

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF QUEENSLAND

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

**Meeting with the Queensland Ombudsman (Parliamentary
Commissioner for Administrative Investigations) regarding the
Ombudsman's *Annual Report to Parliament 1998 - 1999***

April 2000

Report No. 21

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

REPORTS	DATE TABLED
1. Annual report 1995-96	8 August 1996
2. Report on matters pertaining to the Electoral Commission of Queensland	8 August 1996
3. Review of the Referendums Bill 1996	14 November 1996
4. Truth in political advertising	3 December 1996
5. Report on the Electoral Amendment Bill 1996	20 March 1997
6. Report on the study tour relating to the preservation and enhancement of individuals' rights and freedoms and to privacy (31 March 1997—14 April 1997)	1 October 1997
7. Annual report 1996-97	30 October 1997
8. The Criminal Law (Sex Offenders Reporting) Bill 1997	25 February 1998
9. Privacy in Queensland	9 April 1998
10. Consolidation of the Queensland Constitution - Interim report	19 May 1998
11. Annual report 1997-98	26 August 1998
12. The preservation and enhancement of individuals' rights and freedoms in Queensland: Should Queensland adopt a bill of rights?	18 November 1998
13. Consolidation of the Queensland Constitution: Final Report	28 April 1999
14. Review of the <i>Report of the Strategic Review of the Queensland Ombudsman</i> (Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations)	15 July 1999
15. Report on a study tour of New Zealand regarding freedom of information and other matters: From 31 May to 4 June 1999	20 July 1999
16. Review of the Transplantation and Anatomy Amendment Bill 1998	29 July 1999
17. Annual report 1998-99	26 August 1999
18. Issues of electoral reform raised in the Mansfield decision: Regulating how-to-vote cards and providing for appeals from the Court of Disputed Returns	17 September 1999
19. Implications of the new Commonwealth enrolment requirements	2 March 2000
20. The Electoral Amendment Bill 1999	11 April 2000
PAPERS	
Truth in political advertising (Issues paper)	11 July 1996
Privacy in Queensland (Issues paper)	4 June 1997
The preservation and enhancement of individuals' rights and freedoms: Should Queensland adopt a bill of rights? (Issues paper)	1 October 1997
Upper Houses (Information paper)	27 November 1997
Inquiry into issues of Queensland electoral reform (Background paper)	25 November 1999
The role of the Queensland Parliament in treaty making (Position paper)	25 November 1999
Freedom of Information in Queensland (Discussion paper)	8 February 2000
Four year parliamentary terms (Background paper)	11 April 2000

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The committee's contact details are:

Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street, Brisbane, Qld, 4000.

Telephone: (07) 3406 7307
Facsimile: (07) 3406 7070
E-mail: lcarc@parliament.qld.gov.au

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

49TH PARLIAMENT

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Mr Warren Pitt MLA was appointed to the committee by resolution of the Assembly of 29 February 2000 replacing Mr Geoff Wilson MLA.

* Dr Peter Prenzler MLA was appointed to the committee by resolution of the Assembly of 11 November 1998 replacing Mr Charles Rappolt MLA whose resignation from Parliament was received by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on 4 November 1998.

CHAIR'S FOREWORD

The role of the Queensland Ombudsman (officially the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations) is to investigate citizens' complaints and grievances regarding administrative decisions and actions in Queensland's state and local government sectors. Given that the Ombudsman plays a vital role in ensuring the accountability and effective administration of government, the Ombudsman reports, and is accountable, to Parliament and not the Executive. For this reason, the Ombudsman is termed 'an officer of Parliament'.

One of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee's four general areas of responsibility is administrative review reform which includes considering legislation or provisions of legislation about matters including review of administrative decisions. In addition, the committee has a number of specific statutory functions which relate to the Ombudsman. In this way the committee is a conduit through which the Queensland Ombudsman accounts to Parliament. By the same token, the committee is also in a position to provide parliamentary support to the Ombudsman.

In 1997, Professor Kenneth Wiltshire AO was appointed to conduct the inaugural strategic review of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman. In his May 1998 report on that review, Professor Wiltshire recommended that Parliament, through the committee, have a greater involvement in certain aspects of the Ombudsman's Office.

In its July 1999 review of Professor Wiltshire's report, the committee stated that it proposed to examine each annual and other report made by the Ombudsman and presented to Parliament and, if the committee sees fit, to report to Parliament on any matter appearing in, or arising out of, those reports.

On 17 March 2000, the committee met with the Ombudsman and senior officers of the Ombudsman's Office to discuss issues arising out of the Ombudsman's annual report to Parliament for 1998/99. This report was somewhat of a milestone, being the Office's 25th annual report.

The key issues the committee discussed with the Ombudsman and the senior officers included:

- Office resources, staffing and case load including age of complaints and progress in reducing the backlog of cases;
- Office goals and performance indicators;
- the Office's complaints database;
- the implementation of various strategies to enhance the Office's profile;
- proposed review of/reform to the *Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1974*;
- the Office's liaison with various agencies regarding jurisdictional overlap;
- action taken by the Office with respect to a number of matters specifically mentioned in the report; and
- future directions of the Office.

While the primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Ombudsman's annual report, some of the issues raised in the report inevitably overlap with a current external management review of the Office (also stemming from a recommendation by this committee in its strategic review report). Reference was therefore made to the management review on various occasions throughout the meeting. A separate report to Parliament on the management review will be tabled later this year.

In accordance with its statement in its July 1999 strategic review report, the committee has decided to report to Parliament on this meeting by presenting to Parliament the transcript of the proceedings of the meeting.

The Ombudsman has also requested that certain additional information regarding his 1998/99 annual report, which was not canvassed in detail in the meeting, be included in this report. The committee has agreed to the Ombudsman's request and attaches as Appendix A the Ombudsman's additional correspondence.

On behalf of the committee I thank the Ombudsman, Mr Fred Albietz, the Deputy Ombudsmen, Mr Frank King and Mr Rodney Metcalfe and the Director Corporate and Research Division, Mr Keith Alcock, for their time and cooperation.

My thanks also to members of the committee who participated in the meeting and the committee's secretariat and Hansard for their assistance in organising and transcribing the proceedings.

Gary Fenlon MLA
Chair

MEETING WITH THE QUEENSLAND OMBUDSMAN (PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATIONS)

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS (FRIDAY, 17 MARCH 2000, BRISBANE)

The Committee commenced at 11.45 a.m.

