Complaints Policy

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MTSCT Governance	2020	Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust – Trustees: Olly Ball, Vince Kerr, Geoff Butturini, Eden Hakaraia, Manuel Springford, Matt Keen, Hilton Leith.

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide an avenue through which staff, participants and volunteers, and their managers, can resolve work-related complaints as they arise.
This policy is intended to ensure that we handle complaints fairly, efficiently, effectively and in keeping with our organisational principles.
This policy also provides guidance to our staff and people who wish to make a complaint on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system.

Policy

This policy applies to all staff (paid and volunteer), contractors and our governing body, receiving or managing complaints from the public and clients made to or about us, regarding our products, services and staff, or our complaint handling process.
Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust will establish mechanisms to promote fast and efficient resolution of workplace issues.

Staff and volunteers should feel comfortable discussing issues with their manager or contract supervisor in accordance with the procedures outlined below.

All formal avenues for handling grievances will be fully documented and the staff/volunteer's wishes will be taken into account in determining the appropriate steps and actions.
No staff will be intimidated or unfairly treated in any respect if they utilise this Policy to resolve an issue.

This Policy applies to paid contractors and to volunteer workers.

Organisational commitment

This organisation expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following table outlines the nature of the commitment expected from staff and the way that commitment should be implemented:

Who	Commitment	How
Poutokomanawa/ Co-Director (senior management) or chair	Promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution	Report to the governing body on our complaint handling. Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling complaints. Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints. Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly. Encourage staff to make recommendations for system improvements. Support recommendations for service, staff and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.
Programme/Regional Managers (may include Poutokomanawa/ Co-Director or chair)	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	They identify, prevent and address potential problems before they become formal grievances Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. Assist people to make a complaint, if needed. Comply with our policy and associated procedures. Provide regular feedback to management and/or the governing body on issues arising from complaints. Provide suggestions to management on ways to improve our complaints management system. Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as directed by management.
All staff	Understand and comply with our complaint handling practices.	They attempt to resolve any issues through their immediate supervisor and/or senior management (Poutokomanawa/Co-Directors) through internal processes at the earliest opportunity. Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. Be aware of our complaint handling policies and procedures. Assist people who wish to make complaints access our complaints process.

		Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints to resolve matters promptly.

Terms and Definitions

Complaint

- ➔ An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
- ➔ As well as complaints being made directly to our organisation, remember that some complaints (or at least negative comments) may be made on social media.
- ➔ We also take complaints regarding Health and Safety through our programme websites

Complaint handling/management system.

- ➔ All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by us in the management of complaints.

Dispute

- ➔ An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.

Feedback

- ➔ Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, about our services or complaint handling system where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Grievance

- ➔ A clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.

Policy

- ➔ A statement of instruction that sets out how we should fulfil our vision, mission and goals.

Procedure.

- ➔ A statement or instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.

Impartiality.

- ➔ The 'investigator' of the complaint is not the person/s being complained about. There is no predetermined result of enquiry or outcome.

Guiding principles & values

To be effective our complaint handling system is modelled on our principles and values of:

- fairness
- accessibility
- responsiveness
- efficiency
- integration into organisational culture
- least disruption to our commitment and responsibility to our participants and funders



Facilitate complaints

People focus
We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.
Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame.

People making complaints will be:

- provided with information about our complaint handling process and how to access it
- listened to, treated with respect by staff and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate, and
- provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.
- No detriment to people making complaints
- We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Anonymous complaints

We accept anonymous complaints if there is a compelling reason to do so and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

Accessibility

We will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is well publicised, on our website (if available). We will ensure that our systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g., advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

Respond to complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, attempt to resolve any issues through their immediate supervisor and through internal processes at the earliest opportunity.
When appropriate we may offer an explanation or apology to the person making the complaint.

Responsiveness

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints.

We will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

We are committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected time frames for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

We will also advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to meet our time frames for responding to their complaint and the reason for our delay.

Fairness and objectivity

We will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any staff member whose conduct or service is being complained about.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

Responding flexibly

Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

Confidentiality

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

Manage the parties to a complaint

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within our organisation, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

Where our services are contracted out, we expect contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. We take complaints not only about the actions of our staff but also the actions of our service providers.

