

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance Guidelines on Reporting Hate Speech and Extremism

These guidelines are designed to be read alongside the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics

The rise of extremism and the increasing use of hate speech place journalists in a difficult position: how should we report these issues, should we resist efforts to co-opt us, what role does “balance” have to play, should we seek to protect our audience?

MEAA is concerned at the rise of hate speech in Australia. Racist attitudes and hate speech pose a threat to democracy, a free media and racial equality.

Under their Code of Ethics, MEAA Media members have a responsibility to report responsibly on matters of race, religion, culture and ethnicity. These guidelines are designed to work with, but not exclude, the [MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics](#).

They are based on the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland)'s [Guidelines on reporting race](#) (2014). The guidelines are also informed by Media Diversity Australia's industry forum, held in partnership with MEAA, in the fortnight after the Christchurch shootings on March 15, 2019.

It is also worth acknowledging the Australian Press Council's advisory guidelines on:

- [asylum seekers](#),
- [Nazi concentration camps](#),
- [religious terms in headlines](#),
- [reporting of “race”](#), and
- [diverse sexual orientation and gender identity](#).



FURTHER INFORMATION

w: meaa.org

p: 1300 656 513

f [facebook.com/withmeaa](https://www.facebook.com/withmeaa)

t twitter.com/withMEAA

ETHICAL JOURNALISM

- Media freedom is underpinned by ethical reporting. Hate speech is antithetical to ethical journalism.
- Every day, vigorous journalism provokes. At times, it can offend or insult - that is the nature of public debate. Because vigorous journalism is provocative, or because it can offend or insult at one time, that does not mean it intends to vilify. However, journalism that intends to vilify on the basis of race deserves to be condemned, particularly as it is outside what is considered ethical journalism.
- All MEAA Media's journalist members are bound by MEAA's Journalist Code of Ethics. Only MEAA Media members can be investigated by MEAA's National Ethics Committee for alleged breaches of the Code. The Code was first developed in 1944. The code was reviewed and updated in 1984 and again in 1999, when subject to a major review between 1994 and 1998 leading to the current Code being instituted in 1999.
- The Code is acknowledged by many media outlets across Australia in their editorial codes of practice/conduct.
- Clause 2 of the MEAA Code says:
Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief or physical or intellectual disability.
- MEAA Media members should have the right to withhold their labour on the grounds of their obligations under the Code if their employers are providing a platform for racism or hate speech.
- Support your work colleagues who may be subject to hate speech and ensure a safe workplace. Don't allow your workplace to promote hate speech that makes work colleagues feel uncomfortable or targeted.
- Editors must ensure that the coverage of race is placed in a social and ethical context that observes the relevant Australian Press Council guidelines.

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GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Only include a person's race, religion or ethnicity if it is relevant — would you mention race if the person was white?
- Avoid emotive or pejorative terms to describe groups of people, especially in contexts where there can be a conflation of ethnicity, race, religion and criminality.
- Avoid outdated terms that offend, e.g. “half-caste”, “natives”, “coloured”, or “queue jumpers”. Instead, ask people how they choose to define and describe themselves.
- Do not assume cultural background from a person's name – check with them or their community. Only report it when it is relevant.
- Strive for diversity and balance in your reporting, especially on social issues. Investigate the treatment and experiences of the people you interview. Remember that within communities there are diverse opinions, experiences, and treatment.
- Exercise care, balance and proportionality when covering race issues.
- Do not publish or broadcast comments that contain racist hate speech.
- Be sensitive to religion and culture – for example, there is only one place called Mecca.
- Check the MEAA's Journalist Code of Ethics for guidance.
- Discuss the matter with your colleagues and, if need be, your union representative.
- Federal and state legislation has various interpretations of hate speech. Be aware of and inform yourself of these (see further resources at the end of these guidelines).
- The Racial Discrimination Act makes it “unlawful for a person to do an act, otherwise than in private if the act is reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or group of people; and the act is done because of race, colour, or national or ethnic origin...”

REPORTING RACIST ORGANISATIONS

- Consider if it is necessary to report on racist or extremist organisations – do not do

so merely for the sake of “balance” or allow your journalism to provide a platform for their views. Our job is to report the truth, not provide false balance.

- As with any reporting, check the claims made by such organisations and their members. Do not allow the untrue claims of such organisations to go unchallenged.
- If you feel uncomfortable about covering racist organisations, get advice from MEAA.

EXTREMIST VIOLENCE

- Extremists seek to use the media as a platform for their actions. Do your utmost to prevent this.
- Do not broadcast violent footage or publish an extremist manifesto to get clicks and page views.
- Ask yourself if it is necessary to identify perpetrators and, if so, how much?
- Ask if you are giving the same context to a non-white or overseas-born perpetrator of extremist violence as you would to a white or Australian-born perpetrator of such violence.
- Are you treating the victims as fairly as you would anyone else in the community or are you treating people differently because of ethnicity, religion or cultural differences?
- Extremists seek to use the media as a platform for their actions. Do your utmost to prevent this and don't allow yourself to be used to promote extremist views or hate speech.

REPORTING IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

- Use the term “immigrant” with caution – it is sometimes wrongly used to describe people born here.
- Australia is a signatory to international laws that make us obligated to protect the rights of people seeking asylum. It is not illegal for people to seek asylum, no matter the way in which they travel to Australia. Once their claims are investigated, asylum seekers may be recognised as refugees.
- Australia's Customs and Immigration activities have been militarised in the name of border security. Wartime secrecy provisions have been implemented to stop information

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about fishing boats and naval interceptions being made public (“on-water matters”). This also applies to offshore detention centres where laws punish employees and contractors for speaking to the media. Official comment is often, like the centres themselves, outsourced to foreign governments or private contractors.

- Thoroughly verify claims made on immigration, people seeking asylum, refugees and detention centres. Seek the truth and

inform your audience.

- Don't use terms such as “illegal immigrant” or “failed” refugee or asylum seeker. If necessary, use “refused” asylum seeker. A person who has overstayed their visa is “undocumented”.
- Don't use emotive, value-laden language, such as the pejorative “floods” of immigrants. Stick to facts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics: meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/

Reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Issues: mediadiversityaustralia.org/indigenous

National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland)'s Guidelines on reporting race: nuj.org.uk/news/updated-nuj-race-reporting-guidelines/

NUJ Guidelines on Muslims and Islam: nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-guidelines-reporting-muslims-islam/

Federal and state racial/anti-discrimination legislation:

Federal - *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/cth/consol_act/rda1975202/

New South Wales – *Anti Discrimination Act 1977*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/aa1977204/s49zg.html

Victoria – *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/consol_act/rarta2001265/

Queensland – *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/qld/consol_act/aa1991204/

Western Australia – *Criminal Code Amendment (Racial Vilification) Act 2004*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/wa/num_act/ccava200480o2004396/#s1

South Australia – *Racial Vilification Act 1996*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/sa/consol_act/rva1996176/

Tasmania – *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/legis/tas/consol_act/aa1998204/s17.html

Northern Territory – *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/nt/consol_act/aa1992204/#s1

Australian Capital Territory – *Discrimination Act 1991*: austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/act/consol_act/da1991164/