

NIISQ Procedure Public Interest Disclosures

NIISQInPro11

1. Purpose

The National Injury Insurance Scheme Queensland (NIISQ) is committed to fostering an ethical, transparent culture.

In pursuit of this, NIISQ values the disclosure of information about suspected wrongdoing so that it can be properly assessed and, if necessary, appropriately investigated. NIISQ will provide support to an employee or others who make disclosures about matters in the public interest.

This Procedure demonstrates this commitment and ensures that practical and effective procedures are implemented which comply with the requirements of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010* (PID Act).

The procedure aims to assist employees and other people to understand their obligations in reporting wrongdoing that concerns employees of NIISQ and to outline the **public interest disclosure** (PID) process for employees, disclosers and members of the public.

By complying with the PID Act, NIISQ will:

- promote the public interest by facilitating public interest disclosures (PIDs) of wrongdoing or danger
- ensure that PIDs are properly assessed and, where appropriate, properly investigated and dealt with
- ensure appropriate consideration is given to the interests of persons who are the subject of a PID
- ensure protection from reprisal is afforded to persons making PIDs.

As required under the PID Act, the Chief Executive Officer will implement procedures to ensure that:

- any public officer who makes a PID is given appropriate support
- PIDs made to NIISQ are properly assessed and, where appropriate, properly investigated or dealt
 with
- appropriate action is taken in relation to any wrongdoing which is the subject of a PID
- a management program for PIDs made to NIISQ, consistent with the standards issued by the Queensland Ombudsman, is developed and implemented
- public officers who make PIDs are offered protection from reprisal by NIISQ or other public officers of NIISQ.

The PID Act states a disclosure of information to a proper authority can be made in any way, including anonymously. If the proper authority has a reasonable procedure for making a PID the person must use the procedure.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all NIISQ employees (permanent, temporary, and casual) and any external person (member of the public) making a disclosure to NIISQ in accordance with the PID Act.

3. NIISQ PID Management Program

The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility for ensuring that NIISQ develops, implements and maintains a PID management program. The NIISQ PID management program encompasses:

- · commitment to encouraging the internal reporting of wrongdoing
- · senior management endorsement of the value to NIISQ of PIDs and the proper management of PIDs



- communication and information sharing strategy to raise awareness among employees about PIDs, and NIISQ's PID procedure, and for senior management and other staff who may receive or manage PIDs, disclosers or workplace issues relating to PIDs
- the appointment of a specialist officer (PID Coordinator) to be responsible for issues related to the management of PIDs
- ensuring effective systems and procedures are in place so that issues and outcomes from PIDs inform improvements to service delivery, business processes and internal controls where needed
- regular review of the NIISQ PID Procedure and evaluation of the effectiveness of the PID management program.

The Chief Executive Officer has designated the following roles and responsibilities for managing PIDs within NIISQ:

Role:	Responsibilities:	Officer:
NIISQ PID Coordinator	principal contact for PID issues within NIISQdocument and manage implementation of	Manager Policy, Risk and Assurance
	PID management program review and update PID procedure annually	Letter/Mail
	 maintain and update internal records of PIDs received 	Marked "Strictly Private & Confidential"
	 report data on PIDs to Queensland Ombudsman 	Attention: PID Coordinator
	 assess PIDs received, or engage expert advice on assessment matters 	Manager Policy, Risk and Assurance
	provide acknowledgment of receipt of PID to discloser	GPO Box 1391 BRISBANE QLD 4001
	 undertake risk assessments in consultation with disclosers and other relevant officers liaise with other agencies for advice and/or 	Email: complaints@niis.qld.gov.au
	 about referral of PIDs facilitate where required the investigation of a PID, and Support Officer for a PID matter 	See section 5 for further details on who can be contacted to report a PID.
PID Support Officer	 provide advice and information to discloser on NIISQ PID procedure 	An appropriate PID Support Officer will be assigned to support a
	 provide personal support and referral to other sources of advice or support as required 	discloser depending upon the type of disclosure made, and other relevant considerations.
	 facilitate updates on progress of investigation 	
	 proactively contact discloser throughout PID management process 	
Investigator	 conduct an investigation of information in a PID in accordance with terms of reference 	An appropriate internal or external investigator will be appointed, where
	 prepare report for delegated decision-maker 	required, depending upon the type of disclosure and other relevant considerations.
Delegated decision-maker	 review relevant information, or investigation report, and determine whether alleged wrongdoing is substantiated 	An appropriate decision-maker will be appointed.
NIISQ Leadership Managers Supervisors	All leaders and managers across NIISQ are responsible for promoting and supporting an environment in which the reporting of wrongdoing or danger is encouraged; and when a disclosure of information has been received to refer the disclosure to the PID Coordinator.	
Employees	Have a responsibility to be aware of the possibility wasting of public funds, danger to public health a with a disability, and reprisal, may exist in the witheir manager/supervisor or the NIISQ PID Coordi	that corrupt conduct, maladministration, nd safety, the environment or a person orkplace and to report any concerns to



