POLICY STATEMENT NO. 7

COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

First Published 12 December 2003
This revision 30 August 2011

1. Introduction

An effective complaints management system is an essential component of the provision of quality customer service in the public sector. By measuring and monitoring customer satisfaction, an agency can obtain useful information and feedback for improving service delivery.

The establishment of such a system will assist in the timely and appropriate resolution of customer dissatisfaction. Data on complaints and feedback will assist the agency to identify problems and change procedures to prevent similar complaints or levels of dissatisfaction in the future.

All environmental complaints or non-conformances in operations should use the Incident Report and Work Improvement Notice Form (FPC80). Information regarding this procedure can be found on the Forest Products Commission's (FPC) intranet at http://intraneUcorporate/ems/452nonconform.asp. All other complaints should use FPC55, Feedback/Complaints Form. This procedure details the procedures for handling complaints using FPC55 only.

2. Objectives of FPC's Complaints Management System

- To improve customer service.
- To provide a tool for evaluating the quality of service delivered by FPC.
- To ensure compliance with statutory obligations and corporate governance.
- Increase profitability.

3. FPC's Complaints Philosophy

The FPC's philosophy regarding complaints management is based on five key principles:

- Every complaint will be dealt with seriously.
- A complaint is an opportunity to correct a problem (if the complaint is valid).
- A complaint helps the agency in understanding customer expectations.
- Complaints assist in managing service delivery within the Commission.
- Handling complaints well has a positive impact on the FPC's identity.
4. The Need for Complaints Management
   - Customer service relates to identifying and satisfying customer needs. Complaints are an indication of the gap that may exist between the services offered and the needs or expectations of customers.
   - Customer service revolves around developing, managing and maintaining good relationships with our customers. Part of securing that good relationship is our ability to eliminate customer complaints and as far as possible, to the satisfaction of the customer.
   - If a complaint is managed well it can strengthen the customer/agency relationship.
   - Information gathered through complaints and a complaints management system can provide assistance with improving our services and products.

5. Policy Support
   - Executive is committed to a well-managed system of complaints management and to empowering staff to deal with complaints.
   - Administrative Procedures in support of the Complaints Management System are available to staff on the FPC intranet.
   - The FPC's Complaints management system is based upon the principles of the Australian Standard on Complaints Handling (AS ISO 10002).

6. Definitions

Complaint
   - Any expression of concern or dissatisfaction made to the FPC by, or on behalf of, an individual client (including Government agencies) or a group or member of the public, that relates to the FPC's products or services, or the performance, behaviour and conduct of staff, or the complaints handling process itself.
   - A complaint may be made in person, by phone, fax, email or in writing. Verbal complaints should be documented immediately by the staff member who received the complaint.
   - A request for information, or advice, or inquiry, or requests for service are not regarded as a complaint.
   - The philosophy underpinning this definition is that the customer defines the complaint by his/her perception that they are not satisfied. If a customer has communicated to the FPC that there is a problem or concern then it is important and the problem needs to be addressed.

Complainant
   - Person, organisation or its representative, making a complaint.
Providers

- Any person or group providing a FPC service or product to a customer. This includes person/s providing these on behalf of the agency such as would occur in a contractor situation.

Complaint Recipient

- Any FPC officer who receives a written or verbal complaint from a customer.

Complaint Owner (or delegated officer)

- The FPC officer who is accountable to the customer for resolving the complaint.
- The Complaint Recipient and the Complaint Owner may be the same individual.
- The Complaint Owner may delegate the process to a Delegated Officer. However, they retain ownership of the complaint.

Complaint Review Officer

- The FPC officer designated to review or investigate unresolved complaints. This will usually be a person in a supervising role and may be a Director or Senior Manager.

Independent Reviewer

- An individual or organisation external to the FPC to whom an unresolved complaint is referred.

Positive Feedback/Compliments

- When a customer contacts the FPC to express their satisfaction in relation to a product or service. A process of recording and communicating positive feedback/compliments enables the measurement of customer satisfaction. Complaints as well as positive feedback/compliments are received and each has an important role to play in evaluating customer satisfaction.

Vexatious Complainants

- Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be vexatious if they continue to make complaints that are:
  - Instituted to harass or annoy, to cause delay or detriment, or for any other wrongful purpose.
  - Instituted or pursued without reasonable grounds;
  - Conducted in a manner so as to harass or annoy, cause delay or detriment, or to achieve any other wrongful purpose.
• Officers who are responsible for resolving complaints should discuss the possibility of determining that a person is a vexatious complainant with the General Manager prior to making the decision to cease dealing with the complainant.

