



MEAA guidelines for reporting hate speech and extremism – Frequently Asked Questions

December 2019

What are the new guidelines?

MEAA is concerned at the rise of hate speech in Australia.

MEAA has produced guidelines on reporting hate speech and extremism that are intended to be read alongside the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics.

The guidelines are designed to be an editorial tool to assist MEAA Media members as they carry out their duties. The guidelines are designed for use by MEAA members and for display in newsrooms.

The guidelines are just that – a guide for reporting. The guidelines do not replace the Journalist Code of Ethics which is binding on all MEAA Media journalist members. The Code already places a responsibility upon MEAA Media members not to place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality or religious beliefs.

Also, the new guidelines do not seek to replace the advisories of the Australian Press Council or existing legislation, including the Race Discrimination Act.

The guidelines include sections on ethical journalism and general guidance for reporting on race, religion, culture and ethnicity. There are specific guidelines for reporting on racist organisations; extremist violence; immigration and asylum plus links to the relevant federal and state legislation.

Why is MEAA doing this?

MEAA is concerned that hate speech poses a threat to democracy, a free media and social equality. The rise of extremism and the increasing normalisation of hate speech place journalists in a difficult position: how to report these issues responsibly, how to resist efforts to be co-opted by extremists, and how far journalists should go to provide balance or shield their audience from extreme hate speech.

The Christchurch shootings on March 15, 2019 – allegedly the product of an Islamophobic extremist who was partly inspired by hate speech manifestos in the media and on the internet – and the way it was covered by media outlets, brought into sharp focus the urgent need for a framework for journalists to report on race and religion without unwittingly contributing to social division or extremist ideologies.

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How were they put together?

The guidelines are informed by an industry forum, hosted by MEAA and Media Diversity Australia, in Sydney on March 28, 2019 – immediately after the Christchurch shootings. The guidelines principally draw on the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland's) guidelines on reporting race, first published in 2014. Additional input has been provided by Media Diversity Australia and other experts.

How will they be implemented?

The purpose of these new guidelines is as a resource to assist journalists in reporting on these difficult issues in a responsible and ethical way.

Once adopted by MEAA's Federal Council, they will be disseminated to MEAA Media members who will be expected to familiarise themselves with the guidelines – just as they are required to do with the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics. The guidelines will also be available to the public on MEAA's website.

Why don't the guidelines refer to reporting of Indigenous Australians?

There are already existing resources on the reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues. MEAA's new guidelines provide a link to Media Diversity Australia's handbook and guide: Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Issues.

Who should read the guidelines and who is bound by them?

All MEAA Media members are bound by the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics. The new guidelines are an additional resource to assist responsible reporting – the guidelines are neither prescriptive nor are they binding.

It is recommended that all journalists read and familiarise themselves with the guidelines.

When will they be introduced?

The guidelines were endorsed by MEAA's National Media Section Committee on November 28, 2019, and have now been circulated among the MEAA Media section membership for comment and feedback. Based on consultation with members, it is expected that any further amendments will be considered and then endorsed by the NMS Committee at a face-to-face meeting on February 13, 2020.

