



Speech By  
**Jonty Bush**


**MEMBER FOR COOPER**

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Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2021

**LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (3.55 pm): As a member for Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, I too would like to rise and make a contribution to report No. 17, *Oversight of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman*. As others have already articulated, the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee has oversight responsibilities for the Queensland Ombudsman. The report provides information regarding the performance of the Ombudsman and its functions under the Ombudsman Act. The committee reviewed the annual report and conducted a public hearing with the Queensland Ombudsman, Mr Anthony Reilly, and his team on 14 June. As others have, I would like to thank them for their assistance and for taking us through their activities and performance in the reporting period.

We heard that the Queensland Ombudsman's office strives to cultivate fair and accountable public administration in Queensland and that they do that in a few different ways. Firstly, as we have touched on, they investigate administrative decisions, usually following a complaint, and often from members of the public. They help agencies improve practices by providing training, information and overseeing a system of public interest disclosures. During the reporting period the office continued to receive and investigate complaints about state government departments, statutory authorities, local councils and public universities. The Queensland Ombudsman's office received 11,074 contacts, of which 7,207 were treated as complaints and 1,113 were fully investigated.

The wide range of matters investigated were reflected in the Ombudsman's office's new *Casebook 2020*—which we heard about during the public hearings—which was published in February with the authorisation of the Speaker. I was particularly interested in *Casebook 2020*. It is a new publication for the Ombudsman's office and contains a sample of the outcomes that the Ombudsman achieved through its investigations. It is a resource that is intended to support Queensland public servants in their administrative decision-making, which further demonstrates the important contribution that the office makes to Queensland's good governance framework.

Due to COVID the number of contacts, complaints and investigations set out in the 2019-20 annual report were slightly lower. We heard that was mostly due to a drop in demand for services when COVID first hit. Their contacts in fact almost halved, going from an average of around 1,000 a month to about 555. In relation to the nature of the complaints, perhaps predictably given the operating environment that we are in, we heard about an increase in complaints in relation to Queensland Health. Those complaints were largely about issues regarding border closures and quarantine arrangements. During this period Queensland Health worked closely with the Ombudsman's office to set up processes to manage those particular complaints. The Queensland Ombudsman also worked quite closely with Queensland Health to review more broadly their complaints-handling process. I thought that was a really good demonstration of how departments can work together to be responsive and to follow and develop good practice.

COVID obviously had a particular impact on the management of prisons and youth detention centres. We know that the Queensland Ombudsman's office operates a visiting scheme. Following a pause in visits because of COVID they did resume physical visits to youth detention centres in late 2020, but they also moved to an online space to continue visits, particularly in the adult centres, which I think was indicated as something they might look at retaining.

As noted by the Ombudsman at the hearing and by others here in the House today, I also would like to acknowledge the great contribution to improving fairness in public administration made by the former ombudsman, Phil Clarke, who retired as the ombudsman on 9 July after almost 10 years in the role. I congratulate the current Ombudsman, Anthony Reilly, on his appointment and I wish him every luck and future success. I commend the report to the House.