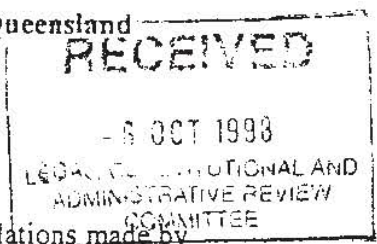


Queensland Treasury Submission – Strategic Review of the Queensland Ombudsman



Queensland Treasury provides the following comments on recommendations made by Professor Wiltshire in his *Report of the Strategic Review of the Queensland Ombudsman* (the "Report"):

Recommendation 4

That the Ombudsman submits the estimates of the office for each financial year to the Parliamentary Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee (PLCAR) rather than to Treasury. The PLCAR, on behalf of the Parliament, would then recommend to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee (CBRC) the level of resources to be made available to the Office of the Ombudsman. The PLCAR would retain its powers to call upon Treasury for advice and analysis.

The reason given for the suggested procedural change is that there could be a conflict of interest if, for example, the Ombudsman was required to investigate a complaint of maladministration in Treasury. In such circumstances, the independence of the Ombudsman could be compromised. In support of this recommendation, the Report cites a similar recommendation made in the 1997 Strategic Review of the Queensland Audit Office (QAO).

Treasury Position

While Treasury acknowledges the need for the Ombudsman's Office to be, and to be perceived to be, independent from Executive Government, our view is that this should not, and need not, override the need to ensure that Government is provided with expert advice to assist it in allocating increasingly scarce resources to meet conflicting priorities. The present system permits a co-ordinated approach to the framing of the State Budget.

If the Office of the Ombudsman is able to set its own budget appropriation through PLCAR its funding priorities would be determined in isolation from the main priorities of Government. It is the view of Treasury that the present appropriation process in no way undermines the independence of the Office of the Ombudsman or of comparable entities such as the QAO and the CJC.

Recommendation 15

The Ombudsman should construct a new set of performance indicators for the Office in consultation with the PLCAR and Queensland Treasury. Presently the main performance indicator is the number of files being closed which takes little account of the qualitative differences between various cases, in particular, their relative complexities.

Treasury Position

Queensland Treasury supports this recommendation which is an accord with the *Managing For Outcomes* (MFO) strategy recently approved by Cabinet. A key component of MFO is the adoption of accrual output budgeting to cost a range of outputs by agencies to help the Government to meet its desired policy outcomes. As part of this process, Treasury is currently working with all agencies including the Office of the Ombudsman to determine required outputs, together with the appropriate performance measures. These performance measures will consider matters of quality, quantity, timeliness and cost thereby addressing the issue of the varying levels of complexity of the various cases.

Recommendation 22

The Ombudsman should instigate a review of the classification of the positions in the Office to ensure that they reflect the true worth of the work being performed, both for professional and support staff positions, and the need for a more graduated scale of professional and support positions.

Treasury Position

The Ombudsman's Office will receive additional funds in the 1998/99 Budget to meet the continuing increases in demand for its services, to overcome excessive delays and to reduce the serious backlog of cases. These funds will be used for the employment of additional permanent staff, additional accommodation for increased staffing levels, an IT upgrade and replacement program, the implementation of the SAP HR/payroll system and the proposed review of the Office staffing classifications.

As part of the review process particular attention should be paid to the issues raised in recommendation 22 of Professor Wiltshire's report.

Recommendation 25

There should be discussions with the QAO in regard to the sharing of some aspects of corporate services, particularly information technology. There should also be an inventory of capital and recurrent requirements in the corporate services area and a special one-off funding to bring the corporate services function up to date.

Treasury Position

Treasury supports the Ombudsman's Office undertaking discussions with the QAO to determine whether it is more cost effective for the QAO to provide any or all of its corporate services. There are a numbers of precedents for this within Executive Government, particularly in relation to smaller agencies where such internal "outsourcing" has provided significant benefits.