4. What is a public interest disclosure?

Under the PID Act, a PID is a disclosure of information about certain types of wrongdoing or danger. Section 11 of the PID Act defines a PID as "... disclosure under this chapter and includes all information and help given by the Discloser to a proper authority for disclosure...". Section 12 and s13 of the PID Act detail what information may be disclosed and who may disclose it.

For the information, or complaint, to be considered a PID and attract the protections afforded by the PID Act, the information must be disclosed to a proper authority.

The person disclosing the information must also have an honest belief, on reasonable grounds, that there is wrongdoing or danger (subjective test), or the information must tend to indicate the wrongdoing or danger, regardless of the belief of the person disclosing the information (objective test).

Under the s12 of the PID Act, any person can make a disclosure of information about a:

- substantial and specific danger to the health or safety of a person with a disability
- the commission of an offence, or contravention of a condition imposed under a provision of legislation mentioned in Schedule 2 of the PID Act, if the offence or contravention would be a substantial and specific danger to the environment
- reprisal because of a belief that a person has made, or intends to make a disclosure.

In addition, **public sector officers (e.g. NIISQ employees)** can make a disclosure about the following public interest matters:

- corrupt conduct
- maladministration that adversely affects a person's interests in a substantial and specific way
- a substantial misuse of public resources
- a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety
- a substantial and specific danger to the environment.

A disclosure amounts to a PID and is covered by the PID Act even if the:

- discloser reports the information as part of their duties such as an auditor reporting a fraud or an occupational health and safety officer reporting a safety breach
- disclosure is made anonymously the discloser is not required to give their name or any identifying information
- discloser has not identified the material as a PID it is up to NIISQ to assess information received and decide
 if it is a PID
- disclosure is unsubstantiated following investigation the discloser is protected when the information they provide is assessed as a PID, whether or not it is subsequently investigated or found to be substantiated.

5. What is a proper authority?

A disclosure of information must be made to a 'proper authority'. A proper authority is a person or organisation authorised to receive a PID.

Disclosers are encouraged to make a disclosure to an appropriate officer of NIISQ first. If the matter is not resolved, or the discloser is concerned about confidentiality, the disclosure may be made to another appropriate agency.

If a disclosure is made to a person or an entity other than a proper authority, the person making the disclosure will not receive the protections of the PID Act.



Who to contact within NIISQ

Any person (including employees) can make a disclosure to:

- NIISQ PID Coordinator
- any member of the NIISQ Executive
- any person in NIISQ in a management/supervisory position
- the NIISQ People & Safety (HR) team
- the Chief Executive Officer

If an employee's manager/supervisor is involved in the alleged wrongdoing, the disclosure should be made to that person's manager/supervisor or other contact as listed above, or proper authority.

All disclosures of information received by a NIISQ employee must be referred to the NIISQ PID Coordinator.

