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NSW Ombudsman **Annual Report 2014-2015**

The Acting NSW Ombudsman Professor John McMillan AO tabled his office's annual report in Parliament today. **"This report demonstrates the extraordinarily diverse, important work the NSW Ombudsman does every day to improve services."** Professor McMillan said.

A snapshot of the year

This has been another busy year for the office of the NSW Ombudsman. In 2014-2015, the office has:

- Received 40,306 matters. 11,109 were formal matters, and 29,197 were informal
- Finalised 10,694 formal matters
- Audited 3,053 police complaint records
- Provided training to 7,187 people in 317 workshops
- Completed the first year of our review of the OCHRE reforms
- Implemented Australia's first scheme for the reporting and independent oversight of serious incidents involving people with disability in supported accommodation.

Dealing with systemic issues

The office has continued to develop and refine its approach to identifying and responding to systemic issues identified across our jurisdiction. This year, we have:

- Worked with the Department of Family and Community Services to develop an integrated governance framework to improve how we monitor outstanding recommendations (page 80).
- Continued to raise concerns about the need for effective accountability systems around social housing (page 64).
- Worked closely with the Grandmothers Against Removal and others to develop a set of guiding principles to improve communication between Aboriginal families and the Department of Family and Community Services (page 109).
- Pressed for the NSW Police Force to respect and give proper weight to adverse findings by a court on the conduct of police (see page 49).

Finding solutions to important, everyday problems

We report each year on cases where our involvement has helped to achieve quick, informal results that can have a very real impact on people's lives. This year, we have:

- Helped to improve relationships between an Aboriginal community and local police (page 105).
- Worked with a carer for a woman with intellectual and physical disability and a disability support service to ensure they coordinated their efforts (page 95).
- Ensured an elderly man had adequate access to water after his water supply was restricted due to his landlord's debt (page 76).
- Made sure a victim of crime had the support she needed to find a safe home for her and her daughter (page 67).

Monitored the delivery and results of Aboriginal programs

This was the first year of the Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) performing a monitoring and assessment role, starting with OCHRE – the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs. This is our first public report on what we have seen, including:

- Promising initial progress at Connected Communities schools (page 112).
- Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are highly valued by communities (page 116).
- Commitment from government to Local Decision Making evidenced by the signing of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Accord (page 117).

There are some areas where we are hoping to see improvements:

- More needs to be done to implement a long term, holistic and place-based approach to delivering services to vulnerable children and families in rural and remote locations.
- The delays appointing Coordinators for Language and Cultures nests need to be overcome.
- Strengthened capacity of government, alliances and local community representatives to work collaboratively and with a clear direction to ensure the success of Local Decision Making.

40 years of working in the public interest

This year marks the office's 40th anniversary. A great deal has happened in that time, including:

- Dealing with approximately 260,000 formal matters, and more than 570,000 informal matters.
- Growing from a staff of 14 at the end of the office's first year, to 71 in 1994-1995, and to 220 this year.

- Reported to Parliament on a wide range of important public interest issues, such as:
 - The need to improve accommodation and support for people with psychiatric disability
 - The use of Tasers by the NSW Police Force
 - Responding to child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities
 - The land valuation system in NSW
 - The operation of the *Freedom of Information Act 1989*
- Ensured agencies comply with legislation aimed at ensuring the integrity, transparency and accountability of the public sector, such as the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994*.
- Using our experience to develop 17 different training courses, dealing with issues such as effective complaint handling, working with Aboriginal communities, the art of negotiation and managing unreasonable complainant conduct.

“This office has a long, proud history” said Professor McMillan **“and I am sure it will continue to evolve and change in the future.”**