

2026

TRBR Code of Practice



CONNECTING VANUATU,
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES.



Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
SECTION 1 – DEFINITIONS	5
SECTION 2 – PRINCIPLES REFLECTING COMMUNITY VALUES	5
SECTION 3 – PROTECTING UNDER-AGE VULNERABLE	6
Principle	6
Rules	6
Alcohol, Smoking, Drugs, and Gambling	6
Sexual Content and Nudity	6
Violence, Bad Behavior, and Offensive Language	7
SECTION 4 – FAIRNESS	7
Principle	7
Rules	7
SECTION 5 – PRIVACY AND INTRUSIVENESS	8
Principle	8
Rules	8
SECTION 6 – RELIGION	9
Principle	9
Rules	9
SECTION 7 – NEWS AND PROGRAMMING	9
Principle	9
Rules	9
SECTION 8 – COMPLAINT PROCESS	10
Principle	10
Rules	10
SECTION 9 – ADMINISTRATION AND APPLICATION	10
Complaints Processing	10
SECTION 10 – SANCTIONS	11

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This Code has been prepared by the Regulator pursuant to Section 7(2A) of the Telecommunications, Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Act, 2009 (the “Act”) for the guidance of radio and television broadcasters, and media service providers licensed to provide services in Vanuatu. The Code will be subjected to substantial consultation to enable all stakeholders to make submissions. As a result, the final promulgated version of the Code, expected in the second half of 2026, will better reflect the current norms and expectations of broadcasters and broadcast audiences in Vanuatu.
2. The Code sets out a standard, as provided for in the Act. The Regulator has described that standard as the Community Standard, which is intended to reflect the norms and expectations of the ni-Vanuatu community, allowing for reasonable diversity to be found in a modern, reasonably tolerant, democratic society. The Code also contains clarification of the Standard at two levels: (1) supplementary principles, and (2) illustrations and examples.
3. Ultimately, the Code of Practice for Broadcasting must reflect arrangements that are acceptable to the community of Vanuatu as a whole, not the views of the Regulator or of the industry. Community standards in relation to many matters may develop and change over time. On other matters, especially in relation to fairness, basic morality and ethics, community norms and expectations may be far more constant. This suggests that any Code needs to be reviewed from time to time for adequacy and currency, as the experience of broadcasters increases and new issues arise.
4. It is the Regulator’s intention to subject the Code to public consultation from time to time, particularly when changes or additions of substance are in contemplation. In addition, the Regulator will convene the TRBR Broadcasting Community Advisory Group—consisting of a diverse range of community and industry representatives—to enable the Regulator to access opinions on broadcasting and media matters that reflect broader community views. Further, the Regulator will develop a program for engaging with local communities on broadcasting and media issues. These initiatives will facilitate two-way discussion in which TRBR staff will explain broadcasting policies and their rationale, and communities will provide feedback on their concerns and opinions.

INTRODUCTION

5. Broadcasting plays a central role in people's lives. Surveys show that people spend more time watching television than consuming any other form of live broadcasting media. Radio also plays a pivotal role in everyday life: many people wake up to it and listen to it on their way to and from work. At times of national disasters and emergencies, radio is the main source of potentially lifesaving information. While the growth of the Internet is providing a complementary source of news, information, and entertainment, the Internet does not yet match the ubiquity and impact of TV and radio broadcasting in Vanuatu. As a consequence of their ubiquity and impact, radio and TV stations have the primary responsibility for ensuring that the material they broadcast reflects community values and standards.
6. The TRBR is required under Section 7(2A) of the Telecommunications, Radiocommunications and Broadcasting (Amendment) Act 2009 ("the Act") to establish a code for broadcasting and media services covering standards in programs, sponsorship, product placement in television programs, fairness, and privacy. This Code will be known as the Vanuatu Code of Practice for Broadcasting and Media Services ('The Code of Practice').
7. Broadcasters are required by the terms of their TRBR license to observe the Standard Code and Fairness Code, which are to be interpreted as references to this Code of Practice. Any international broadcasters broadcasting through an agreement with Vanuatu licensees are required to observe this Code
8. Where the Code of Practice has been breached by any licensed broadcaster, TRBR may publish a report detailing the findings and providing an explanation for the breach.
9. The Code of Practice is outlined in terms of principles, meanings and rules, fairness, and privacy. It also includes a set of practices to be adhered to by broadcasters. The principles are designed to help readers understand the standard objectives and apply the rules. Broadcasters are obliged to comply with the standards and rules set out in this Code of Practice. It is the responsibility of broadcasters to consider and apply the Code in the course of their daily operations.
10. The Code of Practice may not address every situation or case that arises, as broadcasters face unique circumstances not specifically referenced herein. However, the principles outlined in this document make the objectives clear enough to help broadcasters make necessary and ethical judgements.
11. Broadcasters can create programs and content on any issue, but each broadcaster must ensure that these programs comply with the laws of Vanuatu including this Code of Practice.
12. The TRBR can provide guidance on the interpretation of this Code of Practice; however, any advice given will not affect TRBR's discretion to judge cases and complaints after transmission. Broadcasters should seek their own legal counsel on any compliance issues that arise.

