



Policy Name:	Whistleblower Policy		
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1. Policy Statement

The purpose of this Whistleblower Policy (the 'Policy') is to ensure that wrongdoings and conduct not aligned with Rural Lifestyle Options Australia (RLOA) policies are identified so that individuals can disclose wrongdoings safely, securely and with confidence that they will be protected and supported.

RLOA encourages individuals to disclose wrongdoing and speak up when something isn't right. RLOA is committed to ensuring disclosures are dealt with on a timely basis, in accordance with the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) (the 'Act') and other regulatory obligations.

This Policy is important in helping identify wrongdoing that otherwise would not have been uncovered without the protections granted by the Act which are detailed below.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to individuals who are, or have been, any of the following in relation to RLOA:

- (a) An officer or employee;
 - Including permanent, full time, fixed term or temporary roles, interns, managers and Directors.
- (b) A supplier of services to RLOA (paid or unpaid) and their workers
 - Including contractors, consultants, service providers and business partners.
- (c) An associate of RLOA ; and
- (d) A relative, dependant or spouse of an individuals listed in (a)-(c).

The individuals listed above are able to make a disclosure which may qualify for protection under the Act (collectively referred to as 'eligible whistleblowers').

3. Eligible disclosures

An eligible whistleblower is able to make a disclosure relating to a 'disclosable matter.'

A disclosable matter must fulfil the following criteria:

- (1) The eligible whistleblower must have a reasonable grounds to suspect conduct in point 3(3) has occurred.
 - a. ASIC suggests an allegation with no supporting information is not likely to have 'reasonable grounds to suspect'; and
- (2) The conduct outlined in (3) relates to RLOA or a related body corporate of RLOA; and
- (3) Disclosable conduct which is:
 - (i) Misconduct
 - a. Negligence, breach of trust, or breach of duty
 - (ii) Illegal such as;
 - a. Theft, dealing in, or use of illicit drugs or violence or threatened violence
 - b. Fraud, money laundering or misappropriation of funds
 - c. Offering or accepting a bribe



- d. Financial irregularities
- e. Failure to comply with, or a breach or legal or regulatory requirements; and
- f. Engaging in or threatening to engage in detrimental conduct against an eligible whistleblower who has made a disclosure or is believed or suspected to make or planned to make a disclosure.

- (iii) Conduct that is an offence against, or a breach of
 - a. *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth)
 - b. *Banking Act 1959* (Cth)
- (iv) An offence against an Australian Commonwealth law (law which is not state governed law) which is punishable by imprisonment for 12 months or more; or
- (v) Business behaviour and practices that may cause consumer harm; or
- (vi) Improper state of affairs or circumstances; or
- (vii) Represents a danger to the public or financial system; or
- (viii) Or prescribed by regulation.

(Collectively referred to as 'disclosable matters').

Disclosable matters may relate to issues of public safety but do not necessarily involve a breach of law.

Personal Work Grievances

Disclosures that relate solely to:

- (a) personal work-related grievances; and
- (b) do not relate to detriment or threat of detriment to the discloser

do not qualify as a disclosable matter.

Personal work grievances include:

- conflict between an eligible whistleblower and another employer;
- a decision that doesn't involve a breach of workplace laws;
- a decision about a Worker's employment status, transfer or promotion;
- a decision about the terms of a Worker's engagement or contract;
- a decision to suspend, terminate or discipline a Worker.

Workers are able to raise personal work grievances via **RLOA's Employee Grievance Policy**. Workers may want to consider seeking external legal advice about their rights under employment and contract law.

False Reports

RLOA discourages the reporting of deliberate false reporting, which may delay the investigation of valid disclosures. Any false reporting will be treated seriously and may be subject to reporting to appropriate authorities.



4. Who can receive a disclosure?

RLOA encourages eligible whistleblowers to make a disclosure to RLOA as the first port of call so that wrongdoing can be identified and addressed in a timely manner.

Who can receive a disclosure within RLOA?

The following people are able to receive a disclosure within RLOA:

- A person authorised by the entity to receive disclosures
- RLOA has engaged an independent whistleblowing service provider, Stopline, to receive whistleblowing disclosures. Stopline can be the first port of call for an eligible whistleblower through the following methods:

By webform - www.rloa.stoplinereport.com

By telephone – 1300 30 45 50 (Australia)

By telephone - +61 3 9811 3275 (Overseas – reverse charges)

By email – rloa@stopline.com.au

By post - RLOA, C/o Stopline, PO Box 403 Diamond Creek VIC 3089 Australia

- An internal or external auditor; OR
- Any one of the following individuals to qualify for protection:

Disclosure Officers:	Fiona Gracie, Head of People & Culture
	Robert Rees, Head of Operations
	Michelle Latailakepa, Chief Executive Officer

(collectively referred to as 'Disclosure Officers')

Who can receive a disclosure external to RLOA ?

