



Speech by
**Hon. NITA
CUNNINGHAM**

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard 5 April 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Local Government, Management of Complaints

Hon. J. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Planning) (10.03 a.m.), by leave: An area of deep personal interest for me is ensuring that governments appropriately represent their communities and that people have their issues and concerns addressed fairly and effectively.

As Local Government Minister, I receive a significant volume of correspondence from people raising concerns about the actions of their local government and looking to me to intervene on their behalf.

Many of the complaints or concerns relate to the day-to-day business and decisions of local government and I have very limited powers of intervention. While I may initiate inquiries with the local government concerned to satisfy myself that appropriate procedures have been followed, there are few occasions when I can actually intervene or direct a local government to take a particular action.

My predecessor, the Honourable Terry Mackenroth, released a brochure to explain the role of the Local Government Minister and to outline an appropriate complaint resolution process to try to ensure that people could have their issues resolved without unnecessary delays.

Subsequent to the release of this brochure, my Department of Local Government and Planning established a working party consisting of representatives from 14 local governments and the ombudsman's office to consider the introduction of improved local government complaints management practices.

A recent survey of 90 local governments found that 83 per cent of those surveyed do not have a complaints policy; 81 per cent of councils do not have a customer charter; 70 per cent do not have a documented complaints handling procedure; 86 per cent record the complaints made to council but 61 per cent of councils do not have a specific procedure outlining how councillors should respond to complainants or their role in the complaints process; counter staff are most likely to handle customer complaints but 30 per cent of councils stated that no staff were trained in that area; over 90 per cent of councils surveyed do not publish complaints data in their annual report or other council publications; and 83 per cent of those councils believed that a complaints management guideline would improve their complaints procedures.

Based on these results, my department is presently developing a set of complaints management guidelines to meet the identified needs of councils. My department is also proposing to offer training for local governments in this area if it is required. I see this as an important initiative that will help the people of Queensland in their dealings with local government and make decision-makers more accountable.
