

Ombudsman Year in Brief for 2012-13

Resolving Complaints

Complaints and Enquiries

- 11,710 contacts were made with our office including 9,445 enquiries and 2,265 complaints.

Timely Complaint Handling

- Timely complaint handling meant that 83% of allegations were finalised within 3 months and 99% were finalised within 12 months.
- We recorded very significant improvements in timely complaint handling over the last six years with the average age of complaints decreasing from 173 days at 30 June 2007 to 33 days at 30 June 2013 and complaints on hand older than 12 months decreasing by 90%.

Efficient Complaint Handling

- As a result of the office's complaint handling improvement program commencing in 2007-08, the average cost of finalising allegations has now reduced for five consecutive years (by a total of 38% over this period).

In numbers:

- 11,710** contacts with the office
- 83%** of allegations finalised within 3 months
- 99%** of allegations finalised within 12 months

Child Death Reviews

- There were 37 child deaths that were investigable by our office.
 - Timely review processes have resulted in 68% of reviews being completed in 3 months.
 - We identified a number of important patterns and trends in relation to child deaths. Our reviews have also achieved improvements to public administration, designed to prevent or reduce child deaths.

Over the last six years:

- The average age of complaints decreased from 173 days to 33 days
- Complaints on hand older than 12 months have decreased by 90%

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Message from the Ombudsman

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter for 2013. This has been a particularly busy, but very positive and productive year for the office. In this edition, we feature a wide range of our work, including our regional visit to the East Kimberley and, as we look forward to 2014, the tabling in Parliament of three major own motion investigation reports. We have also highlighted our performance in the financial year 2012-13.

With Christmas fast approaching, I take this opportunity to wish you, and your families, a joyous festive season.



Chris Field



Ombudsman Year in Brief 2012-13 (continued)

Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews

An important new function to review family and domestic violence fatalities commenced on 1 July 2012. In the first year of operation:

- Significant work has been undertaken to develop structures and processes to ensure that the function is undertaken effectively and efficiently;
- There were 20 reviewable family and domestic violence fatalities from a total of 22 notifications; and
- Issues, patterns and trends arising from family and domestic violence fatality reviews have been identified.

Own Motion Investigations

- We tabled a report in Parliament of a major own motion investigation into ways that State Government departments can prevent or reduce sleep-related infant deaths. The report made 23 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the agencies involved.
- Significant work has been undertaken on two own motion investigations: the first into ways that State Government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people, and the second examining local government collection of outstanding rates.

Access to Services

- Access to our services for regional Western Australians and Aboriginal Western Australians continued to be a strong focus for the office.

Complaint handling is 38% more efficient than 5 years ago, reducing from \$2,941 per finalised allegation in 2007-08 to \$1,821 in 2012-13

Energy Ombudsman Year in Brief 2012-13

Complaints

- There were 3,380 complaints received comprising:
 - 3,112 electricity complaints; and
 - 268 gas complaints.
- There were 3,390 complaints closed comprising:
 - 3,119 electricity complaints; and
 - 271 gas complaints.
- There was a 6.2% decrease in complaints to the Energy Ombudsman.

Timeliness

- 83% of electricity complaints, 93% of gas complaints and 84% of all complaints were closed within 10 business days of receiving the complaint.

Issues Raised

- Concerns about billing and credit were the main issues raised in complaints, with these issues identified in 81% of complaints received (63% for billing and 18% for credit). Of these:
 - High bills and alleged errors were the most common reasons for billing complaints; and
 - Payment of arrears and debt collection were the most common reasons for credit complaints.

In numbers:

3,380 complaints received

3,112 electricity complaints received

268 gas complaints received

84% of all complaints closed within 10 business days of receiving the complaint

81% of complaints received were about billing and credit issues

Liaison and Access

- Effective relationships with key stakeholders and access to Ombudsman services have been maintained this year through:
 - Continuous liaison and communication with Energy Ombudsman Scheme member organisations, regulators and Ombudsman industry bodies; and
 - Ensuring ongoing access to Ombudsman services for residential and small use customers, and community groups who may represent them, including through visits to the Pilbara and South West.

Raising awareness and accessibility in the East Kimberley

Staff from the office of the Ombudsman met with, and provided training to, representatives from public sector and local government agencies in the East Kimberley region, including Kununurra and Wyndham, as part of the Ombudsman's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program (**the Program**) during November.

The office of the Ombudsman and Energy Ombudsman were joined on the visit by the Information Commissioner and staff from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office and Health and Disability Services Complaints Office. We were also very pleased to be joined on this visit by the Commissioner for Victims of Crime, Ms Jennifer Hoffman.



Above: Deputy Ombudsman Peter Wilkins presenting on the Role of the Ombudsman to public sector agency staff in Kununurra.

Now in its fifth year, the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program seeks to ensure that the office of the Ombudsman is accessible to people living and working in regional Western Australia as well as Aboriginal Western Australians. The East Kimberley regional visit included a number of training workshops, general information sessions, complaint clinics and an information session with Aboriginal communities as part of our initiative to improve access to our services for Aboriginal Western Australians.

The Ombudsman said our office had identified that regional and Aboriginal communities were historically under-represented among our complainants.

"Strengthening our relationships with these two particular groups continues to be a key priority for the office," he said.

"Overall, the Program is an important collaborative opportunity that allows us to efficiently, and effectively, reach out to the communities that we serve."

Outreach to local government

Assistant Ombudsman Complaint Resolution, Sarah Cowie, recently presented workshops on the role of the Ombudsman and complaint handling to the Local Government Western Australian Rangers Conference and staff at the Shire of Mundaring.

The Ombudsman's office provides assistance to all public sector agencies, including local government, on a wide range of issues through resources including guidelines and information sheets. Our suite of publications, available on our website or by request, cover topics including conducting investigations, effective complaint handling, decision making and management of personal information. These guidelines and information sheets were covered in these recent workshops.

Sarah Cowie said the office's outreach activities provide an opportunity to put our guidelines and advice into practice.

"Conducting investigations, managing complaints and making decisions effectively requires skill and experience," she said.

"These presentations and workshops give us the opportunity to share our investigation and complaint handling knowledge and experience through activities and question and answer sessions."



Above: Assistant Ombudsman Complaint Resolution Sarah Cowie presenting a workshop on effective complaint handling to staff at the Shire of Mundaring.

Ombudsman Chris Field said he was pleased that his staff could participate in these events to offer guidance to public sector agencies and local governments on effective complaint handling as well as the role of the Ombudsman.

"Our guidelines set out principles and procedures that our own complaint handling officers put into practice every day," he said.

"These principles and procedures, together with the experience of staff like Sarah, can assist public sector complaint handlers and investigators and provide a valuable opportunity to learn about how to deal as effectively as possible with the issues of complaints raised by their own clients."

"It also provides our staff the opportunity to learn from agencies and improve our own work as they share the challenges and opportunities of dealing on a day to day basis with their clients."

Looking forward to 2014

Own Motion Investigations

In 2014, the Ombudsman will table three major own motion investigations in Parliament:

- An investigation into ways that State Government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people;
- An investigation into local government collection of outstanding rates; and
- An investigation into ways that State Government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce family and domestic violence fatalities.



Ombudsman Western Australia

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