FRED ALBIETZ, examined:

KEITH ALCOCK, examined:

FRANK KING, examined:

RODNEY METCALFE, examined:

Mr CHAIRMAN: I welcome the Ombudsman and his officers to this hearing of the Committee today. The Committee has arranged this meeting with the Ombudsman and senior officers to discuss issues arising out of the Ombudsman's 1998-99 annual report. The first matter I want to turn our attention to relates to office resources, staffing, case loads, including the age of complaints, and progress of reducing the backlog of cases. Various references are made through the report to the office budget being increased by 56% to \$5.2m; 18 additional staff being engaged; 4,062 new cases being received, an 8.6% increase; 3,718 cases being closed with almost 40% resolved substantially or totally in favour of the complainant; and the number of cases open at the end of the year increasing from 1,624 to 1,968. What we are interested in, gentlemen, is whether the office has begun to see the results expected from additional funding and hence additional staff. If so, how is this evidenced? Also, has the average age of open case load decreased since the figures reported for 30 June 1999?

Mr Albietz: If we can deal with each of those as we go through, Mr Chairman. In relation to office resources, the office is very happy with the Government in providing the additional funding. That has certainly been a great boost to the office. It certainly has enabled me to employ additional investigators. As I have explained to the Committee previously, a new structure has been in force. Delegations have gone down to a lower level. My assessment is that it certainly has been of substantial benefit to the office overall. I am very happy with the additional funding the Government has provided.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Does anyone else wish to add to that? If not, I call on Mr Pitt.

Mr PITT: Page 11 of the report states that new performance indicators have been introduced based on file closures (externally and internally), file movements (internally), caseload audits (internally), implementation of recommendations, rectification of sustained cases, complaints received per public interview session, and the age profile of the intake and existing caseload. I am only new to the Committee, but I understand that previously the performance indicators became a major issue of discussion in the strategic review. I think they are being considered now again as part of the management review. I wonder if the Ombudsman can enlighten the Committee about discussions you may have had with the reviewers and what the outcomes have been.

Mr Albietz: Certainly. I say at the beginning that that part of the report deals with reflections over 25 years—looking at the various Ombudsmen and what they have done in relation to the office over that period. Although it says "new performance indicators", I am talking about the current performance indicators. In other words, I have been Ombudsman for a number of years and that is the sort of change I have introduced in my time. It does not mean that I have changed them in the last 12 months or something like that. So there may have been some sort of misunderstanding there.

In relation to performance indicators, the main performance indicator for the Government—and that is in our Output Statement—has been accepted by the Cabinet Budget Review Committee, and that is file closures. I guess that is a bit of a shame in some ways because it does not reflect the full amount of work that is done by the office. For argument's sake, there is a very significant intake of work that is done in the office that does not result in files. Just on a quick estimation I have done in relation to that, I think something in the order of about \$150,000 a year goes into intake and that does not see itself in files. So there are those sorts of anomalies, but certainly the main one is the file closures.

We certainly look at things like whether the recommendations of the Ombudsman are in fact implemented and accepted, whether the cases that are sustained are rectified and those sorts of measures. There has not been any change in those as a result of the Wiltshire review and the parliamentary review. That is a matter that is now being addressed very significantly in the current management review. I expect coming out of that review there will be some recommendations in relation to performance indicators.

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is an issue that takes us back further to the previous question, gentlemen, and it relates to the average age of open case load, which I referred to before. Could you perhaps expand on that and relate it to the question Mr Pitt just asked.

Mr Albietz: In relation to case load, you may have heard today that there are some significant problems with our computer system. I have not been able to get out data as at the end of February. Data as at the end of January has been available. I can inform the Committee of what that information is.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr Albietz: As at 31 January—and I am only dealing with the financial year 1999-2000—there were 2,639 new complaints in that seven-month period. Some 2,412 files were closed. That leaves an outstanding case load of 2,155. You would be aware—and I think you just mentioned it—that the carryover at the end of June 1999 was 1,968. That means that the case load has increased by some 200. If I can take it back to the same 12 months previously—in other words, the end of January 1999—to form a comparison as to where the office is now compared to where it was 12 months previously to give some idea as to how the office is coping and whether there has been benefit from the new arrangements and the new staff, at 31 January 1999, 2,009 new complaints had been lodged.

This financial year we have received an extra 630 complaints, or a 30% increase. That certainly is a concern. Last year was a record year. It is generally an 8% to 9% increase per year. We have now seen a 30% increase in seven months. Unfortunately, with the computer down, I have not been able to analyse just what is happening in relation to that, but it is a concern that so many extra complaints have come in during that seven-month period. At the same time last year, there were 1,115 closed. I just mentioned that this year there were 2,412. That is an increase of 1,297 or a 116% better closure rate than the previous year. I guess this reflects the benefit of the additional funding and the additional staff.

Closures, unfortunately, do not follow a straight line graph. I wish they did, but that does not seem to happen. My experience in the office has tended to show that in the first six months of a financial year investigators will look at concentrating on the difficult, complex cases and trying to progress those while at the same time trying to deal with the complaints coming in. In the last six months of the financial year it is important that targets are met to satisfy the Government. There is a big push on then to try to meet those targets. At the same time last year, 31 January 1999, the outstanding case load numbered 2,510.

As I mentioned, now it is 2,155. So that is a reduction of 365 cases, or 16%. I have to say again that that is in the face of a 30% increase in complaints. So my estimation is that the office will certainly reach its target this year. We have indicated to the Government that 4,500 complaints will be finalised this year. My estimation is that the office will do better than that; I am looking at about 4,700 or 4,750. If the current increase in complaints continues at the rate it is, my estimation is that the backlog at the end of the year, 30 June 2000, will be down by about 200 to 300. So that is my estimation. So I am quite happy about that at this stage. I think that certainly reflects the benefit of having the additional staff and the additional funding.

But again, I must say that we are under a management review and that is taking significant resources. For argument's sake, we are having 20-odd people turn up at one particular workshop—and there are four—and there is preparation time and then one morning they actually met for three hours. There is additional preparation time and a meeting again for another three hours. So I have to be mindful that there are significant resources being put into the review, and I think that is only appropriate. That is not a criticism of the review at all; I think that it is great to have the review. It is just that the reality is that all of that time is not being devoted to closing files.

I guess that is about all I can say. Overall, I am certainly happy with the situation in the sense that we have closed a lot more files—an extra 116%—at the same time this year as compared with last year. One can never rest on laurels, but I am very hopeful with that sort of result.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Dr Prenzler?