Other agencies that can receive PIDs

Disclosures can be made to an agency that has a responsibility for investigating the information disclosed:

- Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) for disclosures about corrupt conduct including reprisal
- Queensland Ombudsman for disclosures about maladministration
- Queensland Audit Office for disclosures about a substantial misuse of resources
- Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs for disclosures about danger to the health and safety of a child or young person with a disability
- Department of Seniors, Disability Services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships for disclosures about danger to the health and safety of a person with a disability
- Office of the Public Guardian for disclosures about danger to the health and safety of a person with a disability
- Department of Environment and Science disclosures about danger to the environment
- A Member of the Legislative Assembly (MP) for any wrongdoing or danger
- The Chief Judicial Officer of a court or tribunal in relation to a disclosure about wrongdoing by a judicial officer.

A disclosure can also be made to a journalist if the following conditions have been met:

- a valid PID was initially made to a proper authority, and
- the proper authority:
 - o decided not to investigate or deal with the disclosure, or
 - o investigated the disclosure but did not recommend taking any action, or
 - o failed to notify the discloser within six months of making the disclosure whether or not the disclosure was to be investigated or otherwise dealt with.

A person who makes a disclosure to a journalist in these circumstances is protected under the PID Act. However, disclosers should be aware that journalists are not bound under the confidentiality provisions of s65 of the PID Act.

Under the PID Act, a journalist means a person engaged in the occupation of writing or editing material intended for publication in the print or electronic news media.

6. How to make a disclosure of information to NIISQ

The PID Act states a disclosure of information to a proper authority can be made in any way, including anonymously. If the proper authority has a reasonable procedure for making a PID the person must use the procedure.

A disclosure of information can be made to NIISQ in writing (preferable) or verbally. If information, or a complaint, is received verbally, NIISQ may request the information in writing.

A disclosure of information, or complaint, must still be assessed, and may be a PID, regardless of how it is made - written, verbally or anonymously.

To assist in the assessment, and any subsequent investigation of a PID, disclosers are requested to:



- provide contact details (this could be an email address that is created for the purpose of making the disclosure, or a telephone number)
- provide as much information as possible about the suspected wrongdoing, including:
 - o who was involved
 - what happened
 - o when it happened
 - where it happened
 - o whether there were any witnesses, and if so who they are
 - o any evidence that supports the PID, and where the evidence is located
 - o any further information that could help investigate the PID
- provide this information in writing

If circumstances prevent the discloser from providing the information in writing, the employee who received the disclosure of information should record the date, time and circumstances of the disclosure and ask the discloser to confirm the contents before having the discloser (preferably) signing the record of information, or otherwise acknowledge the accuracy of the information. This information must then be forwarded to the NIISQ PID Coordinator.

6.1 Anonymous disclosures

The PID Act allows for information, or a complaint, to be made anonymously. When information, or a complaint, is received anonymously about wrongdoing or danger, the information must still be assessed to determine if the information is a PID.

Disclosing anonymously can make it difficult to seek clarification or more information, to inform of progress or to provide feedback on the action to be taken, or which has been taken on the PID.

An anonymous discloser may also experience difficulties in relying upon the protections afforded by the PID Act.

6.2 False or misleading information

It is an offence under section 66 of the PID Act to intentionally give false or misleading information intending it be acted on as a PID.

Employees who provide false or misleading information may also be subject to disciplinary action for intentionally giving false or misleading information in a PID, or during an investigation into a PID.

7. Assessing a disclosure of information

Upon receipt of information, NIISQ's PID Coordinator will assess the information to determine if the information amounts to a PID under the PID Act. Further information may need to be obtained to inform the decision.

Where the matter relates to suspected corrupt conduct, NIISQ's Crime and Corruption Liaison Officer will report the matter to the Crime and Corruption Commission in accordance with the Chief Executive Officer's reporting obligations under the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*.

If the matter involves a possible criminal offence and requires reporting to the Queensland Police Service (QPS), NIISQ will refer the matter to the QPS.

The disclosure will be assessed in accordance with the PID Act, the PID standards, NIISQ's Public Interest Disclosure Procedure and any other relevant legislation, procedure or policy.

It is worth noting that mere disagreements over policy do not meet the threshold for a PID under the PID Act.



7.1 Communication with disclosers

Under the PID Act, NIISQ must give reasonable information to a discloser.

