



MEDIA RELEASE

30 September 2013
For immediate release

Improving services for all Queenslanders

The Office of the Queensland Ombudsman has halved the time taken to finalise complaints, according to the 2012-13 annual report.

The Office continued to provide a timely, cost-effective means of ensuring fair and accountable public administration.

Acting Ombudsman Andrew Brown said improvements to timeliness reflected the Office's broader commitment to improve public services for all Queenslanders.

"At a time when public agencies are being asked to do more with less, the Office is committed to working more efficiently and effectively," he said.

"By independently reviewing complaints, carrying out investigations and delivering programs to improve public administration, this Office contributes to an open, accountable and fair public sector.

"In turn, good public administration leads to better services for all Queenslanders."

Investigating complaints: a fair go for all Queenslanders

In the past year, more than 15,000 Queenslanders contacted the Office. The Office provided a service to each and every one, from general advice and referrals to the negotiated resolution and investigation of complaints.

In 2012-13, the Office received 6,363 complaints about agencies within its jurisdiction, including state government departments, local councils and public universities. It took an average of 12 days to deal with these complaints – half the time taken the previous year. Investigations were also completed in almost half the time taken the previous year.

Improved referral advice on the Ombudsman's website, a new on-hold telephone message, and improved business practices contributed to a reduction in the number of contacts and complaints received by the Office in 2012-13.

The number of people contacting the Office about matters outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction decreased by 37%, allowing Ombudsman staff to focus on complaints within jurisdiction and significantly improve the timeliness of services. Complaints about matters within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction decreased by approximately 12% in 2012-13.

Acting Ombudsman Andrew Brown said the Office helped ensure that Queenslanders received a fair go when dealing with the public sector.

"Decisions made by public agencies can have a profound impact on people's lives," he said.

"The Office encourages people to try and resolve their concerns with the agency before contacting the Ombudsman," he said.

"The Office also works with agencies to improve their complaint management processes. However, when a person is not satisfied with the agency's response, where they feel it has not been taken seriously or that more should have been done, the Office will investigate."



Case studies

The report features a selection of case studies highlighting the positive impact of the Office's informal complaint resolution and investigation processes including:

- Just rewards: helped secure a compensation payment for a 91-year-old war veteran who was mistakenly charged full vehicle registration fees over several years (p. 39)
- Special circumstances: helped secure a \$10,000 Building Boost Grant for a young couple whose application was lodged late due to a series of personal hardships – the application had been rejected by the agency administering the scheme (p. 40)
- A fair go: helped a couple recover the costs of an emergency repair to shoddy renovation works – a claim previously denied by the agency administering the building insurance scheme (p. 40)
- A numbers game: helped secure a refund of \$224,000 to local residents after the local council charged a higher tariff on the quarterly gas bill than the rate published in the council's budget papers (p. 42)
- Lost in translation: helped a university student who applied to defer two exams after her laptop, books and lecture notes were stolen. The application was initially denied by the university, who awarded her a fail mark for both subjects and required her to repeat the subjects at her own expense. After an investigation by this Office, the university agreed to remove the fail grades from the student's academic record and refund the course fees (p. 44).

Major investigations: improving the system

In addition to responding to unfair and unjust decisions, the Office undertakes own-initiative investigations into systemic issues across the public sector.

The lessons learned from these investigations can help agencies improve the way they administer public services.

In 2012-13, the Ombudsman published four reports on major investigations:

- an investigation into the approval and oversight of the Kingaroy underground coal gasification project
- an investigation into the regulation of asbestos in Queensland
- an analysis of the implementation of Ombudsman recommendations to councils
- an investigation of the Brisbane's City Council's Tennyson Reach Parkland project.

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FACTS & FIGURES

Dealing with complaints

- received 15,191 contacts
- finalised 6,406 complaints
- finalised 79% of complaints within 10 working days; 92% within 30 days

Rectifying unfair decisions

- conducted 818 investigations
- made 183 recommendations to agencies
- released four major reports:
 - *The Underground Coal Gasification Report*
 - *The Asbestos Report*
 - *Ombudsman Recommendations to Councils*
 - *Investigation of Brisbane City Council's Tennyson Reach Parkland Transactions.*

Improving decision-making

- delivered 82 training sessions to more than 1,500 state and local government officers
- conducted reviews of 19 council complaint management systems
- record subscription rates to Ombudsman e-newsletters and bulletins.

The annual report is available at www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au.

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