7. **Principles of Complaints Management**

The FPC, in respect to the following matters, will endeavour to:

• **Resources**
  Provide adequate resources with sufficient levels of delegated authority to ensure complaints received are addressed and concluded in a timely manner.

• **Visibility**
  Promote the Complaints Management Policy and Procedures to all FPC staff and potential complainants.

• **Fairness**
  Recognise the need to be fair and equitable to both the complainant and the officer and/or part of the FPC against whom the complaint is made.

• **Access**
  Ensure that the complaint management process is available to all complainants and employees of the FPC by making its policy available at all FPC offices and publishing it on the FPC’s internet and intranet.

• **Responsiveness**
  Deal with complaints quickly, treat complainants with courtesy and wherever possible resolve complaints at the first point of contact.

• **Assistance**
  Provide assistance for complainants in the formulation and lodgement of complaints if requested. This may include provision of a translator or assistance in completing complaint documentation.

• **Data Collection**
  The Governance Coordinator is to collect and record data on complaints lodged and outcomes to assist in the identification of systemic and recurring problems and/or potential improvements to service delivery and customer relations. Data regarding complaints received at FPC regional offices should be forwarded to the Governance Coordinator for recording in the complaints register.

• **Reviews**
  The Governance Coordinator will regularly reviews the complaints handling process to ensure it is efficiently delivering effective outcomes. The information from the reviews will be fed into internal planning and reported externally (via the FPC’s annual report).

• **Confidentiality**
  The customer’s privacy and their need for confidentiality will be respected. The complaints process will not be used to victimise the complainant.
• Communication
  The Complaint Owner will keep customers informed of the progress on their complaint on a regular basis.

8. POLICY OWNER
General Manager

9. CUSTODIAN
Governance Coordinator

10. EFFECTIVE DATE
12 September 2011

11. REVIEW DATE
This policy is to be reviewed on or before 30 August 2013

David Hartley
A/GENERAL MANAGER
30 August 2011
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE NO. 5

COMPLAINTS HANDLING

First Published 12 December 2003
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Purpose

A complaints management system is an organised process for responding to, recording and using complaints to improve services to customers.

It includes procedures for customers to use when making a complaint and guidelines for staff in resolving complaints. In addition, it provides information that can assist in preventing customer dissatisfaction occurring in the future and for continuous improvement of service delivery.

All environmental complaints or non-conformances in operations should use the Incident Report and Work Improvement Notice Form (FPC80). Information regarding this procedure can be found on the Forest Products Commission (FPC) intranet at http://intranet/corporate/ems/452nonconform.asp. All other complaints should use FPC55, Feedback/Complaints Form. This procedure details the procedures for handling complaints using FPC55 only.

An effective complaints management system is an essential part of providing quality public service.

The FPC can benefit from an effective complaints management system in four ways:

- The identification of areas within the agency that need improvement.
- Creating an opportunity to provide service and satisfaction to customers who are dissatisfied.
- Providing an opportunity to strengthen public support for the agency.
- Assisting in planning and allocation of resources.

The FPC has a commitment to customer service and is re-shaping its approach to customer service, placing even more emphasis on recognising the needs of customers.

In addition, the FPC acknowledges the customer's right to complain and that positive changes to service delivery can accrue by managing complaints well.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROCESS (WRITTEN AND VERBAL)

Verbal Complaints (in-person or by telephone) may be made by the complainant directly to an officer over a public counter, at any personal or official meeting or by telephone about the quality of any service or product provided by the FPC.
Wherever possible, all verbal complaints should be dealt with and resolved at the first point of contact;
Where the complaint is unable to be resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint must be referred immediately to a relevant officer with authority to resolve the complaint or the Branch Manager (Complaint Owner);
If the Branch Manager (Complaint Owner) is unable to resolve the complaint orally, the complainant shall be advised that they may put the complaint in writing. (See Section 1 – Complaints Received).

General Written Complaints (including facsimile or e-mail) may be made by any complainant about the quality of any service or product provided by the FPC.

