
WHISTLE-BLOWER POLICY

2022



ROYAL SOCIETY FOR PROTECTION OF NATURE

Version: WhisBlowPolicy1.1	Approved by: Board of Directors
Approved on:	Effective from: January 1, 2022

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1. Whistle Blower Policy

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) values Integrity, Commitment, Transparency, Accountability and Responsive, in striving towards conservation of species and habitat in Bhutan. It set standards for the organization and for employees' conduct. To ensure that there is a common minimum standard of professional behavior, RSPN has in place the Service Rules and Regulation (SRR).

Besides, this policy is designed to address situations in which Governing bodies and committees, and RSPN secretariat suspects another individual has engaged in un-ethical practices or questionable conduct involving RSPN's assets and miss-use of authority, and violation of RSPN rules and regulations. This conduct might include outright theft (of equipment or cash), fraudulent expense reports, misstatements of any accounts to any manager or to RSPN's auditors, or even an employee's conflict of interest that results in financial harm to RSPN. RSPN encourages Board of Directors, RSPN management, oversight committees and secretariat to report such questionable conduct and has established a system that allows them to do so anonymously.

2. Purpose of this policy

The purpose of this policy is to articulate the whistle blowing, the process, and the procedure to strengthen whistle blowing mechanism at RSPN. This policy

- Provides a platform and mechanism for the employees and associates to voice genuine concerns or grievances about unprofessional conduct without fear of reprisal.
- It provides an environment that promotes responsible and protected whistle blowing. It reminds employees and associates about their duty to report any suspected violation of any law that applies to RSPN and any suspected violation of the SRR and other policies including unauthorized use of RSPN's asset and miss-use of authority.
- Above all, it is a dynamic source of information about what may be going wrong at various levels within RSPN and which will help in realigning various processes and take corrective actions as part of good governance practice.

3. Applicability of this policy

All RSPN employees including those stationed in the field offices and centers, including Governing bodies and committees, and associates of RSPN (interns, members, consortium of exerts, consultants, suppliers and contractors) in Bhutan, which are required by law to have a vigil mechanism, shall adopt this policy and get it approved by the Board of Directors.

4. Who is a whistle blower?

Any employee or associates, and / or local communities and public, who discloses or demonstrates an evidence of an unethical activity or any conduct that may constitute breach of the RSPN's rules and regulations, unauthorized use of assets and miss-use of authority. This whistleblower has come to the decision to make a disclosure or express a genuine concern /grievance/allegations, after a lot of thought.

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5. Protection of Whistle-blowers

The process is designed to offer protection to the whistleblower provided that the disclosure made/concern raised/allegations made (“complaint”) by a whistleblower is in good faith and the alleged action or non-action constitutes a genuine and serious breach of rules and regulations of RSPN.

RSPN affirms that it will not allow any whistleblower to be victimized for making any complaint. Any kind of victimization of the whistleblower brought to the notice of the Board of Directors and/or RSPN management will be treated as an act warranting disciplinary action and will be treated so.

RSPN condemn any kind of discrimination, harassment, victimization or any other unfair employment practice adopted against the whistleblowers. Complete protection will be given to the whistleblowers against any unfair practices like danger of physical harm to person or family, discriminatory treatment at workplace in the form of transfer, biased appraisals, unfair work assignment, any form of retaliation or harassment, threat or intimidation or termination/suspension of service, disciplinary action, transfer, demotion, refusal of promotion, or the like including any direct or indirect use of authority to obstruct the whistleblower’s right to continue to perform his/her duties/functions in a free and fair manner.

6. Reporting in good faith

Every Whistle Blower is expected to read and understand this policy and abide by it. It is recommended that any individual who wishes to report, do so after gathering adequate facts/data to substantiate the complaint and not complain merely on hearsay or rumors. This also means that no action should be taken against the whistleblower, if the complaint was made in good faith, but no misconduct was confirmed on subsequent investigation.

