

RFCS Gippsland is committed to the aims and objectives of the Act. It recognises the value of transparency and accountability in its administrative and management practices, and supports the making of disclosures that reveal improper conduct that :

- may have taken place;
- still be occurring;
- is believed will occur or be engaged in; or
- 'detrimental action' taken (or suspected may be taken) in reprisal or in connection with a disclosure made.

RFCS Gippsland will not tolerate improper conduct by the organisation, its employees, contractors or Board members, and will protect those who come forward to disclose such conduct from any detrimental action.

RFCS Gippsland encourages any individual person (e.g., not organisation or company) to make a disclosure under the Act. The individual could be a person within RFCS Gippsland; client or member of the public.

RFCS Gippsland is not permitted to receive disclosures made under the Act. Disclosures about RFCS Gippsland, its Board members, employees or contractors are to be made directly to IBAC to investigate the disclosure.

IBAC is not required to contact RFCS Gippsland about any disclosure made, nor must the disclosure be discussed with RFCS Gippsland or any person(s) in RFCS Gippsland unless permission is obtained by IBAC; or unless IBAC has directed to do so; or IBAC has contacted RFCS Gippsland for the provision of any necessary welfare and support for the informant.

RFCS Gippsland takes its obligations under the Act seriously. This includes the requirement to protect the identity of the discloser and the matters disclosed by a discloser. Maintaining confidentiality in relation to protected disclosure matters is crucial, among other things, in ensuring reprisals are not made against a discloser.

Disclosures may be made in a number of ways set out in the Act, including anonymously; in writing or orally. A discloser need not identify the person or body about whom the disclosure is made.

RFCS Gippsland acknowledges that it is a criminal offence under the Act to disclose any information connected with a disclosure made in accordance with the Act, including the identity of the discloser, unless directed by IBAC. The penalties for breaching confidentiality obligations include financial penalties and imprisonment.

RFCS Gippsland encourages everyone within the scope of this policy to visit www.lbac.vic.gov.au for further information; advice and support.