An eligible whistleblower can make a disclosure to one of the following individuals to qualify for protection:

- **Lawyer**
A lawyer you have engaged to provide advice on the disclosure or to represent you.
 - In the event that your lawyer concludes that a disclosure doesn't fulfil the criteria of a disclosable matter, protections still may apply.
- **Regulatory Bodies**
Disclosures can also be made to [ASIC](#), ACNC, or another Commonwealth body (body prescribed by regulation) and still qualify for protections granted under the Act outlined in point 6.
- **Public Interest Disclosure**
Disclosures can be made to a journalist or parliamentarian under certain circumstances and still qualify for protection, this is called a 'public interest disclosure.' A public interest disclosure can be made where all of the below criteria is met:
 - At least 90 days have passed since the eligible whistleblower made the disclosure to ASIC, ACNC or another Commonwealth body (prescribed by regulation);
 - The eligible whistleblower doesn't have reasonable grounds to believe that action is being, or has been taken;
 - The eligible whistleblower has reasonable grounds to believe making another disclosure is in the public interest; **and**



- Before making a public interest disclosure, the eligible whistleblower has given written notice to ASIC, ACNC or another Commonwealth body (prescribed by regulation) that identifies their original disclosure, and outlines that they intend to make a public interest disclosure.

• **Emergency Disclosure**

Disclosures can be made to a journalist or parliamentarian under certain circumstances and still qualify for protection, this is called a 'emergency disclosure.' An emergency disclosure can be made where all of the below criteria is met:

- An eligible whistleblower has made the disclosure to ASIC, ACNC or another Commonwealth body (prescribed by regulation);
- The eligible whistleblower has reasonable grounds to believe that the information concerns a substantial and imminent danger to the health and safety of one or more persons or the natural environment;
- Before making a public interest disclosure, the eligible whistleblower has given written notice to ASIC, ACNC or another Commonwealth body (prescribed by regulation) that identifies their original disclosure, and outlines that they intend to make an emergency disclosure; **and**
- The extent of the information disclosed is no greater than necessary to inform the journalist or parliamentarian of the substantial and imminent danger.

Before making a public interest or emergency disclosure it is important to ensure all of the above criteria is met. A Worker may wish to seek external legal advice from a lawyer prior to making this type of disclosure.

5. Making a disclosure

An eligible whistleblower who makes a disclosure (a 'discloser') is able to disclose their report by internal and external means. If the individual has any concerns regards whistleblower protections or procedures. Individuals can contact the third party service, Stopline or the individuals listed in point 4 noting that they will not have legal protections available to them outlined in point 6.

6. Legal protections for disclosures

Disclosers who fulfil the criteria outlined in points 1-4 have the following legal protections available to them for both internal and external disclosures:

A. Protection of a Disclosers Identity

RLOA has a legal obligation to protect the confidentiality of a disclosers identity.

A person cannot disclose the identity of a discloser or information that is likely to lead to the identification of the discloser *unless* a person discloses the identity of a discloser to:

- ASIC, ACNC or a member of the Australia Federal Police;
- A lawyer (to obtain legal advice or legal representation);
- A person or body prescribed by regulations; **or**
- With the consent of the discloser

A person can disclose the information contained in the disclosure with or without the disclosers consent if:



- The information doesn't include the discloser's identity;
- RLOA has taken all reasonable steps to reduce the risk that the discloser will be identified from the information; and
- It is reasonably necessary for investigating issues mentioned in the disclosure

It is illegal for a person to identify a discloser or disclose information that is likely to lead to the identification of the discloser.

- If this has occurred, you can lodge a complaint for breach of confidentiality via Stopline.
- A discloser may also lodge a complaint with a regulator such as ASIC or ACNC for investigation.

Anonymity

Disclosures by a discloser who fulfils the criteria in points 1-5 can make a disclosure anonymously and still be protected by the Act.

A discloser who makes a disclosure can choose to remain anonymous:

- Whilst making a disclosure;
- Over the course of the investigation;
- After the investigation is finalized

A discloser can refuse to answer any questions which could reveal their identity at any time.

If a disclosure is received from an email address where a person's identity cannot be determined, it will be treated as an anonymous disclosure. Other mechanisms for protecting anonymity include adopting a pseudonym.

B. Protection from detrimental acts or omissions

A person cannot engage in conduct that causes detriment to a discloser (or another person) in relation to a disclosure if:

- The person believes or suspects that the discloser made, may have made, proposes to make or could make a valid disclosure; and
- The belief or suspicion is the reason (whole or in part) for the conduct.

