




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 2 December 2021

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.42 pm): The office of the Queensland Ombudsman, as an independent authority, plays a vital role in ensuring that government departments are held to account for their decisions and to provide insights into ways that government agencies can do their business better. Importantly, it is one of the few ways that Queenslanders can have government decisions reviewed.

The process leading to report No. 17 on the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee's oversight of the office of the Queensland Ombudsman allowed the committee to review the annual report and to directly question the Queensland Ombudsman and departmental representatives in relation to their activities and how this has improved accountability across departments. This includes their ongoing commitment to providing training to public sector officers across Queensland which is important and should be encouraged and resourced appropriately.

With another four years before the next strategic review of the office, it is imperative that the oversight committee is able to 'fill in the gaps'. With 11 per cent of investigations not completed within the targeted time frames, it was pleasing to see that investigative recommendations have been fully accepted by the agencies referred to, which should lead to ongoing systemic improvements. The annual report noted that there were 150 requests for a review of a previous decision by the Ombudsman, which is an increase of 14 per cent over the previous year. It is this aspect which I speak about.

As noted in my statement of reservation, the process of general service complaints regarding the office of the Queensland Ombudsman has not yet been resolved, with the committee deciding to revisit this sometime in 2022. Due to the confidentiality associated with committee proceedings, the issue about lack of transparency and accountability is reinforced. This means confidence in 'independent of government' processes such as parliamentary committees and offices including the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and others can be eroded unnecessarily.

Invariably, private committee meetings outnumber public hearings and public scrutiny, and the inherent bias of government appointed chairs with casting votes can distort the process in favour of the incumbent government. I again request that these are issues which should be considered by the CLA, particularly noting the lack of transparency of decision-making and less than full disclosure of committee deliberations and decisions which could impact on both parliament and our independent public institutions, leading to unreported and unresolved issues. It is important that Queenslanders have confidence in the parliamentary oversight role of independent bodies that investigate government decisions on behalf of everyday Queenslanders.

I thank the Queensland Ombudsman and departmental representatives for their work and for providing comprehensive details of the working of the office and how it is striving hard to serve the people of Queensland with the high percentage of closed cases demonstrating many good outcomes. I extend my thanks to our chair, fellow committee members and the secretariat for their ongoing commitment to facilitate effective oversight of independent authorities and for the work that goes into this. I wish you all a very merry Christmas.