

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Higgins to the Chief Minister:

Annual Report – Office of the Ombudsman

1. The work the Office of the Ombudsman is doing with NT agencies in facilitating process improvements has undoubtedly contributed to the significant reduction in the number of approaches; however it is agreed there would be other factors. It is noted there is reference made in the report to a spike in Correctional Services approaches in 2014/15 arising from the transition to the new Darwin Correctional Centre. Can you please advise of any known reason for the increase in complex matters from 94 to 117?
2. Are you able to confirm if the lack of use of indigenous interpreters by NT Agencies as mentioned in the Annual Report is due to a shortage of interpreters or are there other reasons?

ANSWER

1. The Ombudsman advises that approaches are categorised into three levels of complexity depending on the commitment of time and resources required. They are 'Enquiry', 'Resolved expeditiously' and 'Complex matters'. Numbers will vary each year depending on the nature of the issues raised.

Comparative analysis of Complex matters by agency from 2015/16 and 2016/17 shows variation across a large number of agencies. The highest variations are noted in a reduction in Remote Housing numbers and increases in NT Correctional Services and NT Police numbers. NT Police Complex matters are responsible for the majority of the increase.

The Ombudsman Annual Report notes an increase in Category 2 Police complaint matters as being reflective of a change in practice to earlier categorisation of complaints (page 40). It notes that categorisation is based on the allegation in the complaint and does not represent an assessment of the credibility or validity of the complaint. There was also an increase in Police Complaint Resolution Process matters, a number of which were Complex matters (page 39).

No other underlying or systemic cause for the increase has been identified.

2. The Ombudsman is currently undertaking an investigation relating to use of Indigenous interpreters as noted at page 9 of his Annual Report. The Ombudsman anticipates that a report will be finalised and presented for tabling in the Legislative Assembly in the first half of 2018. The Ombudsman Annual Report references recommendations relating to interpreters in the Ombudsman's *Women in Prison II* and *Bills, Bills, Bills* investigation reports and a concern raised by a community member that there is a need for more use of Indigenous interpreters (at pages 18, 21 and 26). The Annual Report does not otherwise comment on a lack of use of Indigenous interpreters.

The experience of the Ombudsman generally shows that, while there is increasing use by agencies of interpreters and material translated into Indigenous languages, there is also scope for greater use. Increased use of interpreters must go hand in hand with increased training and development of skilled interpreters. The final investigation report of the Ombudsman will discuss these matters.