SECTION 1 – DEFINITIONS

These definitions apply for the purposes of this Code:

- **Children:** Individuals under the age of eighteen (18) years.
- **Watershed:** The designated timeframe (5.30 am – 9.00 pm) when television programs containing material unsuitable for children may not be broadcast.
- **Sexual Material:** Any material that depicts sexually explicit conduct, including images and/or language of a strong sexual nature.
- **Warranted:** Where broadcasters wish to justify an action (such as a violation of privacy) as "warranted," they must demonstrate clear justification. If the justification rests on public interest, the broadcaster must show that the public interest outweighs other considerations, such as the individual right to privacy.
- **Doorstepping:** An attempt to obtain an interview or recording from a contributor without prior arrangement or agreement.
- **Religious Program:** A program that is religious in nature and serves to provide religious education, practice, or expression.

SECTION 2 – PRINCIPLES REFLECTING COMMUNITY VALUES

19. The Community Standard is expressed through principles overwhelmingly endorsed by the ni-Vanuatu community, applied generally across all age, racial, gender, religious, political, or geographical groups.

20. The core principles are:

(i) **Truth:** Individuals should tell the truth and exercise due care to ensure accuracy.

(ii) **The Equality Principle:** All people, regardless of differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, character, skills, strengths, or frailties, must be treated equally as human beings.

(iii) **The Principle of Respect:** All people deserve a basic level of respect and should behave in a manner that preserves the mutual respect they expect from others.

(iv) **The Fairness Principle:** All people should be treated in a just and fair manner.

(v) **The Principle of Tolerance:** It is recognized that people hold diverse moral and ethical perspectives. Within reasonable context-defined limits, individuals should tolerate diversity of views, accepting that complete unanimity is not always possible.

(vi) **The Reciprocity Principle:** A "live-and-let-live" approach promoting mutual community harmony.

(vii) The Principle of Responsibility: Adults and institutions are responsible for their actions and accountable for the reasonably foreseeable consequences of those actions.

SECTION 3 – PROTECTING UNDER-AGE VULNERABLE

Principle

Ensuring that persons under the age of eighteen years (Children) and vulnerable audiences are fully protected from harmful content.

Rules

21. Broadcasters must ensure they do not broadcast content that might materially and adversely affect children's physical, mental, or moral development.
22. No materials that risk seriously ruining children's physical, mental, or moral development shall be permitted for broadcast.
23. Broadcasters must take all reasonable steps to protect children and vulnerable groups when delivering services.
24. Broadcasters must strictly observe the watershed hours.
25. Radio broadcasters must design their early morning and school-run programming specifically to be safe and suitable for children, recognizing that younger demographics are highly active listeners during these hours.
26. Broadcasters must actively modify or restrict broadcasts if they are reasonably likely to be accessed by vulnerable or susceptible audiences for whom the material would be harmful. Programs must reflect the standard of safety and appropriateness that a ni-Vanuatu parent would expect.

Alcohol, Smoking, Drugs, and Gambling

28. The consumption of illegal drugs, smoking, gambling, and the abuse of alcohol:
 - (i) Shall not be featured in programs intended for children unless there is a strong, explicit editorial justification to warn of the associated dangers.
 - (ii) Must be avoided and never encouraged in programs broadcast during the watershed or during times when children are highly likely to tune in.
29. Children's programs must avoid depicting behavior that contravene community standards or encourage the imitation of vices like substance abuse, smoking, gambling, and drinking.

