



PUBLIC INFORMATION SERVICES FUNCTIONAL AREA SUPPORTING PLAN

**A SUPPORTING PLAN TO THE
NSW STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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AMENDMENTS

Proposals for amendment or addition to the contents of this supporting plan are to be forwarded to:

NSW Police Force, Emergency Management Unit
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Surry Hills, NSW 2010

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DISTRIBUTION

This supporting plan may be distributed in electronic format and is available on the Emergency NSW website at www.emergency.nsw.gov.au.

AUTHORISATION

The Public Information Services Functional Area Supporting Plan has been prepared as a supporting Plan to the New South Wales State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) to detail the arrangements to provide for the coordination of public safety and/or warning messages and public information, and to coordinate the interaction between all agencies during emergency operations being conducted in accordance with the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act, as amended (SERM Act) and the NSW Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN).

This plan has been prepared on behalf of the Public Information Services Functional Area Coordinator in consultation with the State Emergency Management Committee.

This plan was endorsed by the State Emergency Management Committee in December 2019.

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GLOSSARY

Agency

Means a government agency or a non-government agency. *(source: SERM Act).*

Agency-specific Information

For the purposes of this plan, Agency-specific Information relates to factual details about an agency's own area of operational activity and includes:

- numbers of personnel deployed (staff/volunteers)
- time attended scene
- specialist equipment or other resources deployed
- agency-specific tasks and activities
- skills and training of staff
- background information on the agency

Combat Agency

Means the agency identified in the State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) as the agency primarily responsible for controlling the response to a particular emergency. *(Source: SERM Act).*

Control

Means the overall direction of the activities, agencies or individuals concerned. *(Source: SERM Act).*

Control operates horizontally across all agencies/organisations, functions and individuals. Situations are controlled.

Coordination

In this plan means the bringing together of agency media and/or public information officers to ensure the effective co-ordination of information to be issued to the public to assist them in preparation for, or in response to an emergency, and might include the request by the SEOCN of agencies to support the public information function. *(Source: SERM Act).*

Emergency

In this plan means an emergency due to the actual or imminent occurrence (such as fire, flood, storm, earthquake, explosion, terrorist act, accident, epidemic or warlike action) which:

- (a) endangers, or threatens to endanger, the safety or health of persons or animals in the State;
- or
- (b) destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage, any property in the State, being an emergency, which requires a significant and coordinated response.

For the purposes of the definition of emergency, property in the State includes any part of the environment of the State. Accordingly, a reference in the Act to:

- (a) threats or danger to property includes a reference to threats or danger to the environment, and
- (b) the protection of property includes a reference to the protection of the environment. *(Source: SERM Act).*

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)

Means a centre established at state, regional or local level as a centre of communication and as a centre for the coordination of operations and support during an emergency. *(Source: SERM Act)*

Emergency Operations Controller (EOCON)

The member of the NSW Police Force who has been appointed as Local, Regional or State Emergency Operations Controller.

Functional Area

A category of services involved in preparations for an emergency, including the following:

- Agriculture and Animal Services
- Telecommunications Services
- Energy & Utility Services
- Engineering Services
- Environmental Services
- Health Services
- Public Information Services
- Transport Services
- Welfare Services

(Source: SERM Act).

Functional Area Coordinator (FAC)

In this plan means the nominated coordinator of a Functional Area, tasked to coordinate the provision of Functional Area support and resources for emergency response and recovery operations, who, by agreement of Participating and Supporting Organisations within the Functional Area, has the authority to commit the resources of those utility. *(Source: EMPLAN).*

Joint Media Information Centre (JMIC)

In this plan means an assembly area for media where joint media briefings can be held and where spokespersons or Public Information Officers from agencies or relevant stakeholders are located.

A JMIC is an area for where regular media conferences and briefings can be held. In most circumstances it is a location near the incident site.