NIISQ will acknowledge receipt of the PID in writing as soon as practicable. The discloser will be provided with information that meets the requirements of the PID Act and the standards issued by the Queensland Ombudsman, including:

- the action that will be taken in response to the PID
- the protections under the PID Act
- · confidentiality obligations of the discloser and NIISQ
- support arrangements

NIISQ will maintain contact with the discloser and provide regular updates during the management of the PID.

In accordance with the PID Act, after finalising action in response to the PID, NIISQ will advise the discloser in writing of the action taken and the results of the action.

If the PID has been made anonymously and the discloser has not provided any contact details, NIISQ will not be able to acknowledge the PID or provide any updates.

8. Not a PID

When information is assessed as not meeting the requirements of the PID Act, or when a discloser states they are making a PID but the information is assessed as not being a PID, NIISQ will advise the discloser:

- that their information has been received but was not assessed as a PID
- the reasons for the decision
- the review rights available if the discloser is dissatisfied with the decision and how to request review
- action, if any, NIISQ proposes to take in relation to the matter
- any other options the discloser has in relation to the matter

9. Dealing with a PID

When a disclosure of information is assessed as a PID, the PID may be dealt with through a variety of processes. NIISQ will determine the most appropriate way to deal with a PID, subject to any lawful or administrative directions received from an external agency (e.g. the Crime and Corruption Commission, under the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*).

A PID will not necessarily undergo formal investigation. NIISQ remains flexible in dealing with PIDs in a number of ways, and having regard to the information disclosed and depending on circumstances, may include one or more of the following:

- provide an explanation to the discloser (e.g. if the discloser was not aware of the whole circumstances surrounding an action which appeared to them to be improper)
- · resolve the PID managerially
- conduct an internal audit, or a review of an issue or the operations of a particular unit
- implement or change policies, procedures or practices
- formally investigate the allegations
- refer the allegations to an appropriate external entity

Regardless of how NIISQ may decide to deal with a PID, it will be done with consideration for the:

- · principles of natural justice
- obligation under the PID Act to protect confidential information



- obligation under the PID Act to protect officers from reprisal
- interests of subject officers

NIISQ may need to conduct preliminary enquiries to assist in determining what course of action is appropriate.

If as a result of investigating or otherwise dealing with a PID, the information about wrongdoing provided in the PID is substantiated, appropriate action will be taken.

When an investigation or other process does not substantiate wrongdoing, NIISQ may consider a review of systems, policies and procedures to identify whether there are improvements that can be made and consider if staff training is required.

9.1 Declining to take no action, or no action required

Under the PID Act, the NIISQ may decide not to investigate or deal with a PID in various circumstances, including:

- the information disclosed has already been investigated or dealt with by another process
- the information disclosed should be dealt with by another process
- the age of the information makes it impractical to investigate
- the information disclosed is too trivial and dealing with it would substantially and unreasonably divert NIISQ from the performance of its functions
- another agency with jurisdiction to investigate the information has informed NIISQ that an investigation is not warranted.

If a decision is made not to investigate or deal with a PID, NIISQ will give the discloser written reasons for that decision. If the discloser is dissatisfied with the decision, they can request a review by writing to the Chief Executive Officer of NIISQ within 28 days of receiving the written reasons for decision.

10. Referring a PID

If NIISQ decides there is another proper authority that is better able to deal with the PID, the PID may be referred to that agency. This may be because:

- the PID concerns wrongdoing by that agency or an employee of that agency
- that agency has the power to investigate or remedy the matter.

Before referring the PID to another agency, NIISQ will conduct a risk assessment, and will not proceed with the referral if there is an unacceptable risk of reprisal.

It may also be necessary to refer the PID to another agency because of a legislative obligation, for example, refer a matter to the Crime and Corruption Commission where there is a reasonable suspicion that the matter involves or may involve corrupt conduct (as required by section 38 of the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*).

The confidentiality obligations of the PID Act permit appropriate officers of NIISQ to communicate with another agency about the referral of a PID. Officers will exercise discretion in their contacts with any other agency.

