

Ombudsman's report

The Office of the Queensland Ombudsman supports Queenslanders by striving to be an agent of positive change for fair and accountable public administration in Queensland.

Under the *Ombudsman Act 2001*, the Office helps Queenslanders by giving people a timely, effective and independent way to have administrative actions of public sector agencies investigated. We also provide education and advice to public sector officers.

Additionally, as the oversight agency for the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010* (PID Act), the Ombudsman performs an advisory role in the management of public interest disclosures, monitors trends and reviews how they are managed in public sector agencies.

Like most agencies, the COVID-19 pandemic was keenly felt by the Office. Hotel quarantine, border closures, and prison lockdowns gave rise to a number of new types of complaints for our intake and investigation teams. Deputy Ombudsman Angela Pyke and I prepared a report on these issues at p.4.

COVID-19 disruptions and restrictions also contributed to reduced numbers of training participants this year, in comparison to recent years. In pursuit of a more reliable service offering for agencies, we redeveloped our training services so they can be delivered online. Our prison and youth detention centre visits programs were also impacted. In response, our prison investigation officers developed a new virtual visits model with the assistance of Queensland Corrective Services. Doing so enabled them to efficiently carry out a number of prison visits in 2021. The team continued to conduct in-person visits to youth detention centres in Brisbane and Townsville when COVID-19 restrictions permitted.

In the face of the pandemic, workplace health and safety was a strong focus during 2020–21 as we endeavoured to provide a safe working environment for officers. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation for their continuing willingness to adapt to our changing environment – not to mention the fine efforts of our social club to support connection among officers.

Despite these challenges, the Office performed well against its key performance indicators (see p.2).

We also continued to innovate and improve our services.

Casebook 2020, released in February 2021, was a new publication from the Office, containing case studies from 24 investigations. I hope that the casebook not only highlights the value of this Office to good public administration, but also serves as a tool for shared learning. We aim to publish another casebook in 2022.

In May 2021, our *Fire ants report* on the timeliness of responses to notification of suspected fire ant activity featured a new, shorter report format.

To fulfill our PID Act role, we administered a self-assessment audit tool to collect data on the extent to which agencies are complying with the three Public Interest Disclosure Standards. Outcomes of the audit are reported at p.23.

During 2020, we also pursued a range of business process improvements. Our policy and procedures for deciding complaints under the Ombudsman Act were updated in July 2020. We improved our internal governance arrangements, establishing an Executive Leadership Team and Major Investigations Program Board. Oversighted by our Audit Committee, we also improved our risk management processes. Following consultation with agencies and officers, we developed a new strategic plan to frame our work in the years ahead.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many public sector agencies that assisted us with our complaints investigations over the past year, especially when COVID-19 challenges made other important demands on their time.

I look forward to leading the work of the Office in the year ahead.

Anthony Reilly
Queensland Ombudsman