

Western Australian Ombudsman

Edition 4 - February 2009

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Improving accessibility and awareness in regional areas

The Ombudsman has launched an important new initiative to reach out to regional Western Australians.

Regional Western Australians and Indigenous Western Australians are currently under-represented among our complainants. The Ombudsman Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program is intended to significantly enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, our services for regional Western Australians. The Program, along with other initiatives to be commenced later this year, will also target awareness and accessibility for Indigenous Western Australians.

In 2009, we will visit three regional locations - the Goldfields (in April), the Mid West (in June) and the Peel Region (in October).

Major activities to be undertaken as part of each regional visit include:

- A complaints clinic. The clinic will provide an opportunity for people to speak with our complaint resolution staff face to face. Where possible, we will attempt to resolve complaint issues during the regional visit;
- Seminars for regionally-based public sector agencies and local governments to discuss our role, relevant issues and trends related to complaints and good administrative practice;
- A seminar for community groups to discuss our role and how to make a complaint;
- A workshop with Indigenous community groups on issues of interest to them and ways to improve accessibility to the Ombudsman's office; and
- Individual meetings with key regional stakeholders and, where appropriate, visits to regional prisons.

We will co-ordinate the Program with the work of other relevant public sector agencies, including the accountability and complaint resolution agencies co-located with the office of the Ombudsman.

For more details on the Ombudsman Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program visit our website at www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au.

Message from the Ombudsman

Welcome to the fourth edition of our newsletter. In this edition, we have two exciting announcements to make. First, we are very pleased to launch the Ombudsman Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. The Program will significantly enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, our services for regional and Indigenous Western Australians.



Secondly, we welcome Dr Peter Wilkins to the team as Deputy Ombudsman. Peter is a highly qualified appointment who brings enormous public sector experience to our office and significant expertise in the operation of independent accountability agencies. Immediately prior to his appointment as Deputy Ombudsman, Peter was the Assistant Auditor General, Performance Review at the Western Australian Auditor General's Office.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Field'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Chris Field

Our achievements

Eliminating aged complaints

Our strong focus on the consistency, efficiency and timeliness of our complaint handling process is proving very successful with significant achievements over the last six months. Since October 2008, the office has closed a further nine of our oldest cases, with these recent closures reducing the number of cases older than 18 months by 75%.

In 2009, our Consistent, Efficient and Effective Complaint Handling (CEECH) project will optimise resources to ensure these improvements are sustained in future years. Development and implementation of the CEECH project will introduce a framework and supporting systems to achieve:

- more consistent, efficient and effective complaint handling;
- provide staff with a number of new resources and tools to assist them to further improve the timeliness and quality of our complaint handling function; and
- manage complaint handling risks.

The CEECH project will also ensure that the best value for all Western Australians is achieved from the costs associated with our complaints handling.



2009 Administrative Improvement Program

The Western Australian Ombudsman has two core functions:

- Investigating and resolving complaints; and
- Improving the standard of public administration over time.

To reinvigorate this second aspect of our work, in late 2008 the office established a new Administrative Improvement Team. The Team is led by Kim Lazenby, Assistant Ombudsman, and comprises two principal analysts, as well as other internal resources on a project by project basis.

In 2009, the Team will focus on four main areas:

- A number of major projects, including own motion investigations (those initiated by the Ombudsman) into selected areas of public administration;
- Establishing a three year forward program of major projects;
- The selected review of internal investigations undertaken by agencies into matters of public administration; and
- Continuous improvement of processes for inspecting recording keeping and reporting relating to telecommunications intercepts.

Topics for major projects and own motion investigations will be selected according to a number of criteria including:

- Complaints received;
- Number of people directly affected and level of public interest;
- That the project builds on, and does not duplicate, the work of other agencies;
- That the project represents the best and most efficient use of the office's resources;
- There is potential to improve public administration across the public sector; and
- That the project will deliver a practical result that is achievable by agencies examined and, taking into account the regulatory costs of the proposed improvements, provides a net benefit for the Western Australian public.

Through all of these activities, the Team is developing an approach to its work which is rigorous, fair, clear, consistent, efficient, responsive to Parliament and the community, and which delivers benefits to all Western Australians.



Case Study

Resolution of regional complaint benefits many

A resident in a regional Shire complained that the drainage on their residential block did not comply with the Shire's drainage requirements.