However, if a complaint, after an investigation proves to be frivolous, malicious or made with an ulterior intent, the *Discipline Committee* shall take appropriate disciplinary or legal action against the concerned whistleblower.

7. List of exclusions

The following types of complaints will ordinarily not be considered and taken up:

- 7.1. Complaints that are Illegible, if handwritten
- 7.2. Complaints that are vague, with pseudonyms
- 7.3. Complaints that are trivial or frivolous in nature
- 7.4. Matters which are pending before a court of Law, State, Tribunal or any other judiciary or sub judiciary body
- 7.5. Any matter that is very old from the date on which the act constituting violation is alleged to have been committed
- 7.6. Issue raised, relates to service matters or personal grievance

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The Whistle Blowers are encouraged to make complaints that have an impact on RSPN's reputation, cases of financial irregularities, or people related to issues of bias, partiality, and discrimination of any kind, abuse, victimization or harassment.

8. Dealing with anonymity

A whistleblower may choose to keep his/her identity anonymous. In such cases, the complaint should be accompanied with strong evidence and data.

9. Confidentiality

The Disciplinary Committee will treat all complaints in a confidential and sensitive manner. In specific cases where the criticality and necessity of disclosing the identity of the whistleblower is important, it may be disclosed, on a 'need-to-know-basis', during the investigation process and only with the prior approval of the whistleblower.

10. Who is a whistle blower officer?

For the purpose of this policy, the administrative officer (or in his absence, the Chief of AFD) shall act as the Secretary of the Disciplinary Committee and shall also function as a Whistle Blower officer.

11. Procedure for raising a complaint

A whistleblower can make a complaint in multiple ways:

- 11.1. Can write to the Disciplinary Committee. The information about name of members, their e-mail id are *available on the website*.
- 11.2. By writing to the Administrative Officer at ... [email](#)
- 11.3. By writing to Executive Director, who will forward this to the Disciplinary Committee
- 11.4. In exceptional cases, the complainant can directly report his/her complaint to the Chairperson of the Board of Directors at ... [email or any member of the Board](#).

12. Procedure for handling a complaint is as given below:

- 12.1. A whistle blower identifies non-adherence of rules and regulations, unauthorized use of assets and miss-use of authority, by any employee or associates, will compile information that supports the case.
- 12.2. The whistle blower sends the complaint through either of the four channels, depending on:
 - 12.2.1. The level at which the violation is perceived to be happening, or
 - 12.2.2. The seniority of the individual/s involved.
- 12.3. Upon receipt of information, the whistle blower officer or recipient of the complaint, will first do a preliminary investigation to check whether the complaint seems to be genuine and falls under the purview of whistle blower policy. If the

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complaint is sent with malicious intent, then the committee will take appropriate disciplinary action against the whistleblower.

- 12.4. If the complaint does not fall under the purview of the whistle-blower policy, then the same would be redirected to the right forum. For example: If the complaint is related to sexual harassment, same will be forwarded to the same Disciplinary Committee but would be dealt with as per the *Policy to Prevent Sexual Harassment, exploitation, and Abuse at the Workplace*. If the complaint is related to a personal grievance, e.g. appraisal rating, promotion, etc., it will be forwarded to the Human Resource Committee.
- 12.5. Once established that the case needs investigation, the whistle-blower officer after discussion with the committee shall appoint a team to investigate the case, with the utmost confidentiality. The investigative team can be a pool of internal people specially trained to investigate or can be an external agency specialized to investigate such cases.
- 12.6. Under no circumstances, the secretary, investigation team and committee would reveal/discard the identity of the “accused” to anyone else (including the immediate manager) other than all those who are required to know about the case.
- 12.7. The investigation team should work towards ensuring that the investigation is completed by following the laws of the land and principles of natural justice within 3 weeks of the complaint being reported. If the investigation cannot be completed within 3 weeks, then the committee needs to have very valid and strong reasons for the same.
- 12.8. Once the investigation is completed, the secretary will submit the report of the investigation to the committee and the committee will then decide on the quantum of punishment to be given. While deciding on this, the committee will consider the following:
 - 12.8.1. The severity of the misconduct
 - 12.8.2. Impact on the Organization (Reputation, Financial / Non – Financial)
 - 12.8.3. Past record of the employee
 - 12.8.4. Past precedence of treating similar violations
- 12.9. The punishment shall constitute a minimum of a written warning and may lead to withdrawal of last increment/demotion, withholding promotion, dismissal from service, and/or even prosecution in a court of law.
- 12.10. Once the report is received, the committee will put its recommendation and forward it to the respective management team. The team will consider the recommendation and decide on appropriate action within 15 days of receiving the recommendation.
- 12.11. While implementing the recommendation, the management will ensure that the name of the whistleblower and the person accused is kept confidential at all times.
- 12.12. In case the whistleblower or the person accused is not satisfied with the decision of the disciplinary committee and the management team, he/she has the option to appeal within 10 days of the order, to the Board of Directors.

