

## Collaboration and Access to Services

Engagement with key stakeholders is essential to the Office's achievement of the most efficient and effective outcomes. The Office does this through:

- Working collaboratively with other integrity and accountability bodies – locally, nationally and internationally – to encourage best practice, efficiency and leadership;
- Ensuring ongoing accountability to Parliament as well as accessibility to its services for public authorities and the community; and
- Developing, maintaining and supporting relationships with public authorities and community groups.

### Working Collaboratively

The Office works collaboratively with local, national and international integrity and accountability bodies to promote best practice, efficiency and leadership. Working collaboratively also provides an opportunity for the Office to benchmark its performance and stakeholder communication activities against other similar agencies, and to identify areas for improvement through the experiences of others.

#### **Integrity Coordinating Group**

**Members:** Western Australian Ombudsman; Public Sector Commissioner; Corruption and Crime Commissioner; Auditor General; and Information Commissioner.

#### **Background:**

The Integrity Coordinating Group (**ICG**) was formed to promote and strengthen integrity in Western Australian public bodies.

#### **The Office's involvement:**

The Ombudsman participates as a member of the ICG and the Office has nominated senior representatives who sit on the ICG's joint working party.

#### **2018-19 initiatives:**

The Office was involved in the ICG's graduate program, which involves a graduate working in each of the member agencies over a two year period in total.

## International Ombudsman Institute

### Background:

The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), established in 1978, is the only global organisation for the cooperation of more than 190 independent Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries worldwide. The IOI is organised in six regional chapters (Africa, Asia, Australasia & Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean & Latin America and North America). The IOI is governed by a World Board of which the Western Australian Ombudsman is the Second Vice-President.

### The Office's involvement:

The Office is a member of the IOI. The IOI is governed by a World Board, of which the Ombudsman was elected Second Vice-President in November 2016. The Ombudsman previously served as the Treasurer of the IOI from March 2014 to November 2016 and President of the Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region (APOR) of the IOI from November 2012 to March 2014.

### 2018-19 initiatives:

The Ombudsman visited the Control Yuan in Taiwan. As a central part of this visit, the Ombudsman was extended the privilege of addressing the chamber of the Control Yuan in a plenary session on 14 August. The Ombudsman's address was titled *The role of the Ombudsman in promoting good governance and protecting human rights*.

The Ombudsman was accompanied on the visit by Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand, Judge Peter Boshier. During his visit the Ombudsman and Chief Ombudsman were also received by the Agency Against Corruption, the National Audit Office and the Taipei City Government 1999 Citizen Hotline Call Centre.

The Ombudsman and Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Policy and Projects, National and International Relations, Rebecca Poole, attended the quadrennial conference of the European Region of the IOI in Brussels in October 2018. The conference, *The Ombudsman in an open and participatory society*, was hosted by the Federal Ombudsman of Belgium, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman. The conference also included a ceremony on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the IOI.

The Conference, held at the Hemicycle, Senate of the Federal Parliament of Belgium, consisted of three plenary sessions. The Ombudsman chaired the second session, *The Ombudsman as a catalyst for citizen participation*. The conference was opened by Ms Christine Defraigne, President of the Senate and the conference dinner was addressed by Mr Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

While in Brussels, the Ombudsman participated in an Executive Committee meeting of the World Board of the IOI and met with Mr Justin Brown PSM Australian Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg, the European Union and NATO, and on 4 October in Dublin, met with Mr Peter Tyndall, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner for Ireland and President of the IOI (and host of the 2020 World Conference of the IOI) and Mr Richard Andrews, Australian Ambassador to Ireland.

The Ombudsman and Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Policy and Projects, National and International Relations, Rebecca Poole, attended the 30th Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region Conference in Auckland, New Zealand. The conference

was themed *Holding governments to account in a changing climate* and was hosted by the Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand.

The Ombudsman addressed the conference on the IOI's perspectives on the major themes of the conference – the role of the Ombudsman in a time of political and social change and the response of nation states and Ombudsmen to climate change. Mr Peter Tyndall, IOI President and Ombudsman and Information Commissioner for Ireland and Mr Günther Kräuter, IOI Secretary General and Ombudsman, Austrian Ombudsman Board attended the Conference, in addition to Australian Ombudsmen, the Hong Kong Ombudsman, the Control Yuan and Ombudsman from the Pacific Island nations of the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

The Conference was part of a three day program that included a Business Meeting, training and an official side event. Training was provided on leading effective change and on monitoring places of detention to ensure the human rights of detainees are upheld as part of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

### Information sharing with Ombudsmen from other jurisdictions

#### Background:

Where appropriate, the Office shares information and insights about its work with Ombudsmen from other jurisdictions, as well as with other accountability and integrity bodies.