Media Liaison Officer

In this plan means a person who provides communication links between the relevant centre/s coordinated by the PIFAC, and responding agencies. Generally, they have three main functions:

- a. To disseminate information from the relevant Centre to spokespersons, key decision makers and operational commanders. This includes keeping these areas apprised of all released materials, media coverage and public information strategies;
- b. To gather information for the relevant Centre from their area of posting, including directions and requests from spokespersons, key decision makers and operational commanders;
- c. To coordinate media briefings and conferences at the JMIC, or at a nominated Media Conference location.

Participating Organisations

The Government Departments, statutory authorities, volunteer organisations and other agencies listed as Participating Organisations have either given formal notice to Agency Controllers or Functional Area Coordinators, or have acknowledged to the SEMC, that they are willing to participate in emergency response and recovery operations under the direction of the Controller of a Combat Agency, or Coordinator of a Functional Area, or an EOCON, and with levels of resources or support as appropriate to the emergency operation

Public Education

In this plan means public awareness developed through increasing knowledge to enable people to understand the risk and the necessary actions to take to mitigate the effects of the risk. Public education is delivered prior to the event, by the relevant combat agency.

Public Information

In this plan means the information, advice or warnings provided to the public in the lead up to or during an emergency to inform them of the response actions being taken and the specific actions that they should take, given the circumstances, to protect them or their property, or be provided with information that is available at the time to the public via traditional and social media channels and platforms.

Public Information Functional Area Co-ordinator

The PIFAC is responsible to the SEOCON for the operation of the Public Information Arrangements during an imminent or actual emergency operation not under the control of a combat agency, or at the request of a Combat Agency to the SEOCON, to assist with the co-ordination of public information activities of agencies involved, to ensure the effectiveness of information and where required, warnings provided.

Public Information Coordination Office (PICO)

The Public Information Coordination Centre (PICO) is a centre managed by PIFAC that once activated, coordinates the release of public information on behalf of all agencies. A PICO will NOT necessarily be activated for all emergencies.

Public Information & Inquiry Centre (PIIC)

A Public information and Inquiry Centre (PIIC) hotline may be established, depending on the nature, scale and scope of the emergency, and can provide members of the public (family and friends), directly or indirectly impacted by the emergency, the opportunity to contact and obtain information or register details of those involved in the emergency.

Recovery

In relation to an emergency includes the process of returning an affected community to its proper level of functioning after an emergency. (*Source: SERM Act*).

Response

In relation to an emergency includes the process of combating an emergency and of providing immediate relief for persons affected by an emergency. (*Source: SERM Act*).

State Emergency Operations Controller (SEOCON)

In this plan means Commissioner of Police or the person designated by the Governor, on the recommendation of the Minister, as the person for the time being holding or acting in that position. The SEOCON is responsible for controlling, in accordance with the SERM Act, the response to an emergency that affects more than one region or for which the SEOCON assumes responsibility.

State Emergency Recovery Controller (SERCON)

In this plan means the Secretary or a senior executive of the Department of Justice designated by the Secretary. The SERCON is responsible for controlling, in accordance with the SERM Act, the recovery from an emergency that affects more than one region or for which the SERCON assumes responsibility.

Supporting Organisations

In this plan means the Government Departments, statutory authorities, volunteer organisations and other specialist agencies who have indicated a willingness to participate and provide specialist support resources to a combat agency's Controller or Functional Area Coordinator during emergency operations. (*source: EM Plan*).

ABBREVIATIONS

BoM	Bureau of Meteorology
EMPLAN	NSW State Emergency Management Plan
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
EOCON	Emergency Operations Controller
FAC	Functional Area Coordinator
JMIC	Joint Media Information Centre
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding with Radio Organisations (Commercial Radio Australia and ABC Radio)
PIFAC	Public Information Functional Area Coordinator
PICO	Public Information Coordination Office
PIIC	Public Information and Inquiry Centre
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
SEOC	State Emergency Operations Centre
SEOCON	State Emergency Operations Controller
SERCON	State Emergency Recovery Controller
SERM Act	State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989
SEWS	Standard Emergency Warning Signal