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- 12.13. Based on the appeal, the Board of Directors will decide whether to reinvestigate/relook at the quantum of punishment. The Board of Directors will close the case within 21 days of receiving the appeal.
- 12.14. If the charges framed on the accused are found to be false after investigation, it is very essential to demonstrate that the employee's dignity is respected. Hence, the Division or Department Head should thank the employee personally for having cooperated in the process. A formal closure letter has to be sent informing that the charges have not been proved during the investigation process and hence he/she is fully exonerated of all the charges.

13. Reporting process

An Annual and Quarterly report will be prepared by the Disciplinary Committee, of which copies will be placed before the Audit Committee, management team, and HRMC.

14. Guidelines for communication and implementation of this policy

Phone numbers and email addresses of relevant officials need to be made available for reporting of any violation or misconduct.

A communication mechanism should be put in place to create awareness about this policy with the existing or new employees and associates.

It is the responsibility of the Whistle Blower Officer to ensure that the updated names and email addresses of oversight committee members, management team, chairperson of the Board, and division or Department head are made available to all employees and associates through the local intranet and/or any other communication mechanism they may adopt. A copy of this policy shall also be placed on the RSPN website.

15. Review of this Policy

The policy shall be reviewed by RSPN annually or when it is shown necessary that additional issues need to be identified and addressed, such as with a significant change in context or program or change to legislation, and be endorsed by the Board of Directors.

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16. Annexure I: Template for reporting violations

To:

Please select the applicable incident type(s) from the list below that best describes the issue(s) you are reporting. Please note that multiple issues can be selected

- i. Misappropriation of company assets or resources
- ii. Conflict of interest
- iii. Inappropriate sharing of confidential information
- iv. Financial fraud of any nature
- v. Non-adherence to safety guidelines
- vi. Inaccurate financial reporting
- vii. Bribery & Corruption
- viii. Other forms of Harassment – Victimization, Bullying, Discrimination etc.
- ix. Misuse of authority
- x. Concurrent employment
- xi. Others _____

Please provide name, designation and department of the person(s) involved?

	Name	Division/Department	Designation
Individual 1			
Individual 2			

When did the incident occur? (Please provide tentative date if you do not know the exact date)

Please confirm the location of the incident

How did you find out about this incident?

How long has this been occurring for?

- Less than a month
- 1-6 months
- 6-12 months
- Greater than 12 months

Please provide a detailed description of the incident. To enable your company to act on your complaint, you are requested to provide specific information where possible including names, location, date, time etc. Please note that this field is limited to 5,000 characters.

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Do you have any evidence in support of your allegations?

- Yes
- No

Is anyone else aware of this incident?

- Yes
- No

Is there any additional information that would facilitate the investigation of this matter?

- Yes
- No

Have you reported this incident to anyone in the company?