11. Risk assessment

Disclosers should not suffer any form of detriment as a result of making a PID. Upon receiving a PID, NIISQ will conduct a risk assessment to assess the likelihood of the discloser (or witnesses or affected third parties) suffering reprisal action as a result of having made the disclosure. This assessment will take into account the actual and reasonably perceived risk of the discloser (or witnesses or affected third parties) suffering detriment, and will include consultation with the discloser.

A risk assessment will be undertaken if the discloser is anonymous on the basis of information available in the PID. The risk assessment will also take into account the risk to persons who may be suspected of making the PID.

Consistent with the assessed level of risk, NIISQ will develop and implement a risk management plan and arrange any reasonably necessary support or protection for the discloser (or witnesses or affected third parties). Any plan



and control measures must be implemented and actively monitored. A review of the plan should occur if the risk of reprisal changes, or throughout dealing with the disclosure.

Protection for a discloser need only be proportionate to the degree of risk, and where it is within the jurisdiction of NIISQ to manage.

NIISQ will reassess the risk of reprisal while the PID is being managed, in consultation with the discloser, and review the risk management plan if required.

12. Protection from reprisal

A purpose of the PID Act is to provide protections for a person who makes a PID, including from reprisal, as far as reasonably practicable.

Under Section 40 of the PID Act a person must not reprise against another person, by causing or attempt to cause detriment, because a PID has been made.

Schedule 4 of the PID Act defines 'detriment'. It includes such actions as:

- personal injury or prejudice to safety; and
- · property damage or loss; and
- · intimidation or harassment; and
- adverse discrimination, disadvantage or adverse treatment about career, profession, employment, trade or business; and
- financial loss; and
- damage to reputation, including, for example, personal, professional or business reputation.

In the event of reprisal action being alleged or suspected, NIISQ will:

- attend to the safety of the discloser (or witnesses or affected third parties) as a matter of priority
- review its risk assessment, risk management plan and any protective measures needed to mitigate any further risk of reprisal
- manage any allegation of a reprisal as a PID in its own right.

13. Reasonable management action

Making a PID does not prevent reasonable management action. That means that the discloser will continue to be managed in accordance with normal, fair and reasonable management practices during and after the handling of the PID.

Section 45 of the PID Act recognises taking reasonable management action is not prevented because a PID has been, or may be, made. The employment relationship between an employee who makes a PID and the employing agency continues when a disclosure has been, or may be, made.

The PID Act also confirms taking reasonable management action in relation to a person who has, or may make, a PID is not reprisal action.

Reasonable management action is defined in the PID Act. It includes actions such as:

- an appraisal of an employee's work performance
- a requirement that the employee undertakes counselling
- suspension of an employee from the employment workplace
- disciplinary action
- decisions regarding transfer or deployment; or to end the employee's employment by way of redundancy or retrenchment
- any reasonable action in relation to an action mentioned above;



• a reasonable action in relation to the employee's failure to obtain a promotion, reclassification, transfer or benefit, or to retain a benefit, in relation to the employee's employment.

When it is confirmed for an employee they have made a PID under the PID Act, the employee remains responsible for:

- achieving the performance expectations of their position
- their own behaviour
- observing all workplace policy and procedures

Under the PID Act, a person is still liable for their own conduct even if the conduct forms part of, or is the basis, for the PID. The person who made the PID is not protected civilly, criminally or from any liability, including by way of an administrative process, including disciplinary action, for their own conduct.

An employee who has made a PID must ensure their conduct is at all times appropriate and in accordance with the Code of Conduct. In particular, a discloser must ensure their conduct towards a person who is the subject of a PID, or who has participated in the process of dealing with a disclosure, is proper and appropriate.

14. Confidentiality

Confidentiality not only protects the rights of those who are involved in a PID, it also maintains the integrity of the NIISQ's reporting system, any investigation or review and is also a strategy in mitigating the risk of reprisal.

Confidentiality also protects the reputation of an employee whose (alleged) conduct is the subject of a disclosure.

The confidentiality provisions under section 65 of the PID Act apply to persons who have gained the information because of their involvement in the administration (implementing or carrying out) of the PID Act.

Those who lawfully receive information in the administration of the PID Act must not intentionally or recklessly disclose confidential information. However, confidential information may be disclosed to another person, or entity, in accordance with the allowable reasons under the PID Act.