#### 2018-19 initiatives:

The Office exchanged information with a number of Parliamentary Ombudsmen and industry-based Ombudsmen during the year.

### Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association

**Members:** Parliamentary and industry-based Ombudsmen from Australia and New Zealand.

#### Background:

The Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (**ANZOA**) is the peak body for Parliamentary and industry-based Ombudsmen from Australia and New Zealand.

#### The Office's involvement:

The Office is a member of ANZOA. The Office periodically provides general updates on its activities and also has nominated representatives who participate in interest groups in the areas of Aboriginal complaints handling, first contact, business improvement, policy and research, and public relations and communications.

## Providing Access to the Community

### Communicating with complainants

The Office provides a range of information and services to assist specific groups, and the public more generally, to understand the role of the Ombudsman and the complaint process. Many people find the Office's enquiry service and complaint clinics held during regional visits assist them to make their complaint. Other initiatives in 2018-19 include:

- Regular updating and simplification of the Ombudsman's publications and website to provide easy access to information for people wishing to make a complaint and those undertaking the complaint process;
- Ongoing promotion of the role of the Office and the type of complaints the Office handles through 'Ask the Ombudsman' on 6PR's *Perth Tonight* program; and
- The Office's Youth Awareness and Accessibility Program and Prison Program.

### Access to the Ombudsman's services

The Office continues to implement a number of strategies to ensure its complaint services are accessible to all Western Australians. These include access through online facilities as well as more traditional approaches by letter and through visits to the Office. The Office also holds complaint clinics and delivers presentations to community groups, particularly through the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. Initiatives to make services accessible include:

- Access to the Office through a Freecall number, which is free from landline phones;
- Access to the Office through email and online services. The importance of email and online access is demonstrated by its use this year in 68% of all complaints received;
- Information on how to make a complaint to the Ombudsman is available in 15 languages and features on the homepage of the Ombudsman's website. People may also contact the Office with the assistance of an interpreter by using the Translating and Interpreting Service;
- The Office's accommodation, building and facilities provide access for people with disability, including lifts that accommodate wheelchairs and feature braille on the access buttons and people with hearing and speech impairments can contact the Office using the National Relay Service;
- The Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program and Youth Awareness and Accessibility Program target awareness and accessibility for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians as well as children and young people;
- The Office attends events to raise community awareness of, and access to, its service, such as the Financial Counsellors' Association of WA conference in October 2018; and
- The Office's visits to adult prisons and the juvenile detention centre provide an opportunity for adult prisoners and juvenile detainees to meet with representatives of the Office and lodge complaints in person.



## Ombudsman website

The [Ombudsman's website](#) provides a wide range of information and resources for:

- Members of the public on the complaint handling services provided by the Office as well as links to other complaint bodies for issues outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction;
- Public authorities on decision making, complaint handling and conducting investigations;
- Children and young people as well as information for non-government organisations and government agencies that assist children and young people, including downloadable print material tailored for children and young people. The youth pages can be accessed at [www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth](http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth);
- Access to the Ombudsman's reports such as *A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from Investigation into ways to prevent or reduce deaths of children by drowning*;
- The latest news on events and collaborative initiatives such as the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program; and
- Links to other key functions undertaken by the Office such as the Energy and Water Ombudsman website and other related bodies including other Ombudsmen and other Western Australian accountability agencies.



The website continues to be a valuable resource for the community and public sector as shown by the increased use of the website this year. In 2018-19:

- The total number of visits to the website in 2018-19 was 183,946. This is nearly double the number of visits in 2015-16;
- The top two most visited pages (besides the homepage and the Contact Us page) on the site were *The role of the Ombudsman* and *What you can complain about*; and
- The Office's *Effective Handling of Complaints Made to Your Organisation Guidelines* and *Procedural Fairness Guidelines* were the two most viewed documents.

The total number of visits to the website in 2018-19 was 183,946, nearly double the number of visits in 2015-16.

