




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**  
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2021

## LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

### Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (3.37 pm): I move—

That the House take note of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee Report No. 17, 57th Parliament, *Oversight of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman*, tabled on 9 November 2021.

The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee has oversight responsibilities for the office of the Queensland Ombudsman with the Ombudsman Act 2001 conferring functions on the committee including: to monitor and review performance; to report to the Legislative Assembly; and to examine each annual report of the office of the Queensland Ombudsman. The committee has reviewed the Queensland Ombudsman 2019-20 annual report, which was tabled on 24 September 2020. The annual report provided a detailed focus on the work done by the office over that period.

The office of the Queensland Ombudsman was established to investigate the administrative actions of Queensland government agencies, local councils and universities. The majority of investigations arise from complaints received, but the Ombudsman also conducts own-initiative investigations. The office received 11,074 contacts, of which 7,207 were treated as complaints, 2,677 matters were outside jurisdiction and 1,113 were fully investigated. The annual report noted that a further 16,443 people were directed from the online complaint form to their outside of jurisdiction webpage. Of the 7,207 complaints received, 4,987 were about state government agencies, 1,859 were about local councils and 352 were about public universities. The annual report noted that the spread of complaints across agency types was almost the same as the previous two years.

The average age of a complaint when closed at preliminary assessment was 2.2 days, exceeding the target of 10 days. Notably, 85 per cent of complaints were finalised within 10 days of receipt, 94 per cent were finalised within 30 days and 100 per cent of complaints were finalised within 12 months. Due to COVID, the number of contacts, complaints and investigations set out in the 2019-20 annual report were slightly lower than for the previous year, 2018-19.

Since March 2020, complaints about Queensland Health increased as a result of COVID related complaints and were largely about border closures and/or quarantine arrangements with people concerned that they were not allowed to travel across the border or concerned about the requirement to be in or the conditions in quarantine.

The annual report noted that the office continues 'to monitor child safety complaints as part of its continued oversight role'. The office received 440 complaints relating to child safety matters in 2019-20 compared with 513 complaints received in 2018-19.

In 2019-20, the office delivered a total of 151 training sessions, including 71 in regional areas, to 2,785 public sector officers with the annual report attributing the 38 per cent reduction to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics of training included principles of decision-making, complaints management, public sector ethics, managing unreasonable conduct, practical ethics for local government and PID management.

During 2019-20, the office published two major reports: *The Forensic Disability Service report: An investigation into the detention of people at the Forensic Disability Service*; and *Management of child safety complaints—second report: An investigation into the management of child safety complaints within the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women*.

The committee held a public hearing on 14 June 2021. As was acknowledged by the Ombudsman at the hearing, I too would like to acknowledge the 'great contribution to improving fairness in public administration' made by former ombudsman Phil Clarke, who retired as Queensland Ombudsman on 9 July 2020 after almost 10 years in the role.

The office published their *Casebook 2020*, which contains information about 24 of the office's investigation outcomes. The Ombudsman noted that the casebook is a useful resource.