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This supporting plan has been prepared as a state level supporting plan to the State Emergency Management Plan, pursuant to the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act, 1989, and should be read in conjunction with that plan. This supporting plan sets out the arrangements for the Public Information Services Functional Area Coordinator (PIFAC) to coordinate public information services between all agencies during emergencies as outlined below in the Scope of the plan.
- 1.2 The plan has been developed to reflect the changing needs of public information and the way in which emergency management organisations not only provide important information to the community in a timely, coordinated and effective manner, but they also receive information via social media.
- 1.3 All agencies involved in an emergency response may release 'agency specific information' without reference to the PIFAC. However, it is the responsibility of all involved agencies to ensure that the information they intend to release is not in conflict with messages being generated by the PIFAC. Public Information Messages might be generated across several agencies and might require agencies to consult with PIFAC prior to releasing such information to avoid being in conflict and to ensure they reflect the direction of the Emergency Operation.

2. AIM

- 2.1 The aim of this plan is to outline the arrangements for the coordination of the collection, collation of information, advice and warnings for dissemination to the public during times of emergency or imminent emergency events.
- 2.2 This plan recognises there are agencies which have a legislative responsibility for the issuing of public information and warnings. The plan also recognises that agencies have substantially educated the public and the media, in relation to the issuing of public information and warnings, and the public expectation of receiving up to date and validated information.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 This supporting plan details the coordination and release of public information during an actual or imminent emergency for the following:
 - Emergency Operations controlled by Emergency Operations Controllers (EOCONs);
 - When the Combat Agency has requested the PIFAC to assist with or coordinate public information or warnings.
 - As required by any subplans or supporting plans to EMPLAN, or
 - As otherwise requested by SEOCON
- 3.2 This supporting plan operates within the context of and in conjunction with the NSW State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN).
- 3.3 This plan applies to all forms of public information at all levels to and from any or all media sources.

- 3.4 The public information response to an emergency by a Combat Agency will be in accordance with their relevant subplan including their responsibility to manage public information. However, guidance on the responsibilities and operation of agency public information systems is provided at Annex2 for those agencies whose public information resources are not normally accustomed to operating in an emergency context.
- 3.5 This subplan does not supersede the Public Information arrangements included in EMPLAN or any of its Subplans or designated legal responsibilities that agencies might have for the issuing of public alerts and warnings.

4. PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 This plan incorporates the following the principles:
- Ensuring the integrity of emergency operations,
 - Building and holding public confidence,
 - Meeting media and public demands for timely information,
 - Providing information which impacts on public safety in a timely manner, using all appropriate traditional and social media channels and platforms,
 - Providing consistent and coordinated information from all stakeholders and/or agencies.
 - Providing and sharing accurate and reliable information across agency media channels and platforms,
 - Assisting in the recovery process, if required by SEOCON or at the request of the SERCON.
 - Supporting agencies with responsibility for the issuing of public alerts and warnings.

5. CONCEPT

- 5.1 This plan maintains “monitor” status at all times, and when activated, coordinates the release of public information on behalf of all agencies when required by the SEOCON.
- 5.2 Activation of this plan is dependent on the scale and nature of the emergency and may include public information support to several centres or locations.
- 5.3 When activated, the PIFAC might request Media Liaison Officers from Participating and/or Supporting agencies to support the emergency operation.
- 5.4 These Media Liaison Officers will function as a public information team, not simply as representatives of their individual agencies.
- 5.5 The Public Information operation might also require the activation of the Public Information and Inquiry Centre (PIIC) hotline which is the responsibility of the State Emergency Operations Centre. However, ensuring a coordinated approach to the publicising of hotline numbers and the provision of accurately scripted messages and released information is the responsibility of the PIFAC.

6. PREPARATION

6.1 Public Education & Information

- 6.2 Education information provided to the public regarding actions that they may be able to take to prevent, prepare for, respond to, or recover from the effects or impact of the emergency, is generally the responsibility of the relevant combat agency.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The roles and responsibilities of the Public Information Services Functional Area are set out below.

7.1 Public Information Functional Area Co-ordinator

The PIFAC is responsible to SEOCON for the operation of the Public Information Arrangements during an imminent or actual emergency operation not under the control of a combat agency, and will co-ordinate the public information activities of agencies involved to ensure the effectiveness of the information and where required, warnings provided.