Empowerment of staff

All staff managing complaints are empowered to implement our complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.
Staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

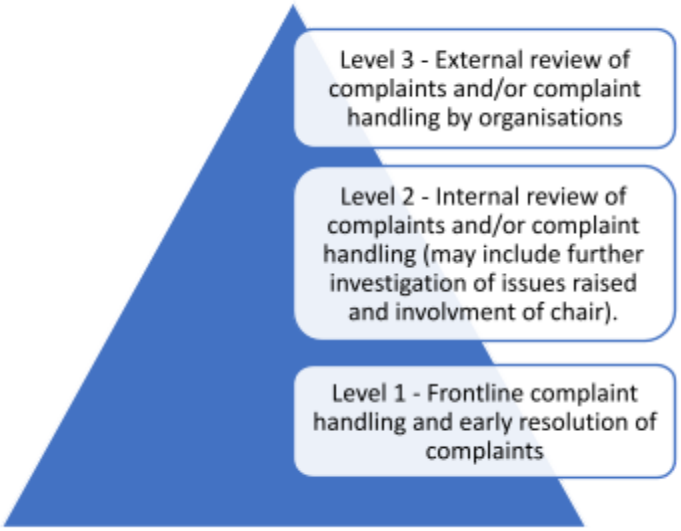
We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:
our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible the health, safety and security of our staff, and our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our staff to do the same in accordance with this policy.

Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

We will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

The three levels of complaint handling



Level 1
We aim to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible staff will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision.

Level 2
Where this is not possible, we may decide to escalate the complaint to senior management (Poutokomanawa/Co-Directors) and/or Chairperson within our organisation. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:
assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).
Level 3
Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of our review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of our decision

Accountability and learning

Analysis and evaluation of complaints

We will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis by management and the governing trustee board.

We will run regular reports on:

- the number of complaints received
- the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the frontline
- issues arising from complaints
- systemic issues identified, and
- the number of requests we receive for internal and/or external review of our complaint handling.

Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of our customer service and make improvements.

Both reports and their analysis will be provided to our Co-Directors, management and to our governing trustees, at least annually.

Monitoring of the complaint management system

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system, and
- monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

Continuous improvement

We are committed to improving the way our organisation operates, including our management of the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling by staff
- regularly review the complaint management system and complaint data, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

Procedure for complaint handling

Introduction
When responding to complaints, staff (paid and volunteer) act in accordance with this complaint handling procedures as well as any other internal documents providing guidance on the management of complaints.

Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.

The five key stages in our complaint management system are set out below



1. Receive
    a. Unless the complaint has been resolved at the outset, we will record the complaint and its supporting information. We will also assign a unique identifier/number to the complaint file.
    b. The record of the complaint will document:
        i. Contact information of the person making a complaint and the date received
        ii. Issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want
        iii. Any other relevant information, and
        iv. Any additional support the person making a complaint requires.
2. Acknowledge
    a. We will acknowledge receipt of each complaint promptly, and preferably within 5 working days. When appropriate we may offer an explanation or apology.
    b. Consideration will be given to the most appropriate medium (e.g., email, letter) for communicating with the person making a complaint.
3. Assess and investigate

Initial assessment

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, we will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within our control.

Listen to the complainant. Obtain a chronology of events (who, what, why, when, how etc).

We will also consider the outcome/s sought by the person making a complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

When determining how a complaint will be managed, we will consider:

- How serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is
- Whether the complaint raises concerns about people's health and safety
- How the person making the complaint is being affected
- The risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and
- Whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organisations.
- Provide the complainant with plenty of time to ask questions.
- If deemed necessary, provide the staff/volunteer with a written summary of the meeting and clarification of the next steps to be taken

Investigating the complaint

After assessing the complaint, we will consider how to manage it. We may:

- Give the person making a complaint information or an explanation
- Gather information about the issue, person or area that the complaint is about, or
- Investigate the claims made in the complaint.

We will keep the person making the complaint up-to-date on our progress, particularly if there are any delays. We will also communicate the outcome of the complaint using the most appropriate medium. Which actions we decide to take will be tailored to each case and take into account any statutory requirements.

Determine outcome and provide reasons for decision

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, we will contact the person making the complaint and advise them:

- The outcome of the complaint and any action we took
- The reason/s for our decision
- The remedy or resolution/s that we have proposed or put in place, and
- Any options for review that may be available to the complainant, such as an internal review, external review or appeal.

Close the complaint: document and analyse data

Document

We will keep records about:

- How we managed the complaint
- The outcome/s of the complaint (including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations), and
- Any outstanding actions to be followed up, including analysing any underlying or root causes

Analyse data

We will ensure that outcomes are properly implemented, monitored and reported to the complaint handling manager, Co-Directors or the Chair.

The Importance of Impartiality (refer to our definition)

It is critical to ensure that the person responsible for carrying out an investigation is impartial. The investigator must not have a vested interest in the outcome of the matter. Staff will often consider that senior management is not sufficiently impartial because of their involvement and role in the workplace.

If such a concern is raised, it's important to consider:

- whether the use of an external investigator is necessary to ensure impartiality;
- whether any conflicts of interest need to be disclosed (e.g., if any individuals are friends outside the workplace); and
- whether the investigator has handled any previous disciplinary matters.

If there is the possibility that a person's contract will be terminated if the allegations are proven as part of an investigation, then you should consider the use of an external investigator to ensure that your investigation and the process followed will stand up in any potential court proceeding.