

4 January, 2021

Dear Editor,

I am writing as a follow-up to my letter published in your August edition, and to address your subsequent refusal to publish letters from Council raising additional concerns about inaccurate reporting.

On 10 December 2020, Ms Douglass advised in a letter to Council that all reporting was based on publicly available information. This is not the case, and in any case does not remove the obligation the Gazette has to ensure what it reports is factually correct and opinion is clearly identified as such. I have on at least two occasions pointed out errors of fact that ought to be publicly corrected; in June 2020, you published baseless speculation about a Council officer's wage and in October 2020, you incorrectly cited a Council officer's qualifications. As well, I have challenged the accuracy of your reporting about Council procedures regarding an abattoir in Mole Creek.

In all instances, the Gazette has refused to correct the record.

While mistakes sometimes happen, it is of great concern that you individually target Council officers' personal circumstances, particularly when your reporting is based on incorrect and unsubstantiated information. The Australian Press Council's (APC) standards enshrine "a person's reasonable expectations of privacy"; they also compel factual reporting. It is disappointing that these standards appear to have been set aside.

Of even greater concern is the refusal of the Gazette to correct identified errors of fact. The above matters were raised with the managing editor of the Gazette prior to your November edition, with sufficient opportunity to at least correct reporting errors. No such correction was made, nor apology given. The Gazette's letter to Council (referred to above) suggested that it 'should not defame itself'. However, the issue at hand is a simple correction of fact. The overwhelming majority of content in the Gazette appears to be written by one author, who is also the president of the management committee overseeing the Gazette, and presumably dealing with complaints. The managing editor is also on that committee. A basic tenet of complaints management is that 'Caesar should not judge Caesar'. That the Gazette persistently refuses to correct factual errors suggests a lack of editorial and complaints management maturity.

Factual reporting (without embedded opinion or undeclared language of editorial commentary or bias) is essential to inform constructive community debate. The Gazette's refusal to publicly correct factual errors suggests a clear lack of responsibility and accountability.



Meander Valley Council  
Working Together

Council supports promoting community awareness through accurate reporting. I can only hope that the Gazette commits to this and upholds the APC standards to which it professes to abide by.

Yours sincerely,

John Jordan  
**GENERAL MANAGER**