However, the SEOCON may approve requests from Combat Agencies, or direct the PIFAC to assist with, or coordinate Public Information or warnings, where the impact of the emergency goes beyond the responsibility of the responding agency, or where there is a requirement for a significant and co-ordinated multi-agency approach to public information.

The responsibilities of the PIFAC are outlined in the following sections.

7.2 Responding agencies

All agencies involved in an emergency can release information related to the activities of their agency, and public information messages that are within their area of responsibility, without the approval of the PIFAC. This plan recognises there are agencies which have a legislative responsibility for the issuing of public information and warnings and do so within their own Concept of Operations.

However, there might be times when the combat and other agencies need to ensure that agency specific messages they intend to release are not in conflict with messages being generated by the PIFAC. This may require agencies to consult the PIFAC prior to releasing such information.

These situations could be when the SEOCON has requested the PIFAC to provide whole of government support and might include requesting agencies to share public information on their social media platforms.

The PIFAC is responsible to SEOCON for the operation of the Public Information Arrangements during an imminent or actual emergency operation.

Agencies are requested to provide contact details of their nominated Media Liaison Officers to the Public Information Functional Area Coordinator, and to confirm the details every six months.

7.3 The Public Information Arrangements

The Public Information Arrangements will normally consist of the following:

- Public Information Functional Area Coordinator (PIFAC)
- Deputy PIFAC
- Media Liaison Officers
- Joint Media Information Centre
- Agency Media Spokespersons
- Public Information and Inquiry Centre (PIIC)

7.4 Deputy PIFAC (DPIFAC)

The PIFAC will nominate at least one Deputy PIFAC to enable public information operations to function for a 24-hour period for an extended period. The Deputy PIFAC may be appointed from any agency and will assume the role and responsibilities of PIFAC whilst carrying out that function. Either PIFAC or Deputy PIFAC can appoint an Executive Officer as needed to assist them in their function or carry out assigned tasks.

7.5 **Media Liaison Officers**

Media Liaison Officers from responding agencies will be required to provide details of agency operations in the lead up to or during an emergency, which will form the basis of the information or warnings issued to the public. Media Liaison Officers from responding agencies might be required to attend the SEOC, or another location, to support the emergency operations public information arrangements by developing communications materials such as, but not limited to social media posts, public messaging, and agency talking points.

The role of the Media Officers is further outlined in the Response Section.

7.6 **Joint Media information Centre (JMIC)**

The JMIC is an area for media where regular press conferences and briefings can be held. Ideally, the JMIC should be housed near to the area of operations or incident site. Depending upon the nature of the operation, another JMIC may need to be established at an alternate location.

During the operation the JMIC will:

- Provide media representatives with timely, consistent and easy-to-understand information about the response, initial recovery and mitigation operations
- Provide on-site spokespersons from responding agencies
- Forward media inquiries to the various operations centres where Public Information Officers area based, and
- Provide media representatives with times and locations of media conferences

The PIFAC should be made aware of all information provided to the media at the JMIC.

7.7 **Responding Agency Spokespeople**

Providing a constant media face is a key strategy to ensuring public confidence. Ideally the chosen spokesperson should be both knowledgeable and authoritative. For example, a senior member of a responding agency or other public official who can regularly engage in media conferences.

The lead media spokesperson will be determined in consultation with PIFAC, and other senior operational commanders and representatives.

7.8 **The Public Information and Inquiry Centre**

A Public information and Inquiry Centre (PIIC) hotline may be established, depending on the nature, scale and scope of the emergency, and will provide members of the public (family and friends), directly or indirectly impacted by the emergency, the opportunity to contact and obtain information or register details of those involved in the emergency.

Public Information material developed and issued by agencies will form the basis of the information and details provided by operators to the callers to the hotline. The PIIC can be established by the SEOC or on advice from the PIFAC.

7.9 **Multicultural NSW**

PIFAC can call upon Multicultural NSW and the arrangements detailed in the Multicultural NSW Community Resilience & Response Plan (COMPLAN) to access multicultural networks during emergencies to assist in delivering messaging relevant to the particular community.

