

## Feature

# How to handle the press

The NGO's media adviser, Alasdair Mitchell, provides some useful tips.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT ONLY TWO PROFESSIONS rank lower in public esteem than journalists; namely, estate agents and badger gassers. Certain journalists try very hard to add gamekeepers to that list.

Or, to be more accurate, there is a certain type of journalist, working for a certain type of media organisation, who is unusually susceptible to the juicy offerings of those who dislike gamekeepers and all (they think) gamekeepers represent.

So it's not surprising that many gamekeepers regard the media the way a frog regards a hungry grass snake.

But, like it or loath it, we live in a media age. That's to say, there is a whole mass of newspapers, magazines, websites and broadcast channels out there. They have become increasingly fragmented, as people increasingly tend to select the news and views that they want, but the overall effect is that the media helps to influence, as opposed merely to reflect, public opinion. And public opinion influences politics, and politics influences our lives and livelihoods.

So, we cannot simply ignore the media.

The press wants a story with spice. Make sure you know their angle before you start, and take a commonsense approach when providing anything they could quote in or out of context.

Either we try to correct, respond to, and proactively influence what it says about us, or we simply sit back and leave it to the other side. I do not recommend the last course.

Now, if you get approached by a journalist, there are a number of things to remember:

1. You are not alone. Both Charles Nodder and I are here to help with anything to do with the media, so get in touch (contact details at the end) if you have any concerns whatsoever. (You could cut this short article out and stick it next to the telephone or keep it in your wallet).
2. No matter how friendly he or she may seem, the journalist is *not* your friend. They may not be your enemy, either – most are pretty straight. But just remember, they are not working for you, and they are after a story. They want short, pithy soundbites and phrases. If they stumble across an angle that will spice up their story, they will use it – even if it damages you or anybody else.
3. Be aware that they could quote you, no matter what you say, or in whatever context, so exercise some commonsense.

(If they take down the spelling of your name and your job title, you can be fairly sure that they are planning to quote you.)

4. If you are contacted, start by getting some basic details from the journalist – certainly name, publication or station and landline telephone number. (The importance of a name and landline number cannot be overstated. It allows us to call back and confirm that the person is who they say they are.) Ask what their deadline is (ie. the time by which you or somebody else needs to get back to them) and offer to ring back if necessary. Don't be panicked into trying to give a quote there and then if it doesn't suit you.

5. No ordinary journalist will reveal confidential sources or read you their pre-publication copy (except perhaps your own quotes), but you are entitled to ask about the main thrust of the story. In the case of broadcast coverage, ie. TV or radio, you are entitled to know how your contribution will be used, including the all-important context. Because of costs and sheer logistics, broadcast coverage is normally pre-planned, so the recording equipment doesn't normally start rolling until the media folk have decided on their angle.

So, be friendly, be cautious, be nosy – get as much information as you can before giving any yourself. Then, if you have the slightest concern, ring us. Above all, please alert us to any relevant coverage you see in your local newspapers. We have a media monitoring service, but it doesn't catch everything – especially not at local level. Very often, a good letter sent to the editor for publication has considerable impact, but sometimes it is best coming from a local reader, like yourself. We can help you write it.

Above all, remember that you're not alone. Any media worries, just get in touch.



CHARLES NODDER

### NEED HELP WITH THE MEDIA?

Contact telephone numbers:  
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