

## Chief Ombudsman revisits *Not a game of hide and seek*

11 December 2019

The Chief Ombudsman is launching a new inquiry into whether central government agencies have addressed any weaknesses identified in a landmark investigation five years ago.

Peter Boshier told Parliament's Government Administration Committee this morning that 'now is the right time' to revisit the 12 representative agencies involved in *Not a game of hide and seek*, the Ombudsman's 2015 investigation into Official Information Act compliance and practice.

"This is all about how agencies respond to requests from people for information about their work. If there are barriers then I want to know about them."

"We're less than a year away from a general election. Voters need access to as much information as possible before they cast their ballot. A well informed electorate is vital for a healthy democracy."

Published in December 2015, *Not a game of hide and seek* was initiated by former Chief Ombudsman Dame Beverley Wakem, in response to growing concerns that some agencies or Ministers were 'gaming' the OIA. The investigation found that while agencies overall met the required standards, there were definite improvements to be made.

"I really have to find out about what has changed since the original report was published," Mr Boshier says.

"I am dealing with many complaints from people frustrated at the slowness of agencies to respond to requests. With less than a year until the next general election, I want to ensure these agencies have systems and practices working consistently with their obligations under the OIA and the public can have trust and know what to expect when they engage with them."

"*Not a game of hide and seek* kicked off a new era of work in my Office", Mr Boshier says. "We intensified our work with agencies and produced guidance to support stronger compliance and practice. Last year, I established a formal programme of official information practice investigations into individual agencies and local authorities."

“Clear themes are emerging from these investigations, particularly the importance of strong leadership that sets a culture and expectation of openness, and provides the structure and resources to back that up”, Mr Boshier says.

“I’ve notified the Chief Executives of the 12 agencies involved that I’m initiating a follow-up investigation”, Mr Boshier says, “and calling for input from anyone who has tried to get information from one or more of these agencies within the last year. This includes phone calls and website visits as well as Official Information Act requests”.

“This follow-up to *Not a game of hide and seek* will provide robust information on the current state of play, five years after that first ground-breaking report”, he says.

“New Zealand enjoys a very high international standing in terms of open government and lack of corruption”, Mr Boshier says. “The Official Information Act is a big part of the reason why. My role is to give assurance to New Zealanders that the Act is being not only complied with, but used to foster an ever-more open society”.

### **Public survey**

Have you sought information from one or more of these agencies within the last 12 months? This can include seeking information on the website, through phone calls and emails, and through Official Information act requests. If so, the Chief Ombudsman welcomes your input into his investigation. The links below will take you to the survey for each agency.

- [State Services Commission](#)
- [Ministry of Justice](#)
- [Accident Compensation Corporation](#)
- [Department of Corrections](#)
- [Ministry of Education](#)
- [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)
- [Ministry of Health](#)
- [New Zealand Customs Service](#)
- [New Zealand Defence Force](#)
- [New Zealand Transport Agency](#)
- [Ministry of Social Development](#)
- [Ministry of Transport](#)

Please note, complaints can’t be made through this survey. If you have a new complaint about one of these agencies, please visit our website, [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz).

**The survey is open until Friday 24 January.**

## **Investigation**

**Timeframe:** December 2019 to June 2020

**Agencies:** Accident Compensation Corporation; Department of Corrections; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Justice; New Zealand Customs Service; New Zealand Defence Force; New Zealand Transport Agency; Ministry of Social Development; Ministry of Transport; State Services Commission

**Publications:** 12 individual agency reports and one thematic report

**Using powers under:** Ombudsmen Act 1975

**Investigation will involve:** analysis of records and data from the Office and the agencies involved; Questionnaire for agency, surveys of staff, and the public; interviews; document research. Agencies will have the opportunity to comment on the Chief Ombudsman's provisional opinion, and the final opinion will incorporate agencies' comments and feedback.

**Criteria:** agencies will be measured against the same criteria as *Not a game of hide and seek*, which we also apply to our targeted investigations of individual agencies and local authorities: leadership and culture, organisation structure, staffing and capability, internal policies, procedures and resources, current practices, and performance monitoring and learning.

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