TE MATO AKAMOEAU
OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
ANNUAL REPORT
2025

TE MATO AKAMOEAU - OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
Harley Street, Pokoinu, Nikao, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, P. O. Box 748, Tel: (682) 20605
Email: niki.rattle@cookislands.gov.ck

The Honourable Tai Tura,
Speaker of the House
Parliament of the
Cook Islands
RAROTONGA

Kia Orana Mr Speaker,

Pursuant to Section 26 of the Ombudsman Act 1984, I have the honour to present the Annual Report for the Office of the Ombudsman (Te Mato Akamoeau) for the period of 1st July 2024 - 30th June 2025.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant

Niki Rattle
OMBUDSMAN

The **Hon Vaine Makiroa Mokoroa**, Minister Responsible for Ombudsman.
Mr Carl Hunter, Public Service Commissioner.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD: BRIEF HISTORY OF TE MATO AKAMOEAU

History in Short

1809 The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman was first established in Sweden.

1984

The Ombudsman Act was passed by Parliament and assented to by His Excellency the Queen's Representative on 26 September 1984.

1985

The Office of the Ombudsman was established in February 1985.

Mr Tangata Simiona OBE was appointed first Ombudsman of the Cook Islands from 26 August 1985 to February 1992.

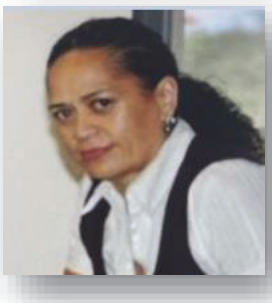
1992

Mr Henry Keta Brown was appointed second Ombudsman of the Cook Islands from 9 March 1992 to August 2000.

2000

Mr Andrew Mata Turua, OBE was appointed third Ombudsman of the Cook Islands as from 30 August 2000 to 14 November 2006.

2006



Ms Janet Grace Maki was appointed fourth Ombudsman of the Cook Islands from 15 November 2006 to November 2011.

2008

18th February 2008; the Official Information Act (the Act) was passed by Parliament and assented to by His Excellency the Queen's Representative. The Act came into force on 11th February 2009.

27th June 2008; The Disability Act 2008 (the Act) was passed by Parliament and assented by His Excellency the Queen's Representative. The Act came into force on the 3rd November 2008 and administered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Part 3 of the Act describes the functions of the Ombudsman in dealing with complaints of unlawful discrimination by or on behalf of a person or persons with a disability.

2012

Mr Tearoa John Tini, BEM was appointed fifth Ombudsman of the Cook Islands from 26 November 2012 to 26 February 2019.

The Police Act 2012 (the Act) was passed by Parliament, assented to by His Excellency the Queen's Representative on the 8th December 2012 and came into force on the day after the date on which it receives the Royal assent.

Part 9 of the Act describes the functions of the Ombudsman in relation to complaints against the Police alleging misconduct and neglect of duties or concerning any practices, policy, or procedure of the Police.

2019

Mr Nooapii Tearea was appointed sixth Ombudsman of the Cook Islands from 26 February 2019 to 31 December 2021.

A new organizational structure was approved on 8 May 2020 by the Public Service Commissioner.

2022

Mrs Niki Rattle was appointed as the seventh Ombudsman of the Cook Islands on 27 January 2022 for the 1st term.
On 27 January 2025 Sir Tom Marsters the King's Representative awarded me with a 3 year extension of my term.

Elected as the Australasian Pacific Region President (APOR) Nov 2023 and a Director of the International Ombudsman Institution stationed in Austria.

The relocation of the Ombudsman Office in Harley Street Pokoinu Nikao, has placed my Office amongst the community.

A location that encourages and enables inclusivity and accessibility for all people.

1. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APOR	Australasia & Pacific Ombudsman Region
CI	Cook Islands
CINDC	Cook Islands National Disability Council
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DA	Disability Act 2008
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit
HRC	Human Rights Commission
HRO	Human Rights Office
ICI	Infrastructure Cook Islands
IOI	International Ombudsman Institute
IPCA	Independent Police Conduct Authority
MFAI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
MFEM	Ministry of Finance & Economic Management
MOH	Ministry of Health (Te Marae Ora)
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOT	Ministry of Transport
NES	National Environment Services
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NON	Non-Jurisdiction
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
NZ	New Zealand
NZOOO	New Zealand Office of the Ombudsman
NZOOO IDET	New Zealand Office of the Ombudsman International Development and Engagement Team
OA	Ombudsman Act 1984
OIA	Official Information Act 2008
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OPSC	Office of the Public Service Commissioner
PA	Police Act 2012

PM	Prime Minister
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PSC	Public Service Commissioner
REDD	Renewable Energy Development Division
RPM	Rethinking Performance Management
TMA	Te Mato Akamoeau (Office of the Ombudsman)
TMO	Te Marae Ora (Ministry of Health)
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention Against Corruption
UNCEDAW	United Nations Convention of the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention of the rights of people with disabilities.
UNCRC	United National Convention of the Rights of Children
UNCAT	United Nations Convention against Torture
UNHRI	United Nations Human Rights Institute

2. MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, and all esteemed members of this House.

I am pleased to have my tenure as the Ombudsman extended another term to allow me to pursue and progress further on the significant progress in the pathway of the establishment of the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) as the 5th Mandate of my Office. Additional staff will be required with operations funds to implement this long-awaited progress.

I am also pleased today to introduce the staff of the Ombudsman Office as the functions of the Office could not be achieved without the commitment and dedication of the staff who are passionate about their roles and responsibilities in serving the people of the Cook Islands with an emphasis on the Office Value of "***fairness for all***"

1. Metua Taurarii - Investigations Lead began his career in the Office as the Investigation Officer and proved his performance to be appointed