- A written complaint may be addressed to the FPC officer responsible for the specific service(s) subject to complaint, providing the officer has the authority to resolve the matter;
- All other complaints shall be addressed to the relevant Branch Manager (Complaint Owner) or to the relevant Director where the Branch Manager is implicated and/or part of the complaint.
- Where a complaint involves issues across more than one division written complaints should be addressed to the General Manager.

Specific Written Complaints (Personal) may be made by a complainant about the unsatisfactory performance of an individual FPC officer or group of officers.

- All complaints directed against the performance of a specific officer or group of officers shall be addressed to the officers' Branch Manager (Complaint Owner) or to the relevant Director where the Branch Manager is implicated and/or part of the complaint.
- Complaints about the personal performance of a Director shall be addressed to the General Manager.

Complaints to the Ombudsman – Where a complainant does not accept a resolution offered by the FPC, (and wishes to pursue the matter) that person shall be advised that they have a right, and may lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman (in accordance with the Ombudsman’s specific requirements).

COMPLAINT PROCESSING PROCEDURE

1 Complaint received
1.1 The Complaint Recipient completes an FPC Feedback/Complaints Form (FPC55) when a verbal or written complaint is made, irrespective of whether the complaint is resolved at the first point of contact. The form is available on the FPC intranet and internet.

If a verbal complaint is made and the Branch Manager is unable to resolve the complaint orally, the complainant shall be advised that they may put the complaint in writing. Once the written complaint is received the Complaint Recipient shall complete the "FPC Feedback/Complaints Form". The Complaint Recipient is any Forest Products Commission officer who receives a written or verbal complaint from a customer.
1.2 Complaints received through the internet or intranet are to be directed to the Governance Coordinator who will coordinate and delegate a response as required. The Governance Coordinator is to acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within two working days of receipt. The written response to the complainant (where required) is to be issued within 10 working days.

1.3 Complaints regarding environmental issues shall be referred to Environmental Management System Liaison Officers.

1.4 The Complaint Recipient contacts the most appropriate Complaint Owner (an FPC officer who is accountable to the customer for resolving the complaint – Delegated Officer or a Branch Manager) for:

- Registration/documentation of the complaint.
- Confirmation of Complaint Owner.
- Assessment of media, legal and political possibilities (General Manager and Directors informed that risk exists).

The Complaint Recipient and the Complaint Owner may be the same individual. However, when there is a high level of risk, consequence or interaction then the Complaint Recipient and the Complaint Owner should not be the same individual.

1.5 A copy of the FPC Feedback/Complaints Form (FPC55) and any supporting documentation (i.e. letter) is to be forwarded to the Governance Coordinator for statistical and monitoring purposes.

2. Complaint Investigation

2.1 The Complaint Owner acknowledges receipt of the complaint in writing within five working days of receipt, and aims to issue a written response to the complainant (where required) within ten working days.

The acknowledgement is to include:

- The officer responsible for resolution.
- Contact telephone number.
- An outline of proposed action.

2.2 The Complaint Owner may delegate the responsibility for the investigation however they remain the owner until the complaint is resolved to the complainant’s satisfaction.

2.3 The Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer keeps the complainant and the Complaint Recipient informed if timeframes can not be met, a holding response, giving reasons for the delay and a possible response time, will be provided to the complainant.

2.4 If an investigation of the complaint reveals that another area of the Commission is responsible for the issue, the complaint will be referred for continued action. The original Complaint Owner retains the ownership until the complaint is resolved to the customer’s satisfaction.
2.5 Where a complaint involves issues across more than one division complaints should be forwarded to the General Manager for his information.

3. Resolution and Communication

3.1 The Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer resolves the complaint through negotiation, consultation and mediation using delegated authority.

3.2 The Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer verbally informs the customer of the resolution and confirms the complainant's satisfaction.

3.3 If the complainant is unhappy with the resolution, the Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer will need to take into account the level of risk and dissatisfaction and forward the complaint to the designated Complaint Review Officer. Refer to section 4 - Internal Review or Investigation.

The Complaint Review Officer is a FPC officer designated to review or investigate unresolved complaints. This will usually be a person in a supervising role and may be an Director or Senior Manager.

3.4 If the complainant is happy with the resolution, the Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer advises the complainant in writing of the resolution and the closure of the complaint.

3.5 The Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer ensures that the documentation related to the completed complaint is finalised and filed in the official records system.

3.6 The Complaint Owner or Delegated Officer forwards a copy of the documentation related to the completed complaints to the Governance Coordinator for monitoring and statistical purposes.