- Yes
- No

Date: _____

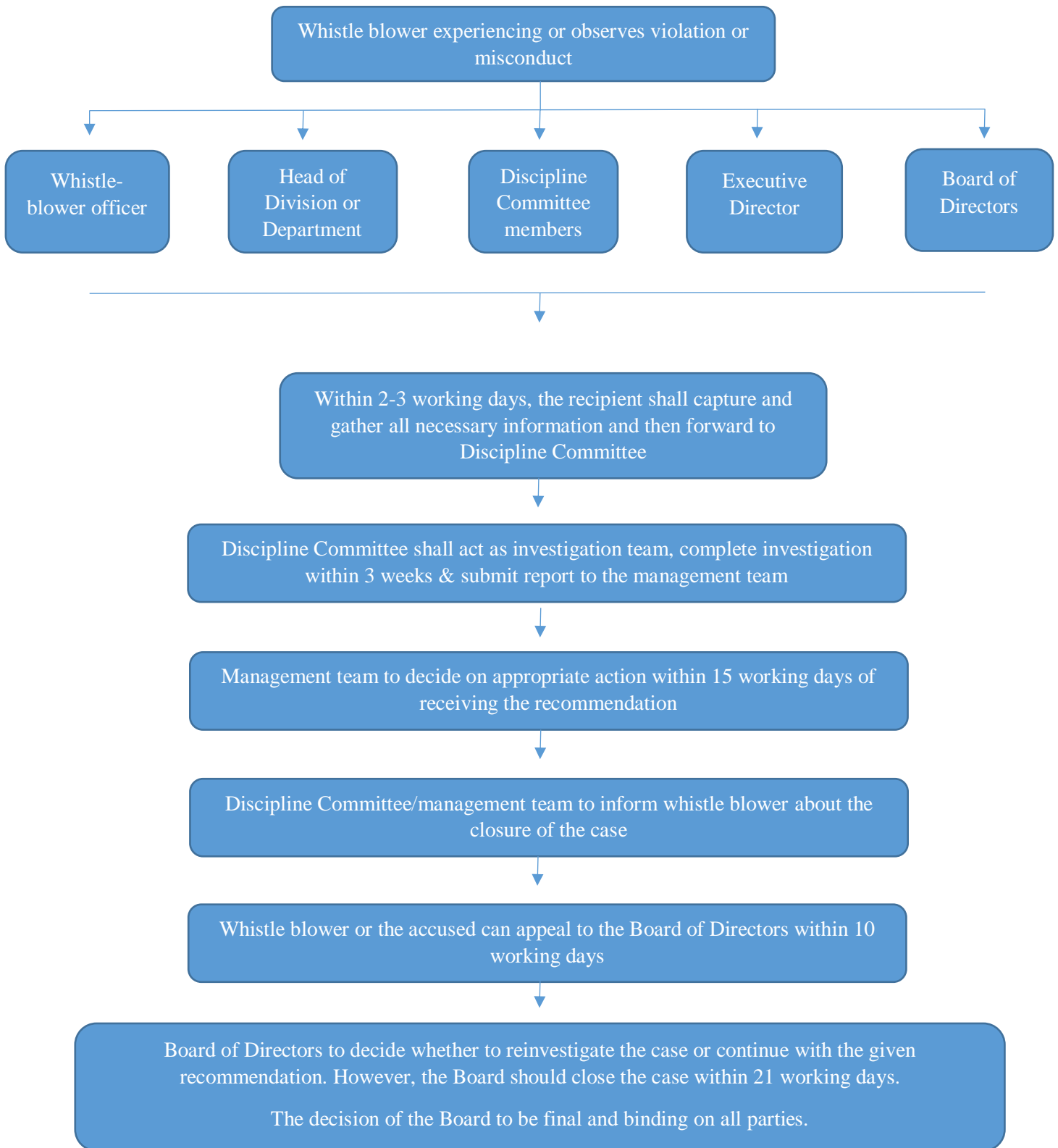
Location: _____

Name of the Person reporting (optional): _____

Contact Information (incl email optional): _____

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17. Annexure 2: Flow chart for reporting, resolving and closing a case



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