



Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 3 November 2016

**LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION
TO TAKE NOTE**

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (12.18 pm): I move—

That the House take note of report No. 35 of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee tabled on 30 August.

As chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee I rise to speak to report No. 35 relating to the oversight of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman. The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee has statutory oversight responsibilities of not only the Queensland Ombudsman but also the offices of the Information Commissioner, the Electoral Commissioner and the Criminal Organisation Public Interest Monitor. This report is provided as part of the committee's statutory oversight responsibility for the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman.

In respect of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman, it is fair to say that it does provide a fair, independent and timely investigative service for people who believe that they have been adversely affected by the decisions of a public agency and it also helps public agencies to improve their decision-making and administrative practices. During the public hearing, the committee members heard about the important role that the Queensland Ombudsman performs in respect of hearing from certain bodies.

The committee met with the Queensland Ombudsman, Mr Phil Clarke, on 25 May this year. Appearing with Mr Phil Clarke were Mr Andrew Brown, Deputy Ombudsman; Ms Diane Gunton, Director, Corporate Services Unit; and Ms Leanne Robertson, Principal Adviser, Public Interest Disclosures. During the public hearing the Ombudsman advised the committee of some interesting findings and explained to the committee that certain matters had concluded and that the workload had increased over 2014-15. He also noted—

The number of contacts made with the office, complaints received and investigations completed all continued to increase steadily. This has been achieved while maintaining the office's focus on timely management and resolution of all matters.

As you can appreciate, Mr Deputy Speaker Crawford—and I am sure you would be in the same position as I am—on many occasions people come into your electoral office to seek some sort of opportunity to raise matters under certain instruments about certain bodies where the capacity within your office prevents you from providing an answer in a number of cases. They are generally referred to the Queensland Ombudsman to assist them in accommodating the issues they wish to raise.

In respect of complaints received, the Ombudsman identified to the committee that the office dealt with 12,982 contacts, an increase of nearly 1,000 contacts compared with the previous year's total of 11,995. The office also finalised 6,962 complaints, an increase of nearly 700 complaints compared with the total of 6,308 complaints in the previous year. Of those complaints, it was broken down to the following extent: 69 per cent were about state government departments, including departments and statutory authorities—that figure was 4,849; 25 per cent were about local councils—that figure was 1,744; and five per cent were about public universities. There was a good range of areas that the Ombudsman had the opportunity to explore that were identified by those complaints and issues raised.

The time lapse, however, is improving. According to the annual report, the office continues to closely monitor the time taken to finalise complaints to ensure that improvements from business practices implemented over the past three years are maintained. More specifically, the report notes that in 2014-15, it took an average of 12.2 days to finalise a complaint compared with 11.6 days in 2013-14. This average includes complaints finalised after preliminary assessments or investigations. The report provides an explanation for that. The average time taken to finalise an investigation in 2014-15, being 12.2 days, is similar to the average of 12 days for the 2012-13 period. This represents a significant improvement from the average of 24.3 days taken to finalise a complaint in 2011-12. On that note, due to my time running out, I commend the report to the House.