The Multicultural NSW Community Resilience & Response Plan (COMPLAN) details the preparedness, prevention, response and recovery (PPRR) arrangements for a coordinated approach by NSW Government agencies and local government partners to managing and mitigating community harmony risks and improving conditions for community harmony within New South Wales.

COMPLAN details arrangements to ensure a coordinated NSW Government response to local and international events which may affect community relations and community harmony.

COMPLAN assists and empowers credible, authoritative messengers to develop, deliver and disseminate, through community networks and the media, effective messages to counter divisive influences, de-escalate actual or potential community tensions, and promote community harmony.

7.10 **Auslan Interpreters**

NSW emergency response and recovery agencies are encouraged to formalise their on-call arrangements for Auslan Interpreters, who 'sign' for hearing-impaired audiences, to ensure effective communication during emergency situations.

Agencies should, where appropriate, utilise the services of Auslan Interpreters for media conferences in the lead up to, during and following emergencies.

By going on to the link the below and registering an account (free of charge) agencies will be able to access the service if required.

The link to register is <http://nsw.slcommunications.com.au/>
Further information about Deaf Society's costs and services can be found at http://deafsocietynsw.org.au/interpreting/page/make_a_booking.

All agencies should regularly review their registration arrangements.

8. **RESPONSE**

8.1 **Activation**

- The arrangements in this Supporting Plan are always active and apply:
 - For an emergency operation controlled by Emergency Operations Controllers (EOCONs)
 - When SEOC has approved a request from the Combat Agency for the PIFAC to assist with or coordinate Public Information activities.

8.2 **Stages of Activation**

Monitor

PIFAC:

- monitors situations which may develop into emergencies requiring Public Information support,
- advises Participating and Supporting Organisations if their services are likely to be required.

Operational

PIFAC:

- State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC) - (If the impact of the emergency is of a significant nature, the PIFAC can request Media Liaison Officers from agencies be deployed to the SEOC, or a nominated centre.
- Request agencies share information (messages and warnings) across social media platforms.

The role of the MLOs deployed to support the SEOC Public Information Operation include:

- Reporting to the PIFAC or PIFAC representative
- Contribute to the overall Public Information Operation
- To ensure the SEOC is kept apprised of all information issues and releases
- To ensure that all functional areas within the SEOC are kept apprised of all public information issues and releases
- Prepare suitable briefings and speaking notes for spokespersons
- Advise SEOC, agency and Functional Area representatives of trends and issues in media coverage, strategies to be deployed and future directions
- Collect information from functional areas and agencies and develop public information for media release or social media product.
- Assist in identifying media and public information priorities in 12-hour blocks - for the next 12, 24, 36, 48-hour periods
- Ensure appropriate communication links are maintained between external MLOs, Combat Agencies, Public Information Centres, and media organisations.
- **Stand Down**
PIFAC:
 - Consults with the SEOC and SERCON regarding the need for the ongoing coordination of public information
 - In consultation with SEOC, identifies the agency responsible for ongoing public information and return to normal arrangements.
 - informs the agencies of the Stand Down declaration, and of any ongoing requirements for the coordination of media resources during initial recovery operations
 - Liaises with Recovery Public Information Co-ordinator during transition from response to recover phase.

8.3 Communications Channels and Platforms – Broadcasting Warnings and Messages.

Broadcasting Warnings and Messages can be undertaken by but not limited to the following;

- Public information and warning messages to ABC Manager Emergency Broadcast and Community Development ABC Radio
- Public information and warning messages to Commercial Radio Stations contacts as provided by Commercial radio Australia
- Broadcast interruptions (radio and television)
- Emergency Alert
- Sydney Alert
- Social Media Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram – existing and emerging
- Use of the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)
- Variable Messaging Signs
- Community Meetings
- Public address systems or 'door knocks'
- Print – newsletters, fliers and pamphlet distribution
- Use of SMS or telephone message systems
- Websites such as Emergency NSW
- Apps such as Fire near Me, Emergency+

9. RECOVERY

Recovery begins whenever communities are impacted. When a recovery operation is required the NSW Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is responsible for coordinating and managing this process, including the activation of the Recovery Public Information Coordinator.

