




Speech By
Jason Hunt

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Record of Proceedings, 1 December 2022

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr HUNT** (Caloundra—ALP) (3.17 pm): I rise today to contribute briefly to the report of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee related to the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman. The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee has oversight responsibilities for the Queensland Ombudsman. This report provides information regarding the performance of the Queensland Ombudsman of their functions under the Ombudsman Act 2021. The committee reviewed the Queensland Ombudsman's annual report 2020-21, which was tabled on 27 September 2021. The committee also held a public hearing with Queensland Ombudsman Mr Anthony Reilly and his staff on 9 May 2022.

The Office of the Queensland Ombudsman has oversight of the actions of Queensland government agencies, local councils and universities. The Ombudsman reported on a range of performance and service measures in its annual report, including investigating complaints, improved decision-making through engagement, training and advice and public interest disclosure oversight.

The statistics and data mentioned in the report, while not terribly gripping to read, are in fact extremely important and also encouraging as we consider the good work done by the office. For example, 10,758 contacts were made to the office for advice, assistance or complaint resolution. Impressively, the preliminary assessment of a complaint was completed in just a fraction over three days. Even more impressively, of the 190 recommendations handed down in investigations, 100 per cent of them were accepted by their respective agencies. The office has also recently established a new complaints handler network to build skills and knowledge across the sector in complaints handling. The Ombudsman advised—

The network meets quarterly with officers who are involved in complaints management in agencies being a part of the network and aims to improve complaints handling across agencies. The complaints handler network uses the same model as our successful public interest disclosure network, which is the same mode of operation.

That is indicative of an agile, responsive and highly effective public sector.

As we might expect, COVID did impact on the reporting period, and the training sessions delivered by the office were down from 151 to 97—still a respectable number by any measure given the circumstances and more so when we consider that 93 per cent of participants indicated that the training delivered by the office improved their decision-making capability. At the same time it was also pleasing to hear that the 'Good decisions' training video was viewed over 1,800 times in an eight-month period after its release in October 2021. Further, of the 164 internal review requests and the 180 that were finalised, the original decision was confirmed in 137 cases; reviews were withdrawn by the complainant or declined by the office in 30 cases; and decisions were not upheld in 13 cases.

Unfortunately, the Office was 'very heavily impacted' by the February and March floods due to the flooding of their building in Albert Street. The Ombudsman foreshadowed an impact in terms of timeliness—in particular, when the Ombudsman reports on the 2021-22 year due to the power being cut off for over a week and employees not being able to go into the office.

As a consequence of the very comprehensive report conducted by the office, the committee was able to focus its attention on a number of key areas including but not limited to: the management of complaints received about the office; the handling of premature investigation complaints by the office; the proposed new role of the Ombudsman as the Inspector of Detention Services and whether a commitment of funding had been made and the timing of the first strategic review of that same new role; and the powers and functions of the Ombudsman in relation to corrections and youth justice and whether the inspections are all announced, scheduled and planned inspections or unannounced.

I congratulate the office on the thoroughness of their report and the quality of information they were able to relay during the public hearing. On that note, I commend to the House the contents of this report.