# Media statement

## Ombudsman releases Community Attitudes towards freedom of information Survey

3 October 2019

The Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier says too many New Zealanders are unaware of their rights to request information from Ministers, government agencies and Councils.

UMR surveyed a thousand New Zealanders about our freedom of information laws, the Official Information Act and the Local Government and Official Information and Meetings Act.

“New Zealand is rated by Transparency International as one of the most transparent countries in the world. Our freedom of information laws help foster an open society.”

Mr Boshier says the survey showed 78 percent thought it was important for people to be able to access government information.

“Yet only 60 percent were aware they could actually ask those agencies to send it to them.”

“While this represents a majority I believe it is a slim one for New Zealand. It suggests that a large section of our population don’t know about this important democratic right.”

“Information is power particularly when people are thinking about who to vote for. The local body elections are underway and we have a general election next year.”

Older people aged sixty and over were far more likely to claim awareness (76 percent) than those under 30 years of age (39 percent).

There was also a gender gap. Males were more likely to declare awareness at 69 percent compared to 52 per cent for females.

“Maori were even less likely to declare knowledge with only 49 per cent awareness compared to Pakeha at 63 percent.”

“Both central and local government have a raft of channels from websites to community newsletters.

“I’d encourage them to use their collective strength to promote the use by citizens of our freedom of information laws. They should also proactively release information of interest to their communities. “

“Another thing that was very concerning to me was the relatively low number of people who had taken the next step and had actually asked for information at any time over the last three years from ministers, government departments or councils.”

Mr Boshier says just 13 percent had requested information.

Of those more than half (58 per cent) were successful.

“This shows the law can be effective if people are prepared to use it.”

 “Just over half (52 percent) of those who received information were satisfied and most (83 per cent) felt they received the information at a speed they were expecting it or even faster.”

However, Mr Boshier says 31 percent of those who requested information did not receive it.

 “I think the number of people who missed out on receiving information is unacceptably high.”

“Understandably, the level of frustration was worse for those whose had not received the information with 77 per cent of this group dissatisfied with the response from officials.”

Mr Boshier says their degree of satisfaction depended on the outcome of their request.

“Agencies are required by law to tell people they have the right to complain to me if they are unhappy with the outcome and I can investigate.”

“My focus over the past two years has been on the early resolution of complaints and clearing the backlog of old complaints. My message is simple. I’m here to help. ”

The online survey was conducted between 27 August to 3 September. The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 per cent.

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