



Speech By  
**Melissa McMahon**


**MEMBER FOR MACALISTER**

---

Record of Proceedings, 17 October 2019

**LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (3.05 pm): I rise to speak to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee report No. 40, *Oversight of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman*, currently on the table. The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee has oversight of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman. This oversight includes but is not limited to monitoring and reviewing the performance of the Ombudsman and its functions and examining each annual report tabled in this parliament. The Queensland Ombudsman's annual report was tabled in this House on 28 September 2018. The Queensland Ombudsman and senior staff attended a public meeting with the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee on 25 February 2019.

Before I go into some aspects of the committee's report and the annual report that I would like to comment on, I note that, before consideration of this report adjourned in August this year, the member for Toowoomba South made some pointed remarks about this Ombudsman's report. He was unimpressed with the member for Toohey's assessment of the report, indicating that he did not believe people would be interested in how many people checked the Queensland Ombudsman website in the last 12 months. Perhaps the member may not be interested in that, but, considering the growth in complaints which the member also pointed out was attributed by the commissioner to an increased awareness of the Ombudsman's role, perhaps it is important to note the work the Ombudsman's office is doing to increase public awareness of its role.

Back then, the member also remarked that he wanted to look at the overall number of complaints and the fact that there has been an increase 'that is up to 4,844 complaints relating to statutory authorities' and 'the significant shift in the number of complaints to the department related to child and family services.' The beauty of being on this committee is that we get to look at the entire committee report and the entire annual report. If the member had done so in quoting those statistics, he would understand why there has been an increase in those numbers. The annual report states—

Since the closure of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian in 2014, the Office has had a more significant and immediate role in oversighting the management of child safety complaints ...

It was even referenced in our committee report. I suggest that the member continue looking a little closer into the reports. More broadly, the member's points about the increased number of complaints—this was something we canvassed during the public meeting; in fact, it was the member for Lockyer who asked a question of the commissioner about the increase in public interest disclosures—were addressed in the public meeting. If the member would like to have a look, the transcript of that meeting states—

... there has been an increase in the number of public interest disclosures being reported by agencies over the last two to three financial years. I do not suggest that that is indicative of an increase in wrongdoing by public sector officers in public agencies.

Further—

What I am suggesting is that hopefully through the outreach work that the office has been doing—

and that may include the website—

agencies are much better equipped to identify wrongdoing and to identify matters that fall within the parameters of the Public Interest Disclosure Act.

The Ombudsman himself went on to elaborate on this. Additionally, when appearing before the committee the Queensland Ombudsman tabled a paper providing a snapshot of the office's performance over the first and second quarters. Of note was that, for all of those complaints, the number of recommendations for improvements in public administration saw a 17 per cent decrease, so the agencies are on the right track.

One of the other metrics the committee paid particular attention to was efficiency dealing with interactions. Some 7,244 complaints were finalised during the reporting period within 10 days of receipt. That is an amazing statistic. I thank the Ombudsman and his staff for the work they are doing. As has already been commented on by the member for Southern Downs, their work in completing the recommendations from the strategic review has been ongoing. There are only six recommendations outstanding.