




Speech By
Jason Hunt

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Record of Proceedings, 22 May 2024

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr HUNT** (Caloundra—ALP) (2.54 pm): I rise to make this brief contribution to the committee reporting process as it pertains to the Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee oversight of the Queensland Ombudsman. As always, the committee, under the tender benevolent guidance of the member for Toohey, acquitted itself magnificently.

As part of its jurisdiction in this area, the committee may report to the Legislative Assembly on any matter concerning the entity, the entity's functions or the performance of the entity's functions that the committee considers should be drawn to the Legislative Assembly's attention; and examine the annual report of the entity tabled in the Legislative Assembly and, if appropriate, to comment on any aspect of the report.

Under the Ombudsman Act, the office investigates complaints about the actions and decisions of state government departments and agencies, local councils and public universities. The office oversees the implementation of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010, reviews the way public sector agencies deal with public interest disclosures and educates and provides advice to public sector agencies about PIDs.

The annual report meets the reporting obligations under the Financial Accountability Act 2009 and the annual report requirements for Queensland government agencies. The office reports on a range of performance and service measures in its annual report, including investigating complaints; improved decision-making through engagement, training and advice; PID oversight; and financial performance and staffing.

Pleasingly, there were signs of constant and overall improvement in performance as reflected in the sheer volume. There were 10,398 contacts received by the office for advice, assistance or complaint resolution. This is down from 2020-21, when there were 10,758. The annual report states 1,583 cases were assessed as involving a human rights element—down from 2,159 cases in the previous year.

Equally as pleasing are the improvements noted in training and delivery of training for staff. In 2021-22, the office delivered a program of administrative improvement initiatives to develop the quality of decision-making and administrative practices in agencies. This included 175 training sessions, with 3,145 public sector officers—almost double the 97 training sessions held in the previous year.

In 2021-22, 129 internal review requests were received and 127 were finalised—which was very impressive. The original decisions were confirmed in 76 cases, reviews were withdrawn by the complainant or declined by the office in 47 cases and decisions were not upheld in four cases. With such a volume of finalised reviews, it is a credit to the office that the measures of client satisfaction were so high.

In 2020-21, the office implemented a new process for measuring client satisfaction involving an email survey to clients whose cases had been closed in the two months prior. Continuing in 2021-22, the overall survey reported that 60 per cent of respondents were either neutral, satisfied or very satisfied.

In the state of Queensland a person can make a public interest disclosure in an effort to report corruption, maladministration and misuse of public resources. It contributes to the cost of providing public services. It reduces the quality of services as a result of unfair, unreasonable, unlawful decisions and actions. Wrongdoing by particular public sector officers and agencies damages the reputation of the wider public sector.

The PID Act encourages the disclosure of information about suspected wrongdoing in the public sector so that public sector organisations can better identify wrongdoing; suspected wrongdoing can be properly evaluated and investigated; actions can be taken to fix these problems; or systems that can reduce the risk of wrongdoing can be implemented. There were 2,092 disclosure types arising from PIDs reported to the office—an increase by 19.4 per cent from the previous year at 1,766.

PIDs relating to corrupt conduct were the most commonly reported type of wrongdoing, representing 87.9 per cent. The committee also noted the establishment of the Inspector of Detention Services, as reported on by the office. This is a role to be undertaken by the Ombudsman. Our committee looks forward to future updates on how this role is supporting continuous improvement for places of detention and related services throughout the state of Queensland.

Debate, on motion of Mr Hunt, adjourned.