Dr PRENZLER: Mr Albietz, I notice on page 15 of your annual report you have made six goals for the year. As you know, we have undertaken a strategic review of your office and made certain recommendations from that review. I notice in the report that there is little mention of those recommendations. I would like you to tell us what steps you are taking to incorporate some of those recommendations into your goals and strategies for your office.

Mr Albietz: Dr Prenzler, could you be specific in relation to which recommendations you are asking me to comment on?

Dr PRENZLER: Related to case holdings and things like that. Basically, what we were covering already. Could you just expand a little bit more? We just want to know what recommendations you are going to incorporate into your goals.

Mr Albietz: Certainly the outcomes have to be changed every year. Every submission that goes to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee has to have fresh outcome figures involved. So targets are changed every year.

Dr PRENZLER: Also—if you do not mind me butting in—in relation to case management and call back on the cases so that you can understand how that is proceeding with the office, or whatever. Can you expand on some of those, please?

Mr Albietz: Yes, certainly there have been changes. The idea of the additional staff and the team structures have all changed. I think that is having a significant impact in the sense that you are getting a closer, smaller group. What you find there is closer mentoring, people getting involved in one-to-one coaching and that sort of thing. So I think that is all having a very distinct and beneficial effect. I am not sure what other recommendations you wish me to refer to.

Dr PRENZLER: No, I am quite happy, thank you.

Mr BEANLAND: I have two or three questions to the Ombudsman. They all relate to the annual report. Page 16 of the annual report talks about database redevelopment that has proceeded but is still in the testing process and that the decision is yet to be made as to whether the current system

needs to be replaced or enhanced. I was just wondering how that is proceeding and what stage it is up to. We can talk about workloads, case loads and all of these other matters, but a database is very much the basic system—the tool that you are working with—to keep control of things, to process them and so on.

Mr Albietz: Correct. There is a committee comprising management and staff in relation to testing not only the current system but also we have an alternative system which we call an OCD system. We have been looking at those two systems with the idea of redevelopment for case management, etc. We had a guarantee in relation to the OSS system that it was, in fact, Y2K compliant. To our horror, that has not proved true. That is the difficulty that we are having now with our computer system. I have already had discussions with the reviewer and he is keen to have some input in relation to the development of the software for any system that we introduce.

So the strategy at the current time is to try to just maintain the existing system to keep it going. As I say, we have run into some difficulties, but as we speak I have people working on the system to get it up and running and maintained again. My view is that we will maintain it until we hear what the reviewer's ideas are. He has some quite definite ideas about a redevelopment of the case load database system. So I would suggest that it is reasonable that we wait and see what comes out of the review.

Mr BEANLAND: If I could follow that up, Mr Chairman? There are a number of issues here. Are you saying that you are testing a new system, which is the OCD?

Mr Albietz: Yes.

Mr BEANLAND: Your current system is the OSS?

Mr Albietz: That is correct.

Mr BEANLAND: It is the current system that was causing problems with Y2K compliance?

Mr Albietz: Yes.

Mr BEANLAND: Obviously, you have people working on that.

Mr Albietz: Yes, even as we speak.

Mr BEANLAND: Surely they would have picked that up prior to 1 January? Has it been picked up only now?

Mr Albietz: Certainly, the Y2K problem only occurred once we hit the new year 2000. The director of corporate services is our key man in that area. Perhaps I could ask him.

Mr BEANLAND: Certainly. I just find it rather incredible that, whatever the problems are, they had not been picked up prior to 1 January.

Mr Albietz: Could I ask the director to explain?

Mr BEANLAND: Thank you.

Mr Alcock: Yes, Mr Beanland. I guess the difficulty that we all have in the IT area is that we rely on information provided to us by software vendors and suppliers. We were certainly given an ironclad guarantee that our OSS system was year 2000 compliant. I think that it is fair to say that we had expressed some concerns about that, because not a lot of vendors are prepared to do that. But at the end of the day, it was not, and that is a difficulty.

Mr BEANLAND: How long will it be before these bugs in the system are ironed out, because this is particularly important to your whole program of processing files, inputs and outputs?

Mr Alcock: Yes. I guess as a result of some disappointment with that organisation—certainly in the last couple of months—we have another contractor on board to complete the year 2000 compliancy fix. He has given us a week's time frame to fix that. It was commenced on Wednesday of this week. So we are expecting to have that up and running in full compliancy early next week.

Mr BEANLAND: This would, no doubt, be setting back your program. Is there a cost involved in this to the office?

Mr Alcock: There is a cost involved in getting another contractor to fix that, yes. In terms of our program, we are keeping other data in spreadsheet format to ensure that we can just put that into the system once it is fully compliant, yes.

Mr BEANLAND: So you think that it will be fixed within a week's time?

Mr Alcock: Yes, yes.

Mr BEANLAND: Can I just go on, because we are talking about the new system, the OCD system. Is that a system that you are designing yourselves together with some IT people? Surely there are software programs in other States or New Zealand that would meet your needs, or are they in the same situation as you? Perhaps there is a program that some other commission is using in a different area that might be able to be adapted. What is the situation with yours?

Mr Alcock: I do not know whether Mr Albietz wants to respond in terms of the process. Prior to my going to the office, in 1997 the office entered into an arrangement with another software vendor to basically replicate the OSS system, which was a system that was meeting our needs at that time, but to put it into a full Windows capacity, a full Windows environment. That would give us extra functionality. The idea was that it would also give us increased speed. Basically, it was going to be a progression from what was a system that was operational at the time—which, as I say, was working well—to bringing it up to date. I am not quite certain what the process was then in terms of what other systems were available at that time, but I guess the decision was taken at that time because that seemed to be the most appropriate system, "The system is working well, let's update it."

Mr BEANLAND: Perhaps I should direct my questions to Mr Albietz, because we still have the situation of what prevails in other States and New Zealand. As I said before, I am aware that there are other Ombudsmen around the States and in New Zealand and they have systems. Perhaps if their systems are not up to scratch, then there is one in another commission that is very similar that you might adopt. I am just concerned that, from this discussion, you seem to be starting from scratch with a new system. There might already be a system on the shelf that somebody else has that you could simply take and adapt with the minimum inconvenience to yourselves? .

Mr Alcock: You are absolutely right. If I may just continue, Mr Albietz? The arrangement that we had with the new software vendor was a very good deal, I guess. It was a very minimal cost to bring our current system into today's technology. You are quite right, there may be other systems out there and they would certainly have cost many times the sort of dollars that we were talking about with the OCD system. Given the lack of resources that the office had back in 1997, where we were channelling most of our funding that we could possibly into people on board to close files, that was a valid option, I believe, at that time.

