

- the total reported cost attributable to the FOI Act during 1995-96 was \$14,827,461 compared to \$11,955,482 for the previous year (a 24.02% increase) – a summary of the costs reported by all agencies, including labour and non-labour costs are set out at Appendices K and L of the Report.

The Ombudsman

Release of A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling

In early 1996, the Ombudsman's office wrote to agencies seeking details of any internal complaints systems and review mechanisms which clients could access before seeking external review or redress. Approximately 80 agencies responded.

The Ombudsman reports that, apart from the review systems required of particular agencies by statute, less than 20% of agencies had a complaint system in place to deal with general service delivery issues which would probably satisfy the Australian Standard on *Complaints handling* (AS4269-1995). Another 10% of agencies indicated that they were in the process of reviewing their current systems with a view to improving them.

These results are discussed in the Foreword to a new publication *A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling* published by the Ombudsman's office in April. The Guide describes the essential elements of an effective complaint handling system from the theoretical standpoint and then discusses how these principles can be put into practice in any agency. The Foreword also notes that, during the 1995/96 financial year, over a quarter of the complaints received by the Ombudsman's

office were about basic service delivery issues, such as timeliness and staff behaviour.

The Ombudsman's survey is also discussed in her Focus Article in this edition of *Admin Review*.

ATSIC Complaints System

Over the past year the Ombudsman's office has been assisting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to develop processes for dealing with internal review of decisions and for handling complaints from the public. The majority of matters involved relate to decisions on funding of community organisations and the subsequent administration of funded programs.

ATSIC's unique structure of elected and administrative arms and its delivery of programs through a large number of community-based organisations throughout the country pose particular challenges in the development of a complaint-handling mechanism.

ATSIC is launching a pilot complaint program in New South Wales. According to the Ombudsman, complaint issues and locations will be monitored during the pilot program to enable the ultimate establishment of an effective national ATSIC complaint system.

Public Report on Activities for 1995-96

This report was released by the Ombudsman's Office at the end of 1996. The report outlines the types of complaints received with case studies to show how complaints are resolved. Copies of the report were circulated to community organisations and Members of Parliament.

Copies of publications and information material are available from the Ombudsman's Office or check the Ombudsman's Home Page on the Internet: <http://www.comb.gov.au>