Writing a Media Release

Guide to Writing and Disseminating Media Releases

A media release is designed to attract media attention and obtain media coverage of the material. Do not put out a media release if you do not want media to contact you. You need to be prepared to answer questions.

A media release does not just have to be world breaking news (though that always helps coverage). However, it still needs to be interesting and relevant to the media it is sent to.

Ensure you have the proper authority to put out the media release or have sought the appropriate approvals (internal and external which includes FRDC) before sending the media release out.

Basic Rules

Try to keep language simple and, whenever possible, use lay terms instead of scientific jargon – the audience of the media release (i.e., the media) do not necessarily have an extensive knowledge of the subject matter at hand.

The most important part of a media release is the first paragraph, also known as the lead. It should contain your key messages. Each subsequent paragraph in the media release should be less important than the one that preceded it, but still add value to the story.

Media releases should always be written in the third person. Always use organisations and people's full titles.

Include quotes where you can. They are an effective way to make the release more interesting, but always attribute the quote to a person or an organisation. It is important to remember that most journalists will look for a quote or a sound bite to incorporate into their stories.

The media is likely to want to speak to the person/people quoted, so ensure they are available to speak to the media when you send your release out.

Try to keep media releases to one page. Media releases should be short, targeted pieces of information telling the whole story.

Basic structure of a media release

A basic media release should follow the pattern below:

1. **Headline** – catchy title
2. **Lead** – sets who, what, where, why and when.
3. **Body** – a series of paragraphs that provide a single piece of information that builds the story.

4. **Acknowledgments** – where necessary acknowledge project partners or funders. This is where you can acknowledge FRDC. The second paragraph is also a good place to add funding bodies as you provide more information about your research.

5. **End** – summarise the call to action and provide contact point for further information.

It is important to remember that the first paragraph (lead) is the most important as it sets the context for the whole media release. It should summarise the key points that you want to convey, but also be interesting to catch the reader's attention. In the lead you will increase your chance of coverage if you can use strong adjectives – first, biggest, most, etc.

The **lead** paragraph should contain information relating to

- Who did it? – scientist, Minister, organisation?
- What did they do? - new discovery, launch?
- Where did they do it? – name of organisation, location, event?
- When did they do it? - today, yesterday, tomorrow?
- Why did they do it? – innovation, benefits, bottom line?
- And how did they do it? – using new technology, new ideas?

Example 1: Teaching schoolchildren about the Australian seafood industry *(what)* just became easier with the launch in Sydney *(where)* today *(when)* of the $XXX, XXX project that aims to develop a Seafood Teachers Resource Kit *(why)*.

Example 2: Australian Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Minister Senator Murray Watt *(who did it)* launched the first Teachers Seafood Resource Kit *(what did they do)* today *(when did they do it)* at Ainslie Primary school in Townsville *(where did they do it)*.

The Resource Kit builds on the best-selling schoolchildren's Workbook – The Story of Seafood, to educate schoolchildren on Australia's fourth most valuable food-based primary industry, which generates over $2.4 billion to the Australian economy *(why did they do it)*.

In the **body** of the release, it is important to prioritise messages from the most important to the least important. Use short sentences and short paragraphs. Use quotes to illustrate the key points. Again, keep it short and concise.

It is important to **acknowledge** the organisations that are working on or paying for the projects. Not all partners will require this. However, All FRDC project agreements clearly state that public announcements (media releases and interviews) relating to a project must be cleared by FRDC. To ensure announcements are cleared, it is important to include an acknowledgment of the funding made by the Australian Government through Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. This can be done in many ways:

- *"The Australian Government through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation has contributed $XXX,000 to the projects funding"; or*

- *"The study will be funded through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and X, Y&Z"; or*

- *"This research was supported by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation on behalf of the Australian Government."*

The **End** paragraph summarises the call to action (i.e., people wanting to participate in the project) and provides contact point for further information.

For some organisations two contacts will need to be provided, a media contact and a project manager (Researcher or Principal Investigator). The role of the contact is to provide more information (detail) as well as provide quotes and/or sound bites depending on the media.

If you are providing the contact details for someone other than yourself, make sure:
- you have their permission, and they know what their role is;
- you have their correct contact details;
- they are available to respond when the media release goes out (see first paragraph);
- they have been briefed on how to respond to the media (key messages).

Improving your strike rate – Images and sound bites

A good way to improve your success rate with media releases is to provide interesting and engaging high resolution images or sound bites.

When providing either the image or sound bite, please ensure it is properly captioned (who, when, where and what) and credited (photographer).

DISTRIBUTING A MEDIA RELEASE

As a starting point, if you are unsure about whether you should put out a media release and how, either contact your media advisor (if you have one) or FRDC. Both can provide guidance.

The first step in sending out a media release is to work out where you want the release published (print/radio/tv, and location local/national). It is important to be realistic in setting your goals; and understand the media may not cover your story – it will depend on the story and news cycle. For many projects local coverage is all that is required. If you are after the local media, the simplest way to create a distribution list is to do a quick web search for the local media outlets. Each media outlet (newspaper or radio station) will have a contact for news.

Another approach is to use a paid media release service provider – there are many to choose from and they can be found with a quick search of the web. These companies specialise in sending out releases and will be able to carefully target your release. Again, there are no guarantees of coverage.