Mr BEANLAND: I am sorry to keep persevering here, but this is an interesting area and a very important aspect of the whole office's operation as far I am concerned. Have you looked at what you might be able to get from other States or New Zealand or not? If so, were there significant cost factors attached? Is that what you are saying to me?

Mr Alcock: What I am saying to you is that we had, in fact, had some discussions with the software vendor that supplied us with the OSS system. In discussions with them to give us an updated

system, they were talking something like six times the cost that we had contracted with the new supplier for the OCD system. I believe we are in the situation now where we are having discussions with the review team about their recommendations for additional functionality and, certainly, if we are going from now looking at a clean sheet, then looking at what other jurisdictions are doing is a valid option.

Mr BEANLAND: Yes, but you have not actually—

Mr Alcock: At this point in time.

Mr BEANLAND: Perhaps I should ask Mr Albietz, you have not previously looked at other States or New Zealand?

Mr Albietz: Certainly not in that detail. The OSS system has served us well and we have certainly persevered with that system. But now, as I say, it does have problems and it is obviously time to change. In discussions with the reviewer, he has indicated that he wishes to look at software systems in other complaint-handling agencies in Queensland and also pursue it when he goes interstate, New South Wales and New Zealand, and hopefully coming out of that I think that there will be a good redevelopment of a good case management system.

Mr BEANLAND: Does your system currently allow you to keep track of the files, in other words, on whose table is the file and which person has the file? Does the current system allow you to do that?

Mr Albietz: I am no expert in the system, but my understanding is that it is not a tracking system.

Mr BEANLAND: It is not a tracking system?

Mr Alcock: No, it is not a tracking system, but we can keep that data in the system. We have file allocations. So if a file is allocated to an investigating officer, that detail is kept within the system, yes.

Mr BEANLAND: But it does not allow you to track it around as such? How about breaking up the various statistics? Does it give you a good breakdown of statistics across the State? I presume that it would, because the way you have the office broken up, you can break it up—

Mr Albietz: Yes, it certainly has been a good system and it has provided the information that we have needed, and which we provide in the annual reports. If it is intended that there be greater capacities to do different things, I guess that we have to be looking at a different software package.

Mr BEANLAND: Yes. Thank you, Mr Chairman. If I could just go on to a couple of other things, hopefully more briefly. On page 17 of your annual report you talk about the matter of the confidentiality provisions under the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1974. You do not spell out in what areas some of these are a problem, though. I notice that you would like to be more forthcoming with the press about investigations. Can you give us some detail and information on exactly what you are looking at in this regard?

Mr Albietz: I think the section 22 deals with the secrecy provisions in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act and that is quite restrictive in the way the Ombudsman can raise a matter of public interest. That pretty much prohibits the Ombudsman from making any public comment at all in relation to a case that has been investigated in the office. That is pretty restrictive, in my view. There may well be issues that are of very significant public interest and I think that the Ombudsman should be able to comment on those. At present, he cannot. You might recall that I did indicate to the Committee a list of amendments that I thought should be appropriate for the Parliamentary

Commissioner Act. They have not gone anywhere at this stage. So it is just the question at the current time of doing all we can to try to get that backlog down and making sure that we cooperate fully and get the best out of the review.

Mr BEANLAND: It is just that I notice occasionally that someone—the Ombudsman or someone from the office, or it is claimed, anyway—makes a comment or two. I notice that there was something about an electricity matter here—

"A spokesman for Mr Albietz said his office was taking Mr Grimley's material very seriously and would contact the next of kin of other electrocution victims."

Obviously, sometimes you consider it worth while making a comment, anyway, or for somebody allegedly from your office making a comment.

Mr Albietz: Yes, it is very difficult. You have the press baying, particularly when a matter becomes very newsworthy. You have the media banging on your door asking you for a comment. It is not possible to say, "I offer no comment at all." You try to provide some comment without getting into trouble with the provisions of the secrecy provisions. It is a pretty fine line, but I think in those sorts of cases—that particular one is quite a major investigation that we are doing and I think that it would be very appropriate to be able to make some public comment in relation to it. Again, I am conscious that I am restricted by that and I cannot be as free with the media as I would like to be.

Mr BEANLAND: You do not have to answer this, but I presume that you have made submissions to the Government about this matter?

Mr Albietz: Certainly.

Mr BEANLAND: The third issue relates to page 18 of the annual report under the heading "Enhanced profile". It states—

"Various strategies will be devised to enhance the Office's profile. These may include the employment of a part-time media officer, an enhancement in the country trip program, media training for senior officers, and sponsoring a public administrative prize at tertiary level."

The reason I raise that is in relation to the Committee's suggestions about having a community education/liaison-type person. I have seen other commissions in other areas of responsibility appoint community relations people to be able to go out and talk to community groups. After all, I would think, Mr Albietz, if we get to the stage at which there were no complaints coming to you, we would have a perfect world. In other words, you could get to putting yourself out of business. That is what you should be aiming at. To do that, of course, you have to educate various State public sectors and local government, particularly the employees in those areas. I know that you have a lot of local government issues coming forward. I would have thought that in one of the areas of community education, a public relations person could be talking to the chief executive officers of the various councils around the State and other public sector bodies as to how they could improve their processes and programs to make their various employees aware of this so that we could look at cutting down the number of complaints that you are receiving at your office. I just do not see a media person doing that. I think that a media person is something totally different. Are you looking at this community education person or has that now moved to a media person? What is the situation there and why is the focus on the media person?

Mr Albietz: I only mentioned the media because that was in relation to your question about the confidentiality provisions in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act. Certainly, no move has been made at this stage to look at the appointment of an education officer. As I indicated, the concentration at the current time is on getting that backlog down as well as trying to cooperate fully and, as I say, get the best out of the review that we can. A big effort has been made this year in relation to agency feedback

reports. In other words, we look at the major areas of complaint, the agencies that bring the most complaints to the office. We have done a very detailed agent's report to each of those. I think that there are probably about 10 of them—the major agencies that receive large numbers of complaints. We have tried to portray a very cooperative attitude to try to indicate the problems that there are in those agencies, as we see it, and what should be done to try to stop any complaints recurring in those areas. I should indicate that those agency feedback reports have been very well received. There have been discussions with a number of those agencies with the whole view to try to prevent complaints being made in the areas that we are talking about.

Mr BEANLAND: Are these agencies putting in place training programs, or have you been carrying out training programs, or is it from the Ombudsman to the chief executive officer of the department or the local government? Just what sort of interrelationship is there?

