




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 22 May 2024

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (2.49 pm): I rise to speak on the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee report on the oversight of the Queensland Ombudsman. The report relates to the performance of the Ombudsman's office during the 2021-22 year as covered by its annual report tabled on 26 September 2022. During 2021-22 the office received 6,662 complaints, of which 1,108 were investigated. As a result of these investigations, the office made 180 recommendations for improvements to agencies—99 per cent of which were accepted by the relevant agency.

A selection of case studies from the Ombudsman's investigations were published in the second investigations Casebook 2022. Since its release, the 2022 Casebook has been downloaded or viewed over 1,100 times. In 2021-22, 40 per cent of the complaints to the Ombudsman's office were from outside of South-East Queensland. In order to assess how to improve Ombudsman services to people in regional, rural and remote areas, the Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman visited regional communities in 2021-22, including Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Roma and Woorabinda. They met with local MPs and their electorate staff, as well as local governments and community organisations.

The Office of the Queensland Ombudsman also has oversight of the Public Interest Disclosure Act, the PID Act. This role includes monitoring the management of PIDs, collecting statistics and identifying trends, and viewing the way public sector agencies deal with PIDs. According to the 2021-22 report, 1,466 PIDs were reported—229 fewer than the 2020-21 period. During the public hearing last October, the Ombudsman mentioned that these figures have since increased significantly. According to the Ombudsman's 2022-23 report, the number of PIDs has risen 36.1 per cent since 2021-22—a very concerning development, particularly since most PIDs relate to corrupt conduct. Corruption was the subject of 92.1 per cent in 2022-23 compared to 85.7 per cent in 2021-22.

The 2022-23 report also shows that all 933 matters reported by the HHS were concerned with corrupt conduct. Nearly 86 per cent of them were identified as role reporter disclosures. Role reporters are officers who identify wrongdoings in the performance of their duties including human resource officers, auditors, inspectors and investigators. This increase in PIDs and the overwhelming preponderance of PIDs concerning corrupt conduct needs to be looked at much more closely by the Ombudsman and the committee in the next review.

The 2021-22 year marked the 20th anniversary of the commencement of the Ombudsman Act 2001. To mark the event, the Ombudsman's office undertook analysis of the various insights contained in the report of its major investigations since 2001. The aim was to identify focus areas for improvement. The most common insights included the need for policies and procedures to be effectively communicated and regularly reviewed; good information and record management to ensure quality,

compliance and accountability; and/or agencies to be supported by staff with the right knowledge and skills. Other insights included providing reasons or any decisions made using human-centred design and improvement governance arrangements with partner oversight agencies.

The 2022 year was one of growth and change for the Ombudsman's office, starting with the passing in 2022 of the Inspector of Detention Services Act. The act established a new oversight role for the Ombudsman which includes conducting inspections of detention services and reporting to parliament on the outcomes of those inspections. The act fully commenced on 1 July 2023, having partially commenced on 9 December 2022—which is my birthday—and will no doubt feature more prominently in future annual reports.

Another driver of change in 2021-22 was Professor Peter Coaldrake's Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector. Since the Coaldrake report was published, the office has actively engaged with government on implementing the report's many excellent recommendations. Throughout 2021-22, the Ombudsman continued to release high-quality publications of vital importance to Queenslanders.

The new incentives were also implemented to improve community understanding around how to raise concerns. These have greatly assisted many people in understanding the role of the Ombudsman, why the office exists, when it should be engaged with and what to expect from the whole process. The Ombudsman and his staff should be congratulated on their performance. I would like to thank the committee and the secretariat and staff for their diligent work conducting the review on this particular bill.