



**Presenter – Graham Mabury**

**Guest – Chris Field, Western Australian Ombudsman**

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**Introduction:** Now on Nightline, it's your direct line to the Ombudsman.

**Graham Mabury:** Yes it is, get on the phone to Royston now if you want to be sure of getting through to Chris Field, the Ombudsman who is in the studio with us. He is also the Energy Ombudsman and I've learned tonight, is also involved in disputes involving our universities. So, 9221 1882, you get to go first Faye.

**Faye:** Good evening Graham. I'm sorry to bother the Ombudsman, but since Jeff died in January I'm up to my ears in lots of things. Chris, may I call you Chris?

**Chris Field:** You can of course Faye. You are not bothering me at all, that's why I'm here.

**Faye:** Thank you very much. Now, I'm having a bit of problems with the Housing Commission. Jeff, my husband, built this fence when we came here 22 years ago. It blew down. He paid for it, it blew down, and we had a colour bond one put up. Now I've had the Housing Commission come around and say - this is at the back - the fence at the side of the house, which belongs to the Housing Commission. They are going to take it down and put up the fence, I will have to pay half for having the asbestos bagged, and I will have to pay half to have the fence put up. And I can't find the money.

**Chris Field:** Well, thank you so much Faye for your call, and I can understand this is a real concern for you. What we would normally say to people of course under these circumstances, if first of all of course that sort of issue involving the Department of Housing is in the jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman. So then it's a question of making sure the Department of Housing has an opportunity to understand the concern, understand the complaint that's being made, the concern that Faye or the customers of the Housing Commission, the Department of Housing do have, and then having an opportunity to try to resolve that. Most of the departments in the State, Graham have a reasonable number, a reasonably sophisticated process for resolving complaints within the department itself, and that's a very good system. And that is something that the Department of Housing would be interested in looking at doing if a complaint was brought to them. So what we're going to do in these circumstances, Graham I think, is take Faye's number if she's able to leave that with Royston, and my staff will give Faye a call tomorrow and talk to her about whether she's had the opportunity to talk to the Department of Housing about that complaint, whether they've had an opportunity to look at resolving it. But we can certainly help with the resolution of that complaint for Faye.

**Graham Mabury:** Faye thank you very much, good call. That's why we invite people to call and speak to the Ombudsman direct. Your chance to go direct to the Umpire, 9221 1882. Good evening Judy.

**Judy:** Oh good evening Graham.

**Graham Mabury:** Hi, and the Ombudsman is listening.

- Judy:** Oh good evening, and thank you for taking my call.
- Chris Field:** Thank you Judy.
- Judy:** Mine is about an account with Synergy.
- Chris Field:** Yes well we can certainly help you with that. What is your complaint about Judy?
- Judy:** Well I was in Sydney from the 11<sup>th</sup> of May until the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, and during that time my daughter paid an account. My mail had been forwarded. She paid an account to Synergy. When I came home after the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, there was a further account in the letterbox they hadn't forwarded. So I took it to the post office and paid that. And next thing they sent me a cheque to reimburse me because I'd paid the same account twice. They made the cheque out to my husband, who is deceased, and they had payee only. The post office would not accept the cheque, the bank won't accept the cheque. It's not very much money. But in the meantime, I got another account from Synergy. Well I had two after that, and I paid them, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> for \$81.40, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup> for \$81. I paid both of those, and then today I get in the letter box, another account I hadn't had a previous invoice at all. I just had this account say \$95.60, pay immediately, total due.
- Chris Field:** Thank you, that's a really helpful explanation to me and all the listeners Judy. Have you actually, or has that complaint been taken back to Synergy? Have you been able to go back and discuss that with them?
- Judy:** I did about the cheque, and they wouldn't do anything about it. I asked if they would credit me, or send another cheque, and they said no, they wouldn't.
- Chris Field:** Alright, well thank you so much. What I can certainly say to you is this, I have as Graham explained at the start of the program, a couple of roles. One is the State Ombudsman, the Parliamentary Ombudsman. And another is the Energy Ombudsman, and in that jurisdiction I can look at complaints and issues arising in relation to Synergy. Synergy do have a group of people within their business that do examine and resolve complaints, and they do a good job of that, so it's a matter for them generally to have an opportunity to consider those complaints first, before they are considered by the Energy Ombudsman. Now, where you've raised that complaint with them and it hasn't been resolved, then it's appropriate for my office to have a look at it. So what we will do in your particular case, that is for all listeners' information, but in your particular case Judy if you're happy do so, and happy to leave your details with Royston, one of my staff will actually call you tomorrow. We will talk through a little but more about the two issues you've raised, because in effect you've raised two issues. And then we can see over the next few days if those matters can be resolved with Synergy. The vast majority of complaints that come to the Energy Ombudsman jurisdiction are resolved in a very short time.

#### Contact Details

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