



### Good decision making in the public interest

As public sector employees, our decisions need to be made – and be seen to be made – in the public interest.

#### Introduction

Every decision we make needs to help us achieve the best outcomes for the community and the State of Tasmania as a whole.

To do this right, we need to understand what 'working in the public interest' means for our role and how our personal interests might affect some of our decision-making.

#### The public interest

When we say that the public sector makes decisions in the public interest, we mean that the decisions public sector employees make every day support building the best future for Tasmania while also directly affecting individuals.

It is not easy to define 'the public interest'; it is a concept or fundamental principle that should guide and inform the actions of public officials.

#### Considering the community as a whole

The public interest refers to 'considerations affecting the good order and functioning of the community and government affairs for the wellbeing of citizens ... for the benefit of society, the public or the community as a whole'.

The decisions that we make in our work roles need to take into account what the decision means for the community.

Working in the public interest means that we consider the impact on the community and individuals, even when they may not be aware of the decision.

Sometimes it can be easy to see how our decisions affect the people of Tasmania – there is a tangible, immediate outcome when we build roads, open offices or streamline processes. But we need to think about the public interest in all of our decisions, including filling in timesheets, placing stationery orders and arranging meetings.

## Determining how the public interest applies to the decisions you make

Take some time to consider how the public interest applies to the decisions you make in your role.

As a first step, think about the purpose of your organisation and the services it provides. It is helpful to consider:

- ▼ the legislative framework in which you operate
- ▼ your organisation's corporate or strategic plan
- ▼ any relevant internal policies and procedures, and
- ▼ your statement of duties or role/position description.

Understanding your organisation's contribution and how your role works to achieve that more significant outcome is a vital first step to making good decisions.

Every public sector organisation has its role to play in achieving outcomes for Tasmania. Thinking about it this way will help you to consider the public interest in your daily decision-making.

## Balancing your interests

As a second step, consider your personal interests. Public sector employees are people first. We all have a range of private interests that help add to the diversity and vibrancy of the public sector and the broader community.

Our personal interests can be relational or financial and include things like:

- ▼ personal relationships, including friends, relatives and business associates
- ▼ the roles and responsibilities we have to our families, friends and community that are different to our work roles
- ▼ associations, clubs and organisations that we belong to or maybe a part of
- ▼ secondary employment
- ▼ financial or economic interests, including direct and indirect assets, and
- ▼ even our own reputational concerns.

These personal interests can sometimes give us a different view compared to other people in the community.

So while it is important that we have personal interests, as public sector employees we need to manage them appropriately. We need to make sure that our personal interests don't affect our ability to make decisions that deliver the best possible outcomes for the community.

The decisions we make every day are opportunities to achieve outcomes that are in the public interest.

## Understanding conflicts of interest

People use many different terms when describing a conflict of interest, which can make it confusing.

A conflict of interest exists when your personal interest could affect your public duty. Suppose a reasonable person thinks that your personal interests might influence your decisions in a manner that could create a personal benefit. In that case, this is also a conflict of interest.

## Putting your public duty first

You can't make a decision that is truly in the public interest if you put your interests ahead of your public duty.

While you need to avoid conflicts of interest, you are also likely good at what you do because of the experience and passion you have for your job. Experience and passion can lead to you having several personal interests that could lead to a conflict of interest.

We recommend that you declare your relevant private interests to your public sector organisation to ensure effective management of any conflicts of interest. You can then achieve the right outcome – acting in the public interest.

## Making good decisions

Good decision-making isn't something that public sector employees need to undertake alone.

You should feel confident discussing your decisions with appropriate colleagues and networks to ensure that your decisions are right and create outcomes that support the public interest.



### The Commission can help

We are available to provide support and assistance with identifying, reporting, investigating, managing and preventing misconduct: [prevention@integrity.tas.gov.au](mailto:prevention@integrity.tas.gov.au) or 1300 720 289.

For more Misconduct Prevention resources go to [www.integrity.tas.gov.au/resources](http://www.integrity.tas.gov.au/resources).