Threats, (whether express or implied) to cause detriment to a discloser (or another person) is not permitted.

Detrimental conduct, which is prohibited under law includes:

- Dismissal, injury to employment, alteration of position or duties
- Discrimination between an workers and other workers
- Harassment or intimidation
- Harm or injury to a person, property or reputation



- Damage to a person's business or financial position
- Any other damage

Detrimental conduct does not include:

- Administrative action which is reasonable to protect the discloser from detriment
- Management action to manage a discloser's unsatisfactory work performance

If a discloser is subject to administrative or management action, they will be informed of the reasons for taking this action.

C. Compensation and other remedies

A discloser (or any other worker or person) can seek compensation and other remedies through the courts if:

- They suffer loss, damage or injury because of a disclosure;
- RLOA failed to take reasonable precautions and exercise due diligence to prevent the detrimental conduct.

If a person wishes to proceed with seeking compensation and/or other remedies from the courts independent legal advice should be sought.

D. Civil, criminal and administrative liability protection

A discloser is protected from the below in regards to their disclosure:

- Civil liability
 - Such as legal action against a discloser for breach of an employment contract or duty of confidentiality
- Criminal liability
 - Such as attempted prosecution of the discloser for unlawfully releasing information
 - This does not include protections for making a false disclosure

These protections do not grant immunity for misconduct by the discloser which is revealed throughout the disclosure procedure.

7. Support and practical protection for disclosures

RLOA is committed to supporting disclosers and protecting disclosers from detriment throughout the disclosure process.

A. Protection of a discloser's identity

Receiving a disclosure

- All personal information or reference to the discloser witnessing an event will be redacted



- The discloser will be referred with a pseudonym
- Where possible, the discloser will be contacted to help identify certain aspects of their disclosure that could inadvertently identify them
- Disclosures will be handled and investigated by qualified staff

Record keeping

- All paper and electronic documents and other materials relating to disclosures will be stored securely
- Access to all information relating to a disclosure will be limited to those directly involved in managing and investigating the disclosure
- Only a restricted number of people who are directly involved in handling and investigating a disclosure will be made aware of a discloser's identity (subject to the discloser's consent) or information that is likely to lead to the identification of the discloser
- Communication and documents relating to the investigation of a disclosure will not be sent to an email address or printed that can be accessed by other staff
- Each person who is involved in handling and investigating a disclosure will be reminded about the confidentiality requirements

B. Protection from detrimental acts or omissions

Detriment in the workplace

- Assessing the risk of detriment against a discloser and other persons once a disclosure is received
- Actions to protect a discloser from potential detriment
 - Such as allowing a discloser to perform their duties at a different location or reassigning a discloser to a different role at the same level
- Ensure that Disclosure Officers are aware of the need to manage conflicts, ensure fairness and assess the risk of harm to the discloser
- A discloser can lodge a grievance with Stopline if they have suffered detriment.

C. Personal Wellbeing

In some instances personal wellbeing services may be offered to a discloser, or those subject to detriment including:

- Support services
 - Such as counselling or psychologist services



- Strategies to help a discloser minimize and manage stress, time, performance impacts and other challenges resulting from a disclosure and subsequent investigation
- If personal detriment has occurred RLOA may take disciplinary action to individuals who contributed to the detriment

8. Handling and investigating a disclosure

A. Receiving a disclosure

Once RLOA, or a service provider authorized by RLOA to receive whistleblowing disclosures receives a disclosure it will assess each disclosure to determine whether:

- The disclosure qualifies for protection; and
- A formal, in-depth investigation is required.

B. When and why a disclosure will be investigated

Disclosures raised will be received and treated seriously and with the utmost sensitivity. Whilst making a disclosure doesn't guarantee a matter will be formally investigated, all disclosures will be reviewed and based on the disclosures nature and evidence provided. From here a decision will be made as to whether the disclosure warrants an investigation.

The determination on whether to investigate the disclosure, the following be considered:

- The objective seriousness of the disclosure
- The quality of information or evidence provided
- Whether the disclosure concerns serious systemic conduct
- Whether similar disclosures have been received
- Whether the conduct involves Disclosure Officers, significant financial matters or non-compliance

RLOA may not be able to undertake an investigation if it is unable to contact the discloser and/or if the discloser has refused to provide or has not provided a means of contacting them. If this is the case, RLOA may opt to conduct a broad review on the subject matter disclosed.

C. Investigation Process

RLOA is committed to conducting objective, fair and independent investigations where this cannot be fulfilled by RLOA in part, RLOA will opt for a completely external investigation. Throughout the investigation process, confidentiality requirements outlined in points 6(A) and 7(A) will continue to be applied.