While NIISQ will make every attempt to protect confidentiality, a discloser's identity may need to be disclosed to:

- · provide natural justice to subject officers
- respond to a court order, legal directive or court proceedings.

NIISQ will ensure that communication with all parties involved will be arranged discreetly to avoid identifying the discloser wherever possible. However, a person who has made a PID can never be promised **anonymity** or that their identity will not be disclosed at any time.

Disclosers should be aware that while NIISQ will make every attempt to keep their details confidential, it cannot guarantee that others will not try to deduce their identity.

A person who has made a PID should not communicate about the disclosure with work colleagues or any other unauthorised person. The fewer people who know about the disclosure, both before and after it has been made, the more likely it is the discloser's identity can be kept confidential.

When a discloser has spoken to colleagues or others about possibly making or having made a PID, this may unnecessarily increase the risk of reprisal. Any reasonable steps taken by NIISQ to protect against reprisal may be obstructed or undermined where a discloser has openly communicated about having made the disclosure.

15. Support for disclosers

NIISQ recognises that providing appropriate support to a discloser is an important feature of effective PID management.

An assessment will be undertaken to identify the support needs of the discloser. Where appropriate, a PID Support Officer will be assigned to the discloser. The PID Support Officer will assist the discloser to access information about



PIDs, protections available under the PID Act and the PID management process. The PID Support Officer will proactively contact the discloser to offer support.

Information and support will be provided to the discloser until the matter is finalised.

16. Rights of subject officers

NIISQ acknowledges that for officers who are the subject of a PID the experience may be stressful. A PID will be managed impartially and objectively. It is only an *allegation* until the information is dealt with, and a finding made.

NIISQ will protect the rights of a subject officer by:

- assuring them that the PID will be dealt with impartially, fairly and reasonably in accordance with the principles of natural justice
- confirming that the PID is an allegation only until information or evidence obtained through an investigation substantiates the allegation
- providing them with information about their rights and the progress and outcome of any investigation
- · referring them to the Employee Assistance Program for support.

Subject officers must be afforded natural justice. The right to natural justice includes being provided with an opportunity to respond to an allegation prior to any adverse decision being made. Affording natural justice does not mean a subject officer must be advised of the allegation as soon as the information, or complaint, has been received.

A person is the subject of a disclosure of information may not be advised about an allegation if it is misleading or of no substance and the decision-maker intends to take no action, nor make an adverse finding, in relation to it.

A subject officer must ensure their conduct or workplace behaviour is not improper or detrimental towards a person who has, or is believed to have, made a PID, or a person who has participated in a process of dealing with a disclosure (e.g. a witness). To do so may be a reprisal under the PID Act and constitute a criminal offence.

Information and support will be provided to a subject officer until the matter is finalised.

17. Record keeping

In accordance with its obligations under the PID Act and the Public Records Act 2002, NIISQ will ensure that:

- accurate data is collected about the receipt and management of PIDs
- anonymised data is reported to the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman in their role as the oversight agency, through the PID reporting database.

Records about disclosures, investigations, and related decisions will be kept secure and accessible only to appropriately authorised people involved in the management of the PID.

18. Relevant Legislation

- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991
- Crime and Corruption Act 2001
- Disability Services Act 2006
- Environmental Protection Act 1994
- Human Rights Act 2019
- Information Privacy Act 2009
- Industrial Relations Act 2016
- Judicial Review Act 1991
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010



- Public Records Act 2002
- Public Sector Ethics Act 1994
- Public Service Act 2008

19. Related policies and supporting information

- NIISQ Agency Code of Conduct (NIISQINPOL16)
- NIISQ Fraud and Corruption Control Policy (NIISQINPOL14)
- NIISQ Risk Management Procedure (NIISQINPRO2)
- Queensland Ombudsman PID Standard No. 1/2019
- Queensland Ombudsman PID Standard No. 2/2019
- Queensland Ombudsman PID Standard No. 3/2019
- PSC Directive 07/20 Appeals
- Queensland Ombudsman: Making a Public Interest Disclosure: A guide for individuals working in the public sector

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