Mr Albietz: What has occurred in relation to the subsequent discussions on those agency feedback reports is that a chief executive will come along with some of his officers and we will sit down and have a discussion. As I say, that has been very fruitful. They have indicated that in the training sessions that they do, they would like some of our officers to come and address their staff. We are very happy to do that.

Mr BEANLAND: Has that happened or is it still happening?

Mr Albietz: The agency reports have only just gone out and we are only just having those discussions now. I would anticipate that that will certainly occur before the end of this financial year.

Mr BEANLAND: Down the track—perhaps next financial year—we should start to start to see some of the results of those training programs?

Mr Albietz: Certainly.

Mr BEANLAND: What level of staff training are you looking at when you talk about training programs?

Mr Albietz: I guess it is up to the agency as to what sort of training programs they have and how they run them. All we have indicated is that we would be very happy to cooperate, attend and have an input into those training sessions. I am not sure at what level, though.

Mr BEANLAND: Your officers who go along to those training sessions, I presume, would be people such as—if it is to do with local government—Deputy Commissioner Metcalfe here, or Mr King if it is his area, or whichever area it is to do with. Are they the sort of people you would see going along?

Mr Albietz: It may well be a couple of people going along. Whatever agencies are involved, if we have people dealing with those complaints from that particular agency, certainly they would want to be involved and they would be involved.

Mrs GAMIN: Still on page 18 of the annual report, excellence in investigations, you mentioned the maintenance and improvement of the high quality investigations; provision of greater administrative law training for staff, focusing on judicial review and other court decisions; and also arranging a program of guest speakers from the public sector, academia and elsewhere to address investigative staff. I know also that the management review is looking at human resource issues, including formal and informal staff training. Would you like to explore what plans you have to institute a more formal staff training program?

Mr Albietz: Certainly. Staff training is very important. It certainly is an area that we are looking closely at. I think in the report I made some mention of a skills retention survey which went to all staff to try to get staff input as to what they saw as the major areas in which they needed training.

That has been very useful. As a result of that—I think I might have mentioned in the report itself that we have had training in areas such as negotiation and conflict resolution. We have had people come in talk about specific pieces of legislation and anti-discrimination. There have been time management courses, as well as courses in alternative complaint resolution and indigenous and juvenile misbehaviour issues. So we followed up on those. In addition, when the new staff was appointed and the new structure was in place, we had assistant commissioners. They have been sent to management training courses. They are now supervising and managing the staff in their team. We have given training to staff in other areas such as speed reading, changes to the industrial relations legislation, changes to local government legislation, changes to the Integrated Planning Act. So we have had people come and address the staff in relation to those areas. We certainly had training in relation to changes to the Corrective Services legislation. We have had their people come in and talk to our officers. Our officers have attended various workplace health and safety courses as well as the Crown Law seminars on various aspects of administrative law and other aspects of the law. Just recently we had representatives from the Department of Corrective Services and the Criminal Justice Commission address our staff. It is very much an ongoing and full program for training for our staff.

Mrs GAMIN: Do you get any feedback from the staff on the value that they are placing on these training programs?

Mr Albietz: Most certainly the feedback I get is that the staff are very interested in training. They find it beneficial and they would certainly like that to be maintained and kept going.

Mrs GAMIN: Following on from that, again on that same—page 18—which we seem to be concentrating on, you talk about the fact that the Parliamentary Commissioner Act has not been systematically reviewed since 1974 and as part of your strategic operational plan you are talking about the reviewing of the Act. Have you considered any sort of timetable for this review? Have you got any time frame on that?

Mr Albietz: The only time frame I have is to await the completion of the management review. Once that is completed, I think it is appropriate then to start looking at those specific issues. As I have indicated previously, the concentration is really on case backlog reduction and, of course, the management reviews.

Mrs GAMIN: I understand that. Have you got any particular aspects of the review of the Act that you would like to mention?

Mr Albietz: There are certainly a number of areas. You might recall that I did provide the Committee with a list of those particular items. I have done that in written form. I think the Committee has had access to that.

The CHAIRMAN: If I can just take you back to the previous item in relation to staff training, that was obviously a matter that was the subject of a recommendation of the Wiltshire review and subsequently endorsed by the Committee. I suppose the Committee was expecting and looking for some reference to that in your annual report. Can you perhaps give us some feedback as to how you saw the continuity of your consideration of the Wiltshire review in terms of reporting back either through your annual report or otherwise?

Mr Albietz: Certainly. That is an area that we can concentrate on this year in the annual report to address those particular issues that have come out of the Wiltshire report and the Parliamentary Committee review. Certainly they will be addressed this year in the annual report. As I said, I place a very great emphasis on matters such as training. Until the additional funding was provided, there was very little scope to provide training for our office. Now that the funding has been provided, certainly programs are in place and they certainly will be pursued and will be reported to the Parliament.

The CHAIRMAN: We look forward to it.

Mr PITT: I just take you back to page 16 of your report. A paragraph states—

"The Office has restructured internally with new lines of supervision and authority and has recruited well qualified staff. The benefit of this recruitment and restructure process should be apparent in the near future. The restructure process has involved no loss of jobs or disadvantage to any staff."

The review's first progress report, I understand, indicates there are still some issues that need to be investigated regarding the delegation of this work. Can you please just bring us up to date and tell us how it is going? You say it is going to be a success. I just wondered how you are going with it.

Mr Albietz: As I have indicated to the Committee, I believe that the restructure and the new delegation that has been put in place in conjunction with the new structure is working well in the sense that, as I indicated, the results that have been achieved are very good and, in my view, very significant. The reviewer, in discussions with me, sees a further delegation at the assistant commissioner level. That is certainly an issue that will be a primary matter that will be in the review report, I am sure. He certainly sees the need for a greater degree of delegation. My view has always been: let us put in a delegation, see how it operates first and, once you are satisfied that it is working well, you can then improve it, and certainly that will be the aim.

The CHAIRMAN: Any further comment?

Mr BEANLAND: I just have one to follow up on that last issue I was raising about the media officer. I am just wondering what benefits you expect to get from a media officer. It seems by the number of complaints that are coming in the Ombudsman's office certainly has a very high profile within the community; people seem to be able to contact you fairly readily. Is this to increase the profile, to create an image, or what exactly was the purpose of the media officer as against the need for training up people and so on?

Mr Albietz: If I can explain, I am not attempting to appoint a media officer; I am simply saying there are restrictions in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act in that I myself cannot comment to the media in relation to investigations. I am certainly not advocating that I do employ a media officer. The Wiltshire report did indicate that the Ombudsman needs to lift his profile. That was one of the major planks, as I saw it, in the report, but I hear you are saying that the Ombudsman has a high profile.