9.1 Recovery Public Information Coordinator

The Recovery Public Information Coordinator (RPIC) coordinates recovery messaging and works closely with impacted local councils and agencies to provide additional communications support.

The RPIC will work closely with the PIFAC to ensure a smooth transition from response to recovery phase. The RPIC can request Public Information Officers from agencies join working groups and provide additional communication support during recovery.

10. ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

10.1 Logistic Support

Agencies involved in this Supporting Plan are responsible for their own logistic support in the first instance. Additional support to enable them to fulfil any responsibility should be requested via the PIFAC who may either assist with the support or consider alternatives to any support that cannot be provided.

10.2 Financial Responsibilities

Agencies are responsible for meeting their own costs for both training and emergency operations. Expenditure of funds by emergency service organisations or functional areas during emergency response and/or recovery operations is to be met in the first instance by the providers of resources from within their normal operating budgets.

11. REVIEW

11.1 Training

Training of members and staff of agencies in relation to their own agency business as usual activities rests with the relevant agency. However, those Media Liaison Officers should be made aware of this Supporting Plan by the particular agency as part of their emergency management arrangements awareness.

Familiarisation sessions of the SEOC and PICO will be conducted for Media Liaison Officers on a yearly basis, or as deemed necessary by PIFAC.

11.2 Review and Exercise

The PIFAC will ensure that a review of this document is conducted after any activation of the PICO, or at least every five years after the date of approval. The arrangements in this supporting plan are to be exercised at least on annual basis or at the direction of the PIFAC unless an activation of this supporting plan has occurred within two years from the previous activation or exercise.

12. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – Participating and Supporting Organisations

ANNEX 2 – A Guide for Agencies for Managing Public Information

ANNEX 1 – PARTICIPATING AND SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

Participating Organisation

- NSW Police Force
- NSW Ambulance
- Fire & Rescue NSW
- NSW Rural Fire Service
- NSW State Emergency Service
- NSW Health
- T4NSW
- NSW Department of Justice
- Office of Emergency Management
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Multicultural NSW
- Bureau of Meteorology

Supporting Organisations/Services

- Australian Defence Force
- Australian Broadcasting Authority
- Commercial Radio Australia
- Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare
- NSW Department of Education and Training
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources
- Department of State and Regional Development
- Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation
- Minister for Emergency Services
- Agriculture and Animal Services
- Communications Services
- Disaster Recovery Human Services (Welfare)
- Engineering Services Functional Area
- Energy and Utilities Services
- Environmental Services
- Sydney Airports Corporation Limited
- Attorney General's Department
- Australian Red Cross
- Australian Government Department of Home Affairs
- City of Sydney Council

ANNEX 2 – A GUIDE FOR AGENCIES FOR MANAGING PUBLIC INFORMATION

Combat Agencies are responsible for the coordination of public information for emergency operations for which they are designated.

This responsibility includes considering the public information requirements of both participating and supporting agencies.

All agencies responding to an emergency can release agency specific operational activity and public information messages that are within their area of responsibility, without the approval of the PIFAC.

This plan recognises there are agencies which have a legislative responsibility for the issuing of public information and warnings and do so within their own Concept of Operations.

Once the details of an emergency are known, Public Information should be released without undue delay by using appropriate or all available means of dissemination.

However, there might be occasions when the intended release of information by agencies requires coordination with whole of government or multi-agency messaging, which is being generated by the PIFAC.

On these occasions, the PIFAC might decide to conduct a teleconference to ensure all agency public information activity is effective.

Agency specific information is factual details about an agency's own area of operational activity. It includes but not limited to:

- Numbers of personnel deployed (staff/volunteers)
- Time attended scene
- Specialist equipment or other resources deployed
- Skills and training of staff

Participating and Supporting organisations are responsible to ensure that agency specific information does not conflict with information released by the Combat Agency or PIFAC, or comment on sensitive information, rescue, or recovery operations, and includes information which might impact upon subsequent investigations or inquiries.

This also includes the release of images at, and from a rescue incident, as outlined in the NSW State Rescue Policy.