

Ombudsman's Overview

The Ombudsman investigates and resolves complaints from Western Australians. In 2022-23, we received 14,042 contacts from Western Australian citizens, comprised of 11,680 enquiries and 2,362 complaints.

Complaints must be resolved effectively and efficiently. In the last year, 96% of complaints were resolved within three months. The average age of complaints as at 30 June 2007 was 173 days. As at 30 June 2023, it is 37 days. In that same time, the cost of resolving complaints has reduced by 47%, from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,547 in 2022-23.



A vital role undertaken by the Ombudsman is the review of certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities. In 2022-23, we made 10 recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities.

At the completion of investigations and reviews, the Ombudsman has the power to make recommendations. In 2022-23, for the sixteenth consecutive year, 100% of my recommendations were accepted.

The Ombudsman serves all Western Australians living and working in our vast State. To enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, our services by Aboriginal Western Australians and those living or working in the regions, we visited the East Pilbara in November 2022 and the West Pilbara in May 2023, as well as a range of other engagement and collaboration initiatives.

In 2022-23, the office of the Ombudsman commenced three critical new functions.

First, we commenced a major new function to monitor, oversee and review investigations into allegations of, and convictions for, child abuse.

The Western Australian Reportable Conduct Scheme (**the Scheme**) makes Western Australian children safer. The Scheme compels heads of organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children to notify allegations of, or convictions for, child abuse by their employees to the office of the Ombudsman and then investigate these allegations. We will monitor, oversee and review these investigations.

The Scheme implements key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and provides that child abuse in organisations will be notified to an impartial and independent body; investigated fully; and dealt with to ensure children are protected from abuse within institutions.

Along with our jurisdictions to investigate child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, this is a major human rights function and very much in keeping with a modern Ombudsman institution and the United Nations General Assembly resolution on *The role of the Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law*.

Second, we established the Western Australian Charitable Trusts Commission following the proclamation of the *Charitable Trusts Act 2022*. There is a particular

importance to charitable trusts in Western Australia given many are established for the purpose of advancing the interests of Aboriginal Western Australian communities and can amount to tens of millions of dollars arising from settlements and determinations of Native Title claims. This new law is not just welcomed on the basis that it will significantly assist to ensure that monies are spent lawfully for their intended beneficiaries, but also because it will advance the inalienable and fundamental human rights of Aboriginal Western Australians.

Third, the *Liquor Control Act 1988 (the Liquor Control Act)* was amended to provide for the establishment of Protected Entertainment Precincts and for the exclusion of people from a precinct who behave in an unlawful, anti-social, violent, disorderly, offensive, indecent or threatening way, or are convicted of specified serious offences, which occurred in the precinct. Under the Liquor Control Act, my office must keep under scrutiny the operation of, and the exercise of powers under the relevant provisions of the Liquor Control Act and regulations, and report on our monitoring work and activities. Importantly, the report must, if we identify any group in the community that is particularly affected by the operation of, or the exercise of powers under the provisions of this new law, include a review of the impact of the operation of, and the exercise of powers under, those provisions on that group.

In May 2021, I commenced my four-year term as President of the International Ombudsman Institute (**the IOI**) at the Closing Ceremony of the 12th quadrennial World Conference of the IOI held (virtually) in Dublin. The IOI represents 235 Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries. This marks the first time in the 45-year history of the IOI that an Australian has been elected President. It was also the first time a President was elected by a vote open to all members of the IOI. Historically, the President was elected by a majority vote of the World Board of the IOI.

During the year, I have had the extraordinary privilege of working with my deeply valued colleagues on the IOI World Board, fellow Ombudsmen, Public Protectors, and Human Rights Commissioners from all around the world, the IOI Secretary General and IOI Secretariat staff. I have been involved in a range of initiatives to advance the protection and promotion of human rights, good governance and the rule of law, including visiting Ukraine in December 2022. This work is set out in detail in the Annual Report.

As President, I am also deeply committed to advancing the strategic, investment, trade and jobs interests, and cultural relationships, of Western Australia globally, and particularly in the Asia Pacific, a region so vital to Western Australian interests.

I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the tireless contributions of my outstanding staff team. Their level of professionalism, integrity and commitment to public service continues to be of the very highest order.

The Ombudsman serves Parliament and its Committees. I consider it the highest honour to serve as an officer of the Parliament and a great privilege to present to Parliament the report of our work in 2022-23.



Chris Field PSM
OMBUDSMAN