In response to the Ombudsman's investigation, the Shire advised that at the time of construction of the property, it had relied on advice from the property developer's surveyors. However, as a result of the concerns being raised by the Ombudsman on behalf of the complainant, the Shire carried out an independent review of the process and activities involved in the matter. The review recommended that minor works be undertaken to improve the drainage to meet Shire requirements.

Not only was a positive outcome achieved in terms of improving the property drainage, but due to the process review undertaken, the Shire identified a number of shortcomings in the development process, which it will now seek to remedy. As a result of this complaint and the Ombudsman's investigation, other Shire residents will benefit from the improvements to be implemented in the drainage development process.

This case highlights how we assist in the resolution of complaints in regional areas and how our involvement can result in benefits to the complainant as well as ongoing benefits to the wider community.

Helpful Information

Using our website to make a complaint

Complaints made to the Ombudsman must be made in writing, which can be by letter, fax or email. However, we encourage people to telephone us before making a written complaint so we can advise them on the best way to handle their concerns.

Written complaints need to tell us who the complaint is about, what has gone wrong and when it happened. Other helpful information includes the outcome sought, details of any relevant telephone conversations and meetings, what has been done to try to resolve the issue and relevant documents.

A simple way to ensure that all the relevant details are included in a complaint is to use our Online Complaints Form. The Form is structured into easy to complete fields and complainants can even submit supporting documentation online. Once the Online Complaint Form is completed and submitted, it will be reviewed by one of our Complaint Resolution team who will acknowledge the complaint and take appropriate action to progress it.

To view the Online Complaints Form and find out more about making a complaint to the Ombudsman go to

<http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/complaints/onlinecomplaintform.htm>.

Staff Profile

Peter Wilkins Deputy Ombudsman

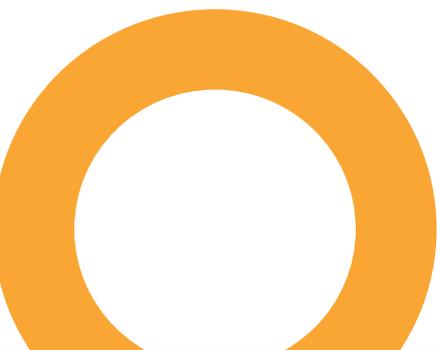
The office is very pleased to welcome Dr Peter Wilkins to our team as Deputy Ombudsman.

Peter brings extensive public sector experience to the office of the Ombudsman and significant expertise in the operation of independent accountability agencies. Prior to joining our team, Peter was Assistant Auditor General, Performance Review at the Western Australian Office of the Auditor General, a position he held since February 2006. Prior to this he held a number of senior positions in the Office of the Auditor General and has over twenty years experience as a public sector manager. Peter holds a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering, a Master of Science and a PhD.



On commencing in the role on February 3, Peter said “I am very pleased to have the opportunity to work with the Ombudsman and his staff in a collective effort serving people throughout the State. It is a vibrant organisation which has made major improvements in the handling of complaints and has launched an administrative improvement initiative, the combined effect being that Western Australians are being better served by a more accountable public sector.”

Key responsibilities for the Deputy Ombudsman in 2008-09 will include the ongoing improvements in our complaint resolution and improving public administration through the identification and investigation of concerns affecting broader sections of the community.



A day in the life of a Customer Service Officer

On the frontline of the office

The first person you will speak to when you call or visit our office will be a Customer Service Officer (CSO). However, there is much more to the role of a CSO than simply directing your enquiry to the right person.

On answering a call or meeting with a visitor wishing to make a complaint, the CSO will ask a series of questions about the nature of an enquiry. They will also check the Ombudsman's complaints handling system to see if the person has already made an enquiry or submitted a complaint. If the Ombudsman's office can assist with the enquiry, the caller will be transferred to an Enquiry Officer or the CSO will arrange for Enquiry Officers to meet with visitors. If the issue is outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, the CSO will provide contact details of an alternative agency or organisation which may be able to help.

Customer Service Officers are the frontline face and voice of our office, dealing with callers and visitors professionally and courteously to best direct enquiries.

There are three CSOs at our office and they provide services to four other co-located agencies in addition to the Ombudsman's office. Their primary role is dealing with calls and visitors but they also have an important role in receiving and referring mail and managing our records systems. They also undertake a range of administrative tasks such as deliveries, office maintenance and meeting scheduling.

Ombudsman Western Australia

Contact Us

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