# Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor are a very easy way to get the message in the local paper. It enables you or others to voice an opinion to policymakers and to educate readers.

You can use letters to correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article, to praise or criticise a recent article or editorial, or simply provide your opinion on a current issue.

Without exception, the letters section is one of the most highly read sections in the paper. Make sure you read the paper before you write to get an idea of the format. This is a great opportunity to reach the public – its best to write early and often.

* **Be timely.** Capitalise on recent news and events that have been covered in the paper or that have happened locally – write within 24 hours if possible.
* **Make one clear argument.** The piece should be in favor of or critical of a particular position taken by the paper or described in an article.
* **Be specific.** The letter should focus on a specific issue that was raised in an article or opinion piece.
* **Cite the article.** Be sure to mention the title and date of the article you're responding to in one of your first two sentences. For example "Dear editor, Your recent coverage of the issue of the uninsured ("Health care in America," May 11, 2012) was a thoughtful piece..."
* **Be brief.** Generally, 150 to 200 words in three to four paragraphs are ideal. If you can't contain the letter to that length, consider asking someone to help you edit it or write a 700-word op-ed instead.
* **Think local.** Emphasise the local effects of the problem and/or solution you write about.
* **Don’t be discouraged if your letter is not printed.** Every time you submit a letter, you are educating the editor of your paper and paving the way for future letters to be printed.
* **You must include your name, address and daytime phone number in your letter.** Don't worry – they won't print your street address. Instructions for submitting a letter to the editor are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's website. Find out from your local paper the best way to send a letter. Most prefer e-mail.

# Sample letter to the editor

In response to the slashing of $213 million from Federal biodiversity funding, our local Carpentarian and Kalkadoon Grasswrens are facing extinction. These rare birds were severely impacted by the fires of 2011 and 2012 and they need our help, with local volunteers working hard to protect the surviving birds from extinction.

Rather than cutting biodiversity spending, the Federal government must develop a threatened species recovery fund to save species like grasswrens from imminent extinction. With so little information known about these species, it would be a terrible shame to lose them before we have had a chance to get to know them.

Fred Chatter, BirdLife North Queensland.