Sexual Content and Nudity

30. Sexually explicit material must not be broadcast at any time. This includes overt sexual behavior, explicit language, and provocative euphemisms.
31. Nudity of any kind must not be broadcast during the watershed or when content is highly likely to be accessed by children.

32. Broadcasters must exercise extreme precaution with adult themes (sex or violence) to ensure:

- (a) Content meets general ni-Vanuatu community standards of acceptability.
- (b) Material is strictly restricted to the watershed hours of 5.30 am – 9.00 pm.

[Note on Content Classification: Consideration may be given to integrating a clear content rating system (e.g., G, PG, M, MA, R) to help manage these issues.]

Violence, Bad Behavior, and Offensive Language

33. Content featuring violence that can be easily mimicked by children:

- (i) Must not be featured in programs intended for children.
- (ii) Shall not be broadcast during the watershed or when children are likely to be present.

34. Harmful, anti-social behaviors prone to child mimicry:

- (i) Must not be featured in programs intended for children.
- (ii) Shall not be broadcast during the watershed or when children are likely to be present.

35. Content containing offensive or profane language is strictly barred during the watershed.

36. Children's programming must actively avoid depicting domestic violence, disrespect, cruelty to people or animals, anti-social behavior, and the destruction of public property.

SECTION 4 – FAIRNESS

Principle

Ensuring the just, fair, and unbiased treatment of individuals or organizations within broadcast materials.

Rules

- 37. Broadcasters shall ensure that individuals or organizations face no unjust or unfair treatment in any program.
- 38. When inviting a person to participate or contribute to a program, broadcasters must ensure that the individual is:
 - (i) Fully briefed on the nature, objective, and scope of the program, why they were selected, and when/where it will air.
 - (ii) Made aware of any significant editing or alterations that might alter the context or affect their original consent.
 - (iii) Encouraged, where feasible, to preview the program to verify the context of their representation.

39. If a contributor is under eighteen, the broadcaster must obtain explicit prior consent from a parent or guardian. Broadcasters must carefully evaluate a child's capacity to answer questions appropriately.
40. In factual and historical programming, broadcasters must ensure that material facts are not misrepresented, disregarded, or omitted in a manner that is unfair to an individual or organization.
41. If a person or an organisation declines to participate or comment, the broadcaster must accurately declare that the individual or organisation chose not to appear while maintaining respect for their privacy and, in appropriate cases, their anonymity.
42. Broadcasters and program creators must not use deceptive means, misrepresentation, or trickery to obtain audio, video, or participant agreements.
43. When dealing with uncertain situations, broadcasters must always rely on and verify information via credible sources.
44. Broadcasters must swiftly, clearly, and prominently correct errors, inaccuracies, or factual mistakes.
45. Broadcasters must only use the content/material of another broadcaster with explicit permission, providing clear attribution upon broadcast.
46. Broadcasters shall not broadcast or repeat hate speech designed to demonize, marginalize,

SECTION 5 – PRIVACY AND INTRUSIVENESS

Principle

Ensuring broadcasters respect individual and institutional privacy during both production and transmission.

Rules

48. Any violation of privacy during a program or during material gathering must be strictly warranted (e.g., demonstrably serving a higher public interest).
49. Disclosure of personal information—such as a person's residential address, family details, or private data—must not be made public without explicit permission unless it is legally warranted (e.g., information already made public via lawful processes like open court proceedings).
50. Individuals caught up in newsworthy events still retain a foundational right to privacy during program creation and broadcast.
51. Broadcasters must secure individual or organizational consent prior to airing words, images, or actions recorded from private properties or settings.

52. Private citizens (non-public figures/officeholders) must not be interviewed or featured without their full, prior consent.
53. The identities of private individuals involved in fatal incidents or severe accidents must not be broadcast until the broadcaster receives clear and credible confirmation proves that immediate kin/family have been formally notified by emergency services or police.
54. Content must not intrude on, sensationalize, or dwell unnecessarily on private grief and tragedy.
55. Doorstepping must be avoided unless, in the case of officials or public organisations, open interview requests have been repeatedly refused, are impossible to make, or there is valid reason to believe an investigation will be frustrated by an open approach.
56. Recording telephone calls for broadcast is permitted only if the broadcaster identifies themselves from the outset, explains the purpose of the call, states that it is being recorded for potential broadcast, and obtains explicit permission to proceed.
or incite hatred against individuals or groups within the community.
47. Broadcasters must identify whether any news material or content is sponsored, and, if so, broadcast the identity of the sponsor.