Mr BEANLAND: I think it depends on the emphasis. When you are talking about profiles, it is one thing to go out and be a splash in the media; it is another thing to be out there training up local government people, training up all these sector groups about whom people complain to you so that they get more skills in handling the issues so you do not receive so many complaints. That is what I see as lifting the profile, getting you trained up within the various sectors as distinct—that I call community relations and community training—from simply PR, media or whatever one likes to call it.

Mr Albietz: I certainly take the point that you are raising.

Mr PITT: Could I just follow up from something there? I do not want to concentrate on the media officer but the actual education program regarding the Ombudsman's Office. We have already heard that you have a high profile. I think everyone knows about the Ombudsman. I am just wondering if you feel that people really understand what the Ombudsman can and cannot do, the way in which the office itself approaches tasks and, I guess throwing in another one there, the capacity of the office to keep people abreast of how the investigation may be going? Can you see a role there in your restructure and appointment of people for an educative program to assist in that respect?

Mr Albietz: I certainly applaud what you are saying. I think what you are saying is absolutely spot on. It may well be, even after 25 years of operation, that some people still are not sure what an Ombudsman does. Certainly when people write to us, I think it is incumbent upon us to advise them what an Ombudsman can do and probably cannot do so that there are no illusions as to what an Ombudsman can achieve for somebody. I certainly do not have a problem with that—and also keeping people up to date with the progress of an investigation. I think your comment is well worth while pursuing.

With the resourcing we have now, there is no reason why we cannot do that. When you are really heavy into a backlog and have little resources and all the energy is devoted to trying to close files, trying to get good outcomes—there just has not been the time, unfortunately, for that. I take your point. I think that is a very good suggestion. I cannot see any reason why it cannot be taken on board right now.

Ms BOYLE: I would like to talk to you about two areas of the report. One, I think, is back on page 22. It relates to the jurisdictional overlaps of the office and Children's Commissioner as they relate to the Criminal Justice Act and various committees. Would you separate the two for me? I would be interested to hear where is the overlap, how does the overlap actually affect our constituents out there and has more happened on either of those issues since the writing of the report?

Mr Albietz: If we can take the Children's Commissioner first in that example, the Ombudsman handles complaints in relation to children's services. The Children's Commissioner handles complaints in relation to children's services. We both recognise that there is an overlap of jurisdiction. We sought to have that clarified when the Children's Commissioner legislation was enacted. That was not accepted. We were informed by Government at that stage that the approach would have to be through protocols to try to work it out ourselves as to what each agency takes on.

Since then there have been discussions between the Children's Commissioner and myself and also respective officers of each commissioner. That has reached a very satisfying result. We have agreed on the terms of the protocol. That has been submitted to writing and each office is happy with that. We are just looking at and giving a final tweak on giving some examples so that we each understand exactly what each jurisdiction will be so that it is exactly clear that there will not be any overlap. That is certainly happening now. I expect that within a month those protocols will be well and truly signed. Hopefully there will not be any further overlap. That has been progressed very well.

You also raised the CJC, or the Criminal Justice Commission. There is a problem there. If it is an administrative matter that is dealt with by the Criminal Justice Commission, the Ombudsman does have jurisdiction. I think that is recognised by the Criminal Justice Commission. I receive a number of complaints from people who are dissatisfied with a review or investigation by the Criminal Justice Commission. Now that there is a Parliamentary Criminal Justice Commissioner appointed, that is obviously the place where they should go.

The only difficulty is that in my legislation I am not to take up an issue—and normally I will not—if a person has a right of review by another body. The difficulty is that, under the legislative structure with the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Commissioner, a person does not have a right of review before that commission. They have a right for the matter to go to the Criminal Justice Committee and it is up to the committee as to whether they want to send it on to the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Commissioner. That is the difficulty. Certainly, there have been discussions with officers of the two commissions—or two commissioners. It is proposed that the Criminal Justice Commission and myself sit down with our respective staff and see if we can overcome the problem. But there is a problem in the legislation as has been set up.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for that. I have a different topic on page 28 of the report. That is about the treatment of sexual offenders. I think there was a flurry of publicity after some of the comments in

your report that suggested the resourcing in terms of the availability of treatment programs within prisons was limited and also in the post-release period. I would be pleased to hear whatever you would like to update us with but certainly what continuing role your office has, if any.

Mr Albietz: I guess again it is a fairly happy report in relation to that area, in part, in the sense that I think the report to the Parliament in relation to that area has been taken on board by the department. There certainly have been a number of discussions between departmental officers and my officers. As a result of that, my understanding is that they have appointed an additional psychologist and they have run an extra program. So at least 12 additional prisoners have been included on the program, and that will be ongoing. But I said "only in part", because I would like to see a greater involvement again by the department. But it is up to the department; they have the resourcing and all the rest of it. At least we have achieved some success there, I am happy to say.

Dr PRENZLER: While we are on Corrective Services, I notice that page 26 of the report relates to the Department of Corrective Services' drug strategies. It is obvious from your report that there must be lots of complaints to your office regarding visitors to prisons and drug strategies regarding strip searches, body cavity searches and whatever to try to prevent drugs from entering prisons, and we can sympathise with some of their thinking. I notice in here that you say—

"The degree of complaint and the harshness of some requirements created by the department's anti-drug strategy highlight this as an area for full review. I therefore propose an indepth review to see if the same objectives can be achieved in a less intrusive manner."

I am just wondering how far down the track you have got with that review. Is there a backlog of complaints to your department? I thank you very much, Mr King, because we touched on this with some of your officers this morning. That was great. Is there a backlog of complaints in this area? If there is, will your review help to reduce that backlog?

Mr Albietz: There certainly have been a number of complaints in that area and that is the reason why it was brought to the attention of the Parliament. There are probably two areas we are looking at. One is the testing of the urine samples of prisoners—that is one area—and who should actually do that testing, whether it is medical people or nursing people involved. That was an area we were concerned about. Another area was the restrictions on visits. The problem with people coming into jail is that perhaps they are bringing drugs with them and getting them into the jail. There is always a question as to what degree of evidence do they have in relation to that. Some of the bans that have been put on people who claimed they were innocent—and one would have to look pretty closely at the evidence as to what, in fact, were the drugs. It is usually based upon intelligence reporting. It is very difficult to ascertain what is the truth of that or otherwise because one is never provided with the actual evidence. Certainly there have been very intense discussions between our office and the departmental officers. As a result of the series of discussions there, the department has put out a number of options papers—very detailed papers—which cover those areas. Again, we will be making further submissions in relation to that, but it is an area that is receiving intense review by the department and we have provided a fair degree of resources to try to overcome the problems as we see them. That will certainly be ongoing. I do not know whether you raised that today with Trevor Gear. It is in his area that this is all occurring.