For disclosures that qualify for protection, RLOA will follow the below investigation process:



1. Receive the disclosure	Disclosures will be received by a Disclosure Officer.
2. Acknowledge the disclosure	A Disclosure Officer will acknowledge receipt of the disclosure within a reasonable timeframe.
3. Assess the disclosure and address immediate risks	A Disclosure Officer will assess the disclosure determining: (a) Whether the disclosure fulfils the criteria outlined in points 1-4 (b) The objective seriousness of the disclosure (c) The quality of information or evidence provided (d) Whether the disclosure concerns serious systemic conduct (e) Whether similar disclosures have been received (f) Whether the conduct involves Disclosure Officers, significant financial matters or non-compliance (g) Whether the disclosure warrants an investigation
4. Resolve the disclosure	For disclosures that do not meet the criteria in points 1-4 or do not warrant an investigation the Disclosure Officer will seek to resolve the disclosure directly with the discloser or redirect their disclosure to the appropriate Personal Grievance Policy.
5. Investigate or review the disclosure	Stopline, a Disclosure Officer of RLOA will conduct an investigation. All workers of RLOA must cooperate fully with any investigators.
6. Provide regular updates throughout the process	Stopline will provide regular updates to disclosers and RLOA regarding the process of the investigation.
7. Provide the final outcome	The findings of the investigation will be provided to RLOA and communicated as appropriate to the discloser and involved Parties.
8. Close the investigation and record the outcome	Stopline will close out the investigation and maintain appropriate records.
9. Facilitate ongoing support for those involved	RLOA will provide referrals to professional services to disclosers and other employees as appropriate.
10. Continuous improvement	Stopline will provide recommendations for improvement for future investigations.



D. Closing the loop on investigations

A discloser will be provided with regular updates so long as the discloser can be contacted, the main updates will be when the investigation:

- has begun;
- is in process; and
- has been finalized.

A person subject of an allegation will be provided the:

- information regarding the allegation and the nature of the allegation to the extent lawful;
- opportunity to respond to the allegation; and
- outcome of the investigation or report.

Pending the nature of the disclosure, timelines of when a discloser will be provided an update will vary. The discloser may be informed of the outcomes of an investigation, there may be circumstances where it may not be appropriate to provide details of the outcome to the discloser.

E. Review

If a discloser is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation the discloser may:

- Request a review be conducted by an officer who is not involved in handling and investigating disclosures and provide the review findings to the Risk Committee; or
- Lodge a complaint with ASIC or the ACNC.

RLOA is not obliged to reopen an investigation where it can confirm:

- The investigation was conducted properly
- New information is not available
- New information would not change the findings of the investigation

9. Fair treatment of individuals mentioned in a disclosure

RLOA is committed to fair treatment of its workers who are mentioned in a disclosure that qualifies for protections under the Act, including those who are subject of a disclosure.

To ensure fair treatment of individuals mentioned in a disclosure:

- Disclosures will be handled confidentially in accordance with point 6(A) and 7(A)
- Each disclosure will be assessed as to whether the conduct listed warrants an investigation. The investigation is conducted to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to substantiate the claims made in the disclosure.
- Investigations will be objective, fair and independent as outlined in point 8.



- A worker will have the contents of the disclosure put to them as required by principles of procedural fairness and prior to any action being taken
- A worker who is subject of a disclosure may access personal wellbeing services outlined in point 7(c).

10. Accessibility

This policy will be made publicly available via RLOA Staff Portal/ website.

RLOA will conduct staff training sessions on this policy as required to ensure that workers are aware of this Policy. Training to all levels of management will occur to ensure that they are equipped on how to deal with disclosures.

11. Accountability & Continuous Improvement

This Policy will be reviewed periodically and training may be recommended by Disclosure Officers or the Board of RLOA as appropriate.

Key themes of disclosures provided to the board to show patterns of behaviour and systemic issues. All information will not contain personal information in compliance with 6(A) and 7(A).

References

Fair Work Act 2009

Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)

Taxation Administration Act 1953 (Cth) (Whistleblower Protection Laws)

Treasury Laws Amendment (Enhancing Whistleblower Protections) Act 2019 (Cth)

Public Disclosure Act 2010 (Qld)

Aged Care Act 2024

Aged Care Rules 2025

Work Health and Safety Act and Regulations

RLOA Policies and Procedures

RLOA Code of Conduct

ASIC Regulatory Guide 270 – Whistleblower policies

Quality Standards

NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework

Aged Care Quality Standards

Quality of Care Principles 2014

AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009 Risk Management Principles and Guidelines