



Speech By  
**Jonty Bush**


**MEMBER FOR COOPER**

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Record of Proceedings, 1 December 2022

**LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (3.26 pm): I rise to make a contribution to report No. 35, which is oversight of the Queensland Ombudsman. I do that in my capacity as a member on the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee. I start by thanking my parliamentary colleagues, particularly the chair, the member for Toohey; the secretariat; and the Parliamentary Service staff for the work they have contributed. I also acknowledge and thank the Queensland Ombudsman, Anthony Reilly, and the Deputy Ombudsman, Angela Pyke, for their attendance and contributions to the report.

The Queensland Ombudsman's office does not need any introduction or explaining in this House. Obviously their objective is to create a fair and accountable Public Service. All of us here would know the value of that service. Certainly I have referred constituents through to their office for help with resolving complaints against government departments. It is really reassuring to know that they are there. I think it is also really important to have the level of oversight through a parliamentary committee for their services.

We reviewed their performance both through the annual report and through a public hearing. In summary, there was nothing particularly contentious about the reporting period for the office. In the reporting period in terms of their complaints and investigations, the office received 10,758 contacts, of which around two-thirds were treated as complaints and a little over 1,000 were investigated. They are similar numbers to the reporting period prior, which I was also involved in.

The timeliness of the complaints and investigations was also of a high standard. The average time to complete the preliminary assessments of complaints was 3.2 days, compared to a target of 10 days. The proportion of investigations completed within the target time frame was 84 per cent, which is down slightly from 89 per cent but still within what I thought to be a reasonable threshold. Outcomes from investigations were also consistent with the reporting period prior, resulting in a rectification action of 14 per cent. In both years 100 per cent of recommendations were accepted by the relevant agencies.

What I would like to do instead in my contribution is talk to some of the statutory functions and powers that they have around conducting their own investigations. In this reporting period, the Queensland Ombudsman's office initiated five investigations and published two reports.

The first was the fire ants report, which was an investigation into the timeliness of responses to notifications of suspected fire ant activity—which I read—which was fantastic. They also published their second casebook, which reports on a selection of investigation outcomes. The casebook is really intended to help the Public Service particularly uplift some of their own investigation and complaints handling processes. I am not going to use it as a prop, but this is it here. It is a fantastic resource for all members to have a look at. There are a number of case studies here around the accessibility of complaint systems and local resolution. There is one in particular that I would like to share with the

House. The casebook was discussed as part of the annual report and part of the public hearing, so I consider it to be relevant. I think it does a really great job of highlighting the importance of the Queensland Ombudsman's office, and in the time I have left I will try to explain it.

Emily was an 18-year-old and had previously been identified as a child needing care under the department of child safety. She was not living with her parents, but she had approached the department to try and assist her in resolving the situation and returning home. The department had given her a list of services to help her live independently. Emily did not believe that was the outcome she wanted so she made a complaint to the department. They resolved that it was out of scope.

Emily went to the Queensland Ombudsman's office and they investigated her complaint. They found that the complaint was within scope because the Queensland Ombudsman's office had also completed an investigation some years prior into the whole of the child safety complaints process and made a number of recommendations in relation to how to improve those complaints processes. As part of that complaint investigation by the Ombudsman's office the department of child safety had strengthened some of their complaints systems. This was another opportunity for the Queensland Ombudsman's office to come back and remind the department of this new complaints system. This was a fantastic outcome both for the proactive investigation work they do and the reminder work they do with departments in helping clients access those complaints systems. I thought that was a great example to use. I commend the report to the House.