

## Ombudsman's Foreword

I am very pleased to present the 2012-13 Annual Report of the Western Australian Ombudsman. The office of the Ombudsman (**the Office**) has four principal functions, which are to:

- Investigate and resolve complaints about State government agencies, local governments and universities;
- Review certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities;
- Undertake own motion investigations and education and liaison programs with public authorities; and
- Undertake a range of additional functions.



The Ombudsman also concurrently holds the role of Energy Ombudsman and State Records Commissioner.

During 2012-13, the continuation of our major complaint handling improvement program, introduced in 2007-08, resulted in 83 per cent of complaints being finalised within three months and 99 per cent of complaints being finalised within 12 months. For the fifth consecutive year, the cost of handling complaints has reduced.

Overall, aged cases have been virtually eliminated, with 2 cases older than 12 months at 30 June 2013 compared to 20 at 30 June 2007. During the same time, the average age of complaints has reduced from 173 days to 33 days. In the last five years, the cost of handling complaints has reduced by 38 per cent. These improvements have been made in the context of a very significant increase in complaints that occurred in 2009-10.

This year, we continued to undertake a significant level of work in relation to our child death review role including, reviewing child deaths, identifying patterns and trends arising from these reviews and seeking to improve public administration to prevent or reduce child deaths. Our review of child deaths also led to two major own motion investigations into issues, patterns and trends arising from our reviews.

The first major own motion investigation, *Investigation into ways that State Government departments can prevent or reduce sleep-related infant deaths*, was tabled in Parliament in November 2012. The investigation found that the Department of Health has undertaken a range of work to contribute to safe sleeping practices in Western Australia, however, there is still important work to be done. This work particularly includes establishing a comprehensive statement on safe sleeping that will form the basis for safe sleeping advice to parents. The report included 23 recommendations for improvement, all of which were agreed to by the agencies involved and we are actively monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of these recommendations. The second own motion investigation in relation to suicide by young people will be tabled in Parliament in 2014.

During the year, we also commenced an own motion investigation into local government collection of outstanding rates which will be tabled in Parliament in 2014.

On 1 July 2012, we commenced an important new function to review family and domestic violence fatalities. Significant work has been undertaken during the year to develop the structures and processes to ensure that the function is undertaken effectively and efficiently.

In 2007-08, we commenced a new program aimed at addressing the historical under-representation of regional and Aboriginal Western Australians in terms of complaints to the Office. The program aims to significantly enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, the Office and involves a range of strategies, including seminars for public authorities and community groups, liaison activities with Aboriginal communities, complaint clinics for the general public, and visits to regional prisons. The program has continued this year with visits to the Pilbara and South West regions.

In a very busy year for the Office, I take this opportunity to recognise the outstanding contribution of my staff team. I thank each of them for their skill, commitment and hard work.

The Office is an accessible source of administrative justice for Western Australians and also contributes to improving public administration through recommendations that arise from investigating complaints and from undertaking major own motion investigations. The Office also undertakes an important range of reviews, inspections and additional functions, such as the Energy Ombudsman. In undertaking all of these functions, the Office is committed to providing services to the Parliament and the people of Western Australia that are of the highest quality and efficiency. This is a commitment that I strongly believe we have fulfilled this year.



Chris Field  
**Western Australian Ombudsman**