4. Internal Review or Investigation

This section refers to action that may be required as a result of Point 3.3.

4.1 The Complaint Review Officer checks if there are any previous complaints from the complainant. The Complaint Review Officer is a FPC officer designated to review or investigate unresolved complaints. This will usually be a person in a supervising role and may be an Director or Senior Manager.

4.2 Contact is made with the complainant to:

- Clarify the complaint.
- Clarify the outcome sought.
- Explain the investigation process.

4.3 All documentation relevant to the complaint is gathered and assessed. The decision is then made as to whether or not the complaint can be resolved without further investigation.

4.4 The Complaint Review Officer will then arrange to interview staff involved if further investigation is required. A formal record of these interviews will be made.
4.5 The Review Officer will then compile a report taking all the information gathered into consideration. This should be circulated to all parties including the customer. The latter can be excluded if particular reasons exist for doing so.

4.6 The report will then be finalised taking into consideration the documents received and including a remedy or resolution to the complaint.

4.7 The Complaint Review Officer then follows step 3.4 to 3.6 in this procedure.

5. **External Review**

If the internal review or investigation process does not lead to a resolution, or if the complaint is a very serious one, it is appropriate to have an external source review the situation.

The sources available include:

- Professional mediator appointed by the FPC.
- Accountability/complaint bodies established by the State Government:
  - Ombudsman.
  - Auditor General.
  - Equal Opportunity Commission.

Dissatisfied complainants can be referred to these and other bodies as appropriate. Alternatively a joint complainant/agency approach can be made.

Before proceeding with the external review process all other avenues need to be exhausted and the General Manager consulted and informed of the situation.

Further advice and assistance on this part of the process may be obtained from the FPC's Governance Coordinator.

6. **POSITIVE FEEDBACK/COMPLIMENTS**

6.1 The Recipient completes an FPC Feedback/Complaints Form when a written positive feedback/compliment is made. If the positive feedback/compliment is made at an FPC office then the Recipient requests that the customer complete an FPC Feedback/Complaints Form.

6.2 Positive feedback/compliments received through the internet or intranet are to be directed to the Governance Coordinator who will coordinate and delegate a response as required. The Governance Coordinator is to acknowledge receipt of the positive feedback/compliment in writing within five working days of receipt, and aims to issue a written response to the individual (where required) within ten working days.

6.3 The Recipient records the customer's positive feedback/compliment details on the FPC Feedback/Complaints Form when a verbal or written positive feedback/compliment is made. A form to assist is available on the FPC intranet or the internet.
6.4 The Recipient contacts the most appropriate Owner (Delegated Officer or a Branch Manager) for:

- Registration/documentation of the positive feedback/compliment.
- Confirmation of the Owner.
- Assessment of media, legal and political possibilities. Please contact the Communications Coordinator if a positive media opportunity exists.

*Please note that the Owner is a FPC Branch Manager or officer who is accountable to the customer (Delegated Officer). The Recipient and the Owner may be the same individual.*

6.5 A copy of the “FPC Feedback/Complaints” Form and any supporting documentation (i.e. letter) is to also be forwarded to the Governance Coordinator, Rivervale for statistical and monitoring purposes.

6.6 The Owner acknowledges receipt of the positive feedback/compliment in writing within five working days of receipt, and aims to issue a written response to the individual (where required) within 10 working days.

7. **PROCEDURE OWNER**

General Manager

8. **CUSTODIAN**

Governance Coordinator

9. **EFFECTIVE DATE**

12 September 2011

10. **REVIEW DATE**

This policy is to be reviewed on or before 12 September 2012

David Hartley
A/GENERAL MANAGER

12 September 2011
Correspondence

Verbal (Telephone, Meeting, etc) (FPC Officer to fill out FPC Feedback/Complaints Form) if cannot be resolved at first point of contact

Complaint Recipient to complete FPC Feedback/Complaints Form

Complaint Recipient to immediately forward the FPC Feedback/Complaints Form to Complaint Owner and a copy to the Corporate Governance Coordinator, Rivervale

Complaint Owners or Delegated Officer to prepare response

Response to customer

Response outcome filed

Forward a copy of completed response and supporting documentation to Governance Coordinator, Rivervale

In Person – Complaint Recipient requests that the customer complete the FPC Feedback/Complaints Form if it cannot be resolved at first point of contact

Five (5) days to acknowledge and ten (10) days to respond