The website content and functionality are continually reviewed and improved to ensure there is maximum accessibility to all members of the diverse Western Australian community. The site provides information in a wide range of [community languages](#) and is accessible to people with disability.

The youth pages can be accessed at [www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth](http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth).



### ‘Ask the Ombudsman’ on 6PR’s *Perth Tonight*

The Office continues to provide access to its services through the Ombudsman’s regular appearances on Radio 6PR’s *Perth Tonight* program. Listeners who have complaints about public authorities or want to make enquiries have the opportunity to call in and speak with the Ombudsman live on air.

The segment allows the public to communicate a range of concerns with the Ombudsman. The segment also allows the Office to communicate key messages about the Ombudsman and Energy and Water Ombudsman jurisdictions, the outcomes that can be achieved for members of the public and how public administration can be improved. The Ombudsman appeared on the ‘Ask the Ombudsman’ segment in August and October 2018.

## Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office continued the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program (**the Program**) during 2018-19. Two regional visits were conducted, to Katanning and Albany in the Great Southern Region and Manjimup in the South West Region in November 2018, and to Waroona, Mandurah and Boddington in the Peel Region in May 2019. The visits included activities such as:

- Complaint clinics, which provided an opportunity for members of the local community to raise their concerns face-to-face with the staff of the Office;
- Meetings with the Aboriginal community to discuss government service delivery and where the agencies may be able to assist;
- Liaison with community, advocacy and consumer organisations; and
- Liaison with public authorities, including meetings with senior officers and workshops for public officers on *Good Decision Making* and *Effective Complaint Handling*.

The Program is an important way for the Office to raise awareness of, access to, and use of, its services for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians.

The Program enables the Office to:

- Deliver key services directly to regional communities, particularly through complaint clinics;
- Increase awareness and accessibility among regional and Aboriginal Western Australians (who were historically under-represented in complaints to the Office); and
- Deliver key messages about the Office's work and services.

The Program also provides a valuable opportunity for staff to strengthen their understanding of the issues affecting people in regional and Aboriginal communities.



Mary White, Deputy Ombudsman and Marcus Claridge, Assistant Ombudsman Energy and Water, presented workshops on *Good Decision Making* and *Effective Complaint Handling* to state and local government officers in Mandurah on 23 May 2019.

## Aboriginal engagement

In 2016-17, the Office developed the *Aboriginal Action Plan*, a comprehensive whole-of-office plan to address the significant disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The plan contributes to an overall goal of developing an organisation that is welcoming and culturally safe for Aboriginal people and meets the unique needs of the Aboriginal community it serves.

In 2018, the Office appointed two additional Aboriginal staff: a Senior Aboriginal Advisor that reports to the Office's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer and an Aboriginal Enquiry and Investigating Officer (both of which are identified s. 50(d) positions under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*). The Office also engaged an Aboriginal artist to produce an artwork for the Office. The artwork is featured on the cover of this report and has been used as a theme for new publications.

The Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Senior Aboriginal Advisor attended events and meetings with government and non-government service providers to discuss particular issues affecting the Aboriginal community and raise awareness of the Office's role.

The Office also continued its engagement with the Aboriginal community through:

- Aboriginal community information sessions as part of its Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program;
- Visits to prisons and detention centres accompanied by Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal consultants, as part of its Prison Program; and
- Consultation with the Aboriginal community for major investigations and reports. See further details in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#).



In May 2019, the Office organised and hosted Independent Agency Information Sessions in Perth and Mandurah, which provided representatives from seven independent complaint bodies the opportunity to speak to, and hear from, Aboriginal Elders and service providers. The information sessions included presentations on the roles of:

- The Western Australian Ombudsman;
- Energy and Water Ombudsman Western Australia;
- Commonwealth Ombudsman;
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman;
- Australian Financial Complaints Authority;
- Health and Disability Services Complaints Office; and
- Office of the Information Commissioner.



These sessions, part of the Office's engagement strategy and cultural competency with Aboriginal Western Australians, was guided by the Office's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer. Very positive feedback was received from attendees and the sessions provided valuable information for our engagement with the Aboriginal community.



Cultural Ceremony conducted by Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Alison Gibson, in Mandurah, May 2019.



Presentation by Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Alison Gibson, at the Independent Agency Information Session in Perth, May 2019.

The Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer also coordinated cultural awareness information and events throughout the year, including training on *Aboriginal Cultural Awareness* for staff of the Office, and provided information to staff about culturally important dates and events being held in the community.

