

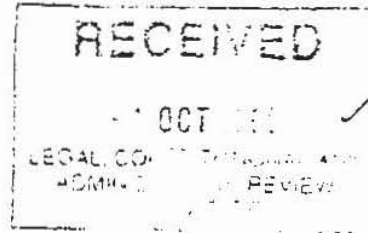


Hon. Terry Mackenroth MP

MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION, AND  
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, PLANNING,  
REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

MIN 23033.98

29 SEP 1998



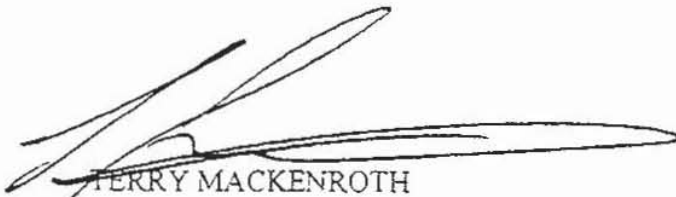
Mr Gary Fenlon MLA  
Chair  
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee  
Legislative Assembly of Queensland  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Fenlon

I refer to your letter of 13 August 1998 inviting submissions on the *Report of the Strategic Review of the Queensland Ombudsman*.

Please find attached my Department's submission to this Report. I trust the comments are helpful in the review and look forward to the Committee's final report.

Yours sincerely

  
TERRY MACKENROTH

Encl.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION,  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PLANNING

Submission

Review of the findings and recommendations of the  
Report of the Strategic Review of the Ombudsman

28 September 1998

General

Generally the Department of Communication and Information, Local Government and Planning support the recommendations of the Report of the Strategic Review of the Ombudsman. Specifically, a number of comments have been made by the Department in respect of particular Recommendations of the Report. These are detailed below.

In regard to rural and remote areas, the Department recommends better coordination and advertising of visits to rural and remote areas together with an increased profile and understanding in rural and remote areas of the Ombudsman's role. It is believed such measures would alleviate much of the misunderstanding of the role of the Ombudsman and assist in solving issues which may arise.

Recommendation 2

This recommendation is generally supported. However, it would be helpful if regular discussions could be held between senior officers of the Local Government Services unit of the Department and the Ombudsman's office (approximately 2 meetings per year) so that the Department could be kept informed of any emerging strategic or systemic issues relating to Local Government. Such regular dialogue would enable the Minister and the Department to take remedial action before problems escalate.

Recommendation 6

(C) This recommendation is supported. The Department is keen to enhance public understanding of the various mechanisms for making complaints against Councils, elected officials and Council officers.

Recommendation 7

This recommendation is supported. As mentioned, twice yearly meetings of senior officers of the Ombudsman's office and the Department to discuss emerging issues and any matters of mutual concern would be most beneficial.

#### Recommendation 8 and Recommendation 10

While the concept of each Local Government having a formal contact officer for Ombudsman complaints is supported in principle, many Local Governments in Queensland (particularly smaller rural Councils) have extremely limited resources. The extent to which such Councils could establish generic complaint handling procedures is questionable.

The question of different types of complaints also needs to be considered. For example, it would not be unusual for a Council to receive a large number of complaints about a rise in rates. A generic complaints handling procedure may not be appropriate in such cases. There is also the wider issue to be considered of the extent to which Local Governments should be developing complaints handling procedures, given specific complaints procedures are now a requirement under various Acts under which Local Government operate, eg National Competition Policy complaints processes.

#### Recommendation 11

A formal program of short term secondments of ombudsman staff to agencies that generate regular or more complex on-going Ombudsman investigations is strongly supported. This will expose Ombudsman staff to an agency's work practices and equip them with a better appreciation of the agency's organisational culture. It may also contribute to a reduction in systemic practices that result in client dissatisfaction and complaints.

Similarly, the Department recognises the value gained from Department staff working for a time in the Ombudsman's office.

#### Recommendation 13

This recommendation is supported. Again, the Department would stress the need for regular meetings between senior officers of the Ombudsman's Office and the Department to ensure that the Department is kept abreast of emerging issues stemming from basic systemic causes. It may be that the Department is already taking action in relation to some such matters. Regular open dialogue with the Ombudsman's Office would ensure a coordinated and consistent approach.

#### Recommendation 29

If an overall review of the administrative appeal mechanisms in Queensland is conducted, it is essential that the Local Government appeal mechanisms are included in the review.