SECTION 6 – RELIGION

Principle

Broadcasters bear a responsibility to respect freedom of religion and religious expression while maintaining social cohesion.

Rules

57. Broadcasters must ensure that religious programs do not incite religious discord, intolerance, or disharmony among the public.
58. Broadcasts must not permit or validate abusive, derogatory, or defamatory treatment of the religious views and beliefs of others.

SECTION 7 – NEWS AND PROGRAMMING

Principle

Ensuring total editorial independence, objective balance, and distinct separation between commercial interests and factual news.

Rules

59. Broadcasters must strictly respect embargoes placed on the release of news stories or public announcements.
60. Broadcasters must unconditionally respect publication constraints or embargoes imposed by emergency services and the Government during natural disasters or national security crises.
61. Broadcasters must honor all explicit agreements made while gathering news, including protecting source anonymity.

62. Independent editorial control over programming must be fiercely retained. Editorial and news content must be visibly and audibly distinct from advertisements, infomercials, and sponsored messaging.
63. News and current affairs content must never be sponsored without full, explicit on-air acknowledgment detailing the nature of the sponsorship.
64. Broadcasters must provide fair, balanced, and multi-perspective coverage of news stories, particularly on contentious issues.
65. News journalism must be clearly separated from the broadcaster's editorial opinions or commentary.
66. Targets of public allegations or critical comments within news segments must be afforded a reasonable, timely opportunity to respond, with their reply broadcast in an equivalent, appropriate manner.

SECTION 8 – COMPLAINT PROCESS

Principle

Ensuring that consumers have access to transparent, simple, and effective mechanisms to voice grievances.

Rules

67. Broadcasters must maintain clear, accessible, and well-publicized complaint channels allowing aggrieved persons to seek rectification for content breaches, in full compliance with Section 41 of the Act.
68. Broadcasters must engage meaningfully with complainants to reach a fair resolution, allocating adequate operational and senior resources to resolve disputes in a timely manner.

SECTION 9 – ADMINISTRATION AND APPLICATION

69. This Code serves as a guiding standard for broadcasters; it is an organic framework that may be updated as new industrial developments surface.
70. The Regulator will actively monitor adherence to these guidelines and may, by independent initiative or via stakeholder consultation, update or clarify provisions.

Complaints Processing

71. The Regulator handles escalated public complaints using the following structured approach:

(I) Acknowledge the complaint and refer it to the originating broadcaster first. The complainant will be informed that if the broadcaster fails to resolve the issue adequately, they may formally escalate it back to the TRBR.

- (II) Forward the matter to the broadcaster with a mandate to address the consumer's grievance within a specified deadline (typically within one month).
- (III) Require the broadcaster to update the Regulator on the final status of the complaint (e.g., resolved, ongoing, rejected) at the end of the specified period.
- (IV) If unresolved, the Regulator may intervene and adjudicate the matter decisively in accordance with Section 41(3) of the Act.

72. The Regulator plans to establish the **Broadcasting Community Advisory Group (BCAG)**, advising the Regulator on evolving broadcasting issues, especially in relation to content and the development and administration of this Code. While recommendations from the BCAG will be highly respected and fully considered, final policy adoption remains at the sole discretion of the Regulator.

73. The BCAG comprises representatives from TRBR, civil society, churches, and ni-Vanuatu civil society, and cultural groups. TRBR participation is to coordinate and convene BCAG meetings and to provide organisational support. Other representatives, such as from media organisations, may be invited to join BCAG discussions to assist its deliberations.

SECTION 10 – SANCTIONS

74. This Code is intended primary for guidance; structural infractions do not universally trigger direct financial penalties immediately. Many entry-level or accidental breaches can be effectively remedied through transparent explanations, on-air apologies, or formal retractions by the broadcaster.

75. The Regulator reserves the right to publicly identify broadcasters who display a pattern of continuing non-compliance or outright disregard for the Code. In egregious or continuous cases of violation, the Regulator may invite public and community feedback during the broadcaster's license renewal window. Under these severe conditions, the broadcasting license may be formally revoked, or renewed under strict, legally binding conditions designed to correct past unacceptable practices.



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