



Guide to Twitter

Judy Dunlop and Emma de Burgh, August 2019

Twitter is an immediate communication that is widely used by scientists to reach their audience, collaborate with other scientists and promote their work. It allows Biodiversity and Conservation Science (BCS) to engage with real-time communication, respond immediately to enquiries and show the good work being done by the Department. Twitter provides BCS staff with a fantastic opportunity to promote our work and reach users outside our normal audience. It enables better communication with younger generations who may not be part of science messaging in other forums, and takes advantage of our mobile connectivity in most places.

The points below provide guidance on best practice for managing postings and replying to tweets from the BCS social media accounts.

Do: read some 'how to get started on Twitter' articles online

There are plenty of guides to help set up a good profile and get started.

Do: Use good photos and videos

Including a photo in your tweet results in much more interaction. The majority of our followers will be most interested in the plants, animals, marine life, landscapes, ecosystems, rivers and wetlands that we work on. Show people the things they don't get to see. It doesn't have to be rocket science; sometimes small aspects can be very interesting and show the human element of science. Tweet day to day activities like visiting the herbarium, an interesting scat you saw in the field, or analysing samples.

Make sure you have permission to use photos; especially if it includes significant sites, traditional owners, rock art, significant sites or sensitive locations. If you use photos taken by someone else, be sure to tag or credit the photographer.

Don't: Confuse Your Followers

Keep scientific jargon to a minimum. Use scientific names (since a lot of our audience are scientists) and some science language but be more conversational in social media than you would be in a peer-reviewed paper. Use links to provide more detail rather than trying to cram things in. A URL of any length will be altered to 23 characters, even if the link itself is less than 23 characters long.

Do: Show individuality

Tweets should be personal and not written in the style of a press release or marketing email – you are communicating directly with individuals who can respond to you immediately. Similarly, responses to tweets should also be personal and professional.

When tweeting a link from another source, put your own spin on it and add a comment. Use humour. Use emotion "How interesting is this?" or "We're excited to announce" or "Great work by", etc. Some emojis are good.

Do: Act responsibly and ethically

Act responsibly and ethically in management of online content, including securing necessary approvals, removing inappropriate material, exercising good judgment in response to, or reporting misuse or complaints. It is important to maintain the integrity of the department's corporate social media accounts.

Don't: be political, endorse commercial organisations or advocate for resources

When tweeting, it is important not to make comments that can be perceived as political, lobby for funding/resources/recognition, endorse commercial entities (unless they are partners in a project), or provide personal opinions on matters outside of the scope of the department.

Do: use hashtags and handles

Tag @Science_DBCA in your tweets to let us know what you are up to, and to have your posts retweeted. If you are talking about other people's work, add their Twitter handle (if they have one). If you think it will interest someone, or you would like them to retweet (RT), add their handle or tag them in a photo. You can tag up to 10 people in a photo. For papers, include the journal, publisher, and coauthors. Be sure to mention/tag photographers, collaborators, university partners etc just as you would for a publication. Where relevant, tag @WAParksWildlife and PICA will consider retweeting.

Some hashtag suggestions: #scienceourWA #WAHerbarium #WAMuseum #WildOz (for plants and animals)

Do: cross promote good work being done by our collaborators and other DBCA divisions

You can do this by retweeting their tweets at a different time, retweeting with a comment or replying to their tweet. Each engagement puts this post back at the top of people's timelines so that more people will see them. A rough ratio to follow is 1/3 our own content, 1/3 responding to others, 1/3 RT of other people's timelines. If RT, ensure the content of the tweet reflects or does not contradict DBCA's policy/position on the subject.

Do: Repeat Tweets

Don't be scared to retweet the same tweet a couple of days, or even weeks apart, as long as it's still relevant. The best time of day for Australian engagement is in the morning for Western Australia, remembering that the east coast is 2-3 hours ahead.

Don't: Ignore People

When someone tweets at you or mentions you, don't ignore it. Favourite every (positive) tweet responding to our posts. If you have the time to respond, say something, even if it's as brief as, "Thanks!"

Answer questions that people have in a positive and open-minded way. Don't assume too much knowledge – maybe they didn't know that foxes are introduced or that there are different eucalypt species. If you don't know the answer, tell them that you'll get back to them and check with the original author. If it's a great question that you want more people to see, use 'retweet with comment' to answer them.

Do: Use Twitter at conferences

Use Twitter at conferences and events to set up real-life interactions. Put your Twitter handle on each presentation slide so that it's included when people take photos of your slides. Rather than using your last slide for acknowledgements, make it a summary slide that the audience can tweet during question time.

Do: Ignore negativity/hostility

If the message is someone complaining about or criticising the Department, use your judgement about whether responding will help the situation. Often it is better to leave the comment alone and not draw

further attention to it. If you feel you can change their perception with information or a helpful response, do so. Try and remain positive and facts-based and avoid controversial topics where possible. Offer to refer them to someone who might be able to help with their specific query. Don't respond to anything in a way that could be perceived as critical to the current Government, or managers, or complain about funding etc. Take your time and refer to PICA if you need advice. See the decision tree below.

Do: check with PICA if your post is contentious/newsworthy/a potential announcement

Staff should be aware that social media sites also attract journalists working for traditional media, for example TV, radio and newspapers. Therefore, social media interactions should be treated with the same scrutiny as media communications. If your post might be something the news media is interested in, might be worthy of a press release or Ministerial announcement, has the potential to attract significant interest outside of the science community, or has the potential to be contentious, please contact PICA media to discuss. There may be more appropriate platforms for the information to be released, or the Minister may want the first opportunity to announce. If in doubt, contact PICA.

Do: Focus on the science

Ultimately our goal is for good, positive science communication. Even disagreements can remain professional and avoid personal attacks.

Do: Use Photos and videos

Did I mention to include photos and videos of the cool stuff we do? ☺

Rules of engagement

The US Airforce put together a flowchart as a guide to monitoring and responding to online community activity. A modified version of it has been reproduced below.

Social media response flowchart

