

Ombudsman's Office celebrates 50 years

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A guide for whistleblowers wanting protection and guides for government agencies wanting to establish good complaints handling processes and apply good decision-making practices are among a range of new materials being released to help mark the 50th anniversary of the Office of Ombudsman in New Zealand this week.

New Zealand was the first English speaking country to appoint an Ombudsman following the Scandinavian countries establishment of the role. The Office opened its doors on October 1, 1962 and is running a Good Governance Week to mark its birthday.

Chief Ombudsman Dame Beverley Wakem says the role has changed vastly over the years from a classical ombudsman model of complaint handling to a modern ombudsman making more use of its powers to conduct systemic investigations to improve public administration. The Office is also reflecting in its practices the way people now interact with the Office through new technology such as email, websites, and Facebook.

"We now publish precedent-setting decisions on our website as well as topic guides to make sure our work is as accessible as possible.

"We are working hard to be more relevant and more accountable."

Dame Beverley says what the Office wants to see is a high level of public trust in government maintained through improved administration and decision making in public sector agencies as well as official information becoming increasingly available.

"There is no doubt that the office has contributed substantially to good governance in the public sector over the years, and is trusted to be even-handed in its dealings with complainants and agencies in the pursuit of administrative justice and procedural fairness," she says.

The 50th anniversary will be marked with a reception at Parliament on October 2.

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