Collaboration and Access to Services



The Office participated in the State-wide 2019 Street Banner Project for National Reconciliation Week, 27 May to 3 June 2019



Mary White, Deputy Ombudsman (centre) and Alison Gibson, Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer (right) attended the National Reconciliation Week Breakfast along with the Ombudsman's Advisory Panel Member, Dorinda Cox (left)

## Youth Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office has a dedicated youth space on the Ombudsman Western Australia website with information about the Office specifically tailored for children and young people, as well as information for non-government organisations and government agencies that assist children and young people, and a suite of promotional materials targeted at, and tailored for, children and young people.

The Office continued its proactive visiting program to vulnerable groups of children in the child protection system. During 2018-19, the Office visited:

- The Kath French Secure Care Centre in June 2019;
- Two family group homes in the Great Southern Region in November 2018; and
- Two residential group homes and one family group home in the Perth metropolitan area in June 2019.

The Ombudsman has also continued regular visits to the Banksia Hill Detention Centre and engagement with community sector youth organisations in regional Western Australia under the Ombudsman's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program.

The children and young people section of the Ombudsman's website can be found at [www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth](http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth).



## Prison Program

The Office continued the Prison Program during 2018-19. Five visits were made to prisons and the juvenile detention centre to raise awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and enhance accessibility to the Office for adult prisoners and juvenile detainees in Western Australia.

## Speeches and Presentations

The Ombudsman and other staff delivered speeches and presentations throughout the year at local, national and international conferences and events.

### Ombudsman's speeches and presentations

- *Professionalism, Ethics and Confidentiality*, presented to University of Western Australia Legal Internship Students in August 2018;
- *The role of the Ombudsman in promoting good governance and protecting human rights*, a Keynote address to a Control Yuan Plenary Meeting in August 2018;
- Chaired a Plenary Session entitled *The Ombudsman as a catalyst for citizen participation* at the quadrennial conference of the European Region of the IOI, in October 2018;
- *The Ombudsman*, presented to the visiting delegation of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament in October 2018;
- *The role and functions of the Ombudsman: experiences, developments and issues for government lawyers*, presented to the State Solicitor's Office Government Law Seminar in October 2018;
- *Practice, Procedure and the Law of Parliament*, presented to the Legalwise Seminar in November 2018; and
- *30th Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region Conference*, Final Remarks from the International Ombudsman Institute, in November 2018.

Speeches by the Ombudsman are available on the [Ombudsman's website](#).

### Speeches and presentations by other staff

- *Developing and Delivering Culturally Appropriate Ombudsman Services*, presented by the Office's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer to staff of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman in Melbourne in July 2018;
- *The Ombudsman*, to the University of Western Australia Foundations of Public Law Students in October 2018;
- *The Role and Functions of the Ombudsman*, presented to the Tenancy Network at Tenancy WA in December 2018;
- *The Role and Functions of the Ombudsman*, presented to the Civil Law and Human Rights Unit at the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia in February 2019;
- *The Role and Functions of the Ombudsman*, presented to the Community Resilience and Relief Forum at the WA Council of Social Service in May 2019;
- *The Western Australian Ombudsman*, presented by the Deputy Ombudsman in Independent Agency Information Sessions in Perth and Mandurah in May 2019; and
- *Developing and Delivering Culturally Appropriate Ombudsman Services*, presented by the Office's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer to staff of the Commonwealth Ombudsman in Perth in May 2019.



## Liaison with Public Authorities

### Liaison relating to complaint resolution

The Office liaised with a range of bodies in relation to complaint resolution in 2018-19, including:

- The Department of Justice;
- The Department of Communities;
- The Department of Transport;
- The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services;
- The Corruption and Crime Commission;
- Curtin University; and
- University of Western Australia.

### Liaison relating to reviews and own motion investigations

The Office undertook a range of liaison activities in relation to its reviews of child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities and its own motion investigations.

See further details in the [Child Death Review section](#), the [Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Review section](#), and the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#).

### Liaison relating to inspection and monitoring functions

The Office undertook a range of liaison activities in relation to its inspection and monitoring functions.

See further details in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#).

## Publications

The Office has a comprehensive range of publications about the role of the Ombudsman to assist complainants and public authorities, which are available on the Ombudsman's website. For a full listing of the Office's publications, see [Appendix 3](#).





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