Dr PRENZLER: Do you have a backlog of complaints in your office regarding these areas?

Mr Albietz: My understanding—and I will probably ask Mr King to comment there—is that, yes, we certainly do have a number of complaints and there are a number of unresolved complaints. I will ask Mr King if he would like to comment as it is in his particular area.

Mr King: I simply say that we have a number of complaints. Whether you would call them a backlog or not, I am not sure. I do not know the exact number, but we are not talking about hundreds

or scores. Perhaps we are talking of a couple of dozen at the most—that sort of thing. We are dealing more with the systemic issue that is raised: are the authorities obeying the law when they are body cavity searching people; are they obeying the law when they are calling for urine samples; are they acting on reliable evidence when they are banning prisoners from having visits from their families with perhaps deleterious effects on their rehabilitation and the good harmony of the jail? That is the situation.

Dr PRENZLER: Do you think it has been abused by the prison authorities as a punishment for prisoners?

Mr King: We have never had formal evidence of that, so I would not want to answer that.

Dr PRENZLER: That is fine.

Mr PITT: You may be aware—I am sure you are—that the Government is seriously considering DNA testing for prisoners, and it is something which has my total support. Would it be appropriate now for your office to be discussing with the office of the Minister for Corrective Services the process that will be entered into to try to forestall or pre-empt any difficulties so that the process is as streamlined as possible so that when complaints are lodged, as they will be at some stage, you are able to more effectively handle them to the satisfaction of both the internee and the department itself?

Mrs GAMIN: That is an interesting one.

Mr Albietz: Most certainly. That is the idea. We sort of take these systemic issues on board to try to see if we can prevent complaints coming in that particular area. As I say, there have been discussions and a very detailed options paper has been put out in relation to how to address that. Our officers were involved very heavily in talking to prisons people, explaining the difficulties as we see it and suggesting ideas as to how they can be overcome. We are trying to cooperate as much as we can with the prison authorities and they with us to try to get a good result.

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee has a few final issues we would like to take up with you in relation to your report. I will just refer to some of the specific comments you made in the report, particularly about how you proceed with future directions. On page 6 of the report you refer to efforts being directed at detecting and addressing systemic practices and procedures and other serious problems in public administration and thus reducing the ever increasing public demand on the services of the office. Perhaps you would like to comment on that, and I will refer to a couple of others.

Mr Albietz: Certainly in systemic areas, the idea of the agency feedback reports is to try to identify particular areas in an agency that are causing problems and giving rise to complaints. I guess it is more so in the prisons area than anywhere else, because we get significant numbers of complaints in relation to prisons and we are able to form a view as to what are the major issues that are occurring. As I say, we can try to work through cooperatively to try to prevent those sorts of issues arising. We will continue to do that.

We have some other systemic issues on board in relation to the State Government area. One that Mr Beanland suggested or mentioned was the workplace health and safety investigations into deaths that are occurring on industrial sites. It is an area we are looking very closely at. It is those types of issues that we are trying to spend a good deal of time on, as I say, to try to prevent complaints in that area coming to our office. The only own motion investigation that was on foot was the registration—change of ownership—and that has certainly hit a brick wall. Until there is some legislative change, unfortunately, it will remain at the brick wall.

The CHAIRMAN: Next, on pages 5 and 18 of the report, you say that the primary focus for the next two years at least will be to reduce significantly the high number of cases currently open to the point where the office is able to respond immediately to any serious or significant matter that is

placed before it or considered worthy of an own motion investigation. You touched on the own motion investigation to some degree.

Mr Albietz: I have certainly indicated that I think our program of reducing the high case load is heading in the right direction. I am very confident about that. I have indicated a two to two and a half year time frame to get that down to manageable proportions. If we can demand manage the new complaints coming in, I think we are going to be very successful in that area. Even with the significant increase in the complaints, I am confident that within that space of time we will reduce the case load. All the officers are working towards it. I am sure we are going to achieve it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Page 15 of the report states—

"To be effective the Office needs to not only be informal and inexpensive but also timely in its investigations, and the challenge for the forthcoming year is for the Office to be able to respond immediately to any significant matter that is placed before it. On the timetable I have laid out this objective should be achievable within the next two years."

So you are confident of that?

Mr Albietz: I am very confident of that. I have taken on board the comments in the Wiltshire report and the parliamentary committee report in relation to formality. Last year I think there were 18 formal recommendations made. In the seven months to date, there have been two formal recommendations made. The approach has been to try to work constructively and informally with the agencies to achieve a good outcome. That, to date, has been very well received by the agencies. I think it is the way to go. We do seem to be achieving just as much, if not more, by the informal means. That is an area that had to be changed and is being changed. I think it is getting good results.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The Committee certainly hopes that the management review will provide you with even further support in achieving that.

Mr Albietz: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do members have any final questions or comments?

Mr BEANLAND: You covered my last two matters, Mr Chairman. I will see if there are any more.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good. While members think about final considerations—gentlemen, if any of you have any final statements on your annual report that might assist us and indeed the Parliament in understanding your operations over the past year and your future directions, you are welcome to provide that.

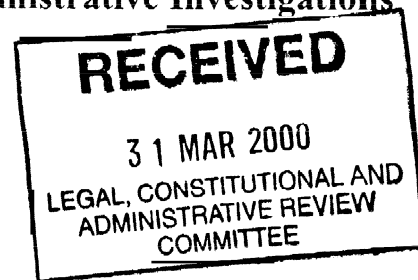
Mr Albietz: Mr Chairman, I have nothing additional to raise. I think that the examination by the Committee has been quite thorough. I have endeavoured to set out in the report the direction I think the office is heading. I have tried to supplement that today to indicate where I believe the office has changed, and for the better. I am hopeful that, if we keep going down that track, we will achieve greater results.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you. As there are no further questions, the Committee stands adjourned.

The Committee adjourned at 12.49 p.m.

0 MBUDSMAN

Parliamentary Commissioner for
Administrative Investigations



Your Ref:

Our Ref:

30 March 2000

Mr G Fenlon MLA
Chair
Legal, Constitutional & Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE Q 4000

Dear Mr Fenlon

I refer to my discussion with the Committee on 17 March last during which a number of matters arising from my 1998/99 Annual Report to Parliament were discussed.

I am returning herewith the transcript with some minor corrections only, as marked by hand on pages 1, 2, 8, 10, and 13.

Insofar as the Committee is contemplating making a report to Parliament, based on my Annual Report and our discussions on 17 March last I thought it might be appropriate if I also put forward other matters arising from the Annual Report which were not canvassed in detail in our discussion.

As you know my Office currently has three primary goals viz. administrative justice for Queenslanders, improvements in public administration in Queensland, and improved public access to and awareness of my Office.

Accordingly on the attachment hereto I have indicated, in dot point form and in accordance with those goals, some of the matters included in my Annual Report that indicate the activities and achievements of my Office during the 1998/99 financial year. I have also listed a number of matters under the generic heading of "Internal Office Activity" which identifies a number of major and/or significant projects that were undertaken during the year within the Office.

I trust that the Committee finds this additional information of interest and assistance.

Yours faithfully

[Original Signed]

F N Albietz
Commissioner



QUEENSLAND OMBUDSMAN 1998/99 ANNUAL REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

MATTERS NOT RAISED IN DETAIL WITH PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE 17 MARCH 2000

(A) ADMINISTRATIVE JUSTICE/IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

1. The highest number of matters ever received by the Office - **4062** - were received in 1998/99, indicating an ongoing strong public demand for the Office's services (p15).
2. 3718 matters were closed during the year, the second highest on record (25 fewer than the highest) and in excess of the targeted closure figure (p15).
3. A 3 percent increase in file closures per officer was achieved in accordance with the enterprise bargaining target (p15).
4. The number of cases more than two years old was reduced to 76 in accordance with enterprise bargaining target (p15).
5. 90% of cases received in 1997/98 were closed within 12 months (target: 80%) (p83).
6. 86% of cases closed in 1998/99 were under 12 months old (target: 80%) (p83).
7. 40 percent of cases were sustained and rectified wherever possible in favour totally or partially of the complainant (p15).
8. Systemic issues were identified and proposals for action canvassed, particularly in the corrections area (p17).
9. All recommendations were complied with totally or to the extent agreed following negotiation'(pp 15, 79).
10. Approximately 13 "feedback reports" were provided to substantial complaint generating agencies (p44). These agencies included WorkCover, Health, Main Roads, Public Trustee, Education, Families Youth and Community Care, Queensland Rail, Natural Resources and Transport and the major local governments.
11. Significant cases reported indicated achievement of significant outcomes for citizens (p51).
12. Administrative breach codes were refined to attempt to more accurately identify complaint trends in particular agencies (p16). (N.B. The NSW Ombudsman has now embarked on a similar exercise)

(B) ACCESS AND AWARENESS/OUTREACH

1. Public interviews were held at fifty-three regional centres, two ATSI councils and each of the State's fourteen correctional centres twice (p45).
2. In "feedback reports" to selected major agencies (see above) the Office has encouraged those agencies to include in correspondence to the public advice as to statutory appeal rights or the right to apply for review by this Office when conveying adverse decisions to them (p18).
3. The Office brochure continues to be available in five languages and is currently under review.

4. Relationships with the media are good, with comment being made as permitted by the *Parliamentary Commissioner Act*.
5. Relationships with agencies and complainants are good (p16).

(C) INTERNAL MATTERS

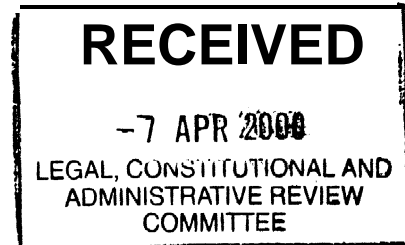
1. New staff were recruited and trained; over seven hundred applications for positions were received and assessed.
2. The Office was restructured internally with five teams in two divisions, each team being headed by an Assistant Commissioner at A08 level. This has allowed for greater coaching/mentoring of staff and greater delegation of authority from the Commissioner and the Deputies.
3. All Divisions in the Office were relocated.
4. A skills retention survey was completed (p15).
5. Training was given to staff via individual coaching/mentoring by Assistant and Deputy Commissioners, and external training in negotiation, conflict resolution, specific legislation, anti-discrimination, time management, practices in alternative complaint resolution bodies, and the treatment of indigenous prisoners and juvenile prisoners (p15).
6. Over fifty recommendations for change were implemented following a survey of complainants and agencies (p15).
7. Performance indicators to monitor productivity and effectiveness were continued, including file closures (externally and internally), file movements (internally), case load audits (internally), implementation of recommendations, rectification of sustained cases, complaints received per public interview session and the age profile of the intake and existing case load (p11).
8. A new human resources payroll system was implemented (p34).
9. A new accrual budgeting system was implemented (p34).
10. The development of an alternative data base has continued but has been placed on hold due to the current management review of the Office.
11. Office IT infrastructure was upgraded to provide a standard operating environment, and a dedicated IT officer was appointed (p34).
12. The groundwork was laid for internet and external email access for all officers from their individual PCs.
13. A new telephone system for the two Offices was installed.
14. Security was upgraded.

Your Ref:

Our Ref:

Queensland
0 MBUDSMAN
Parliamentary Commissioner for
Administrative Investigations

4 April 2000



Gen 20

Mr G Fenlon MLA
Chair
Legal, Constitutional & Administrative
Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE Q 4000

Dear Mr Fenlon

RE: ANNUAL REPORT - QUEENSLAND OMBUDSMAN - 1998/99

I refer to your letter of 30 March 2000 and my discussion with Ms Kerry Newton earlier today.

I confirm if the Committee is proposing to report to Parliament on my last Annual Report it is my desire that the additional material supplementary to matters canvassed at the meeting of the Committee (which was attached to my letter) be included in the Committee's report to Parliament.

I would also suggest that the information contained in the transcript on intake, closures and backlog be updated with the latest data available from the computerised case management system in the Office. The comparative position at 31 March this year and last year is as follows:

	2000	1999	
intake (new complaints)	3400	2850	550 additional cases received or 19% increase on the previous year
Closures	3644	2156	1488 additional cases closed or 69% increase on the previous year
Backlog	1684	2306	622 case reduction or 27% decrease on the previous year



It is clear from the latest statistics that the additional resources and staff, despite their time and effort devoted to the current management review, are having a substantial impact on meeting closure targets and thereby reducing case backlog.

Yours faithfully

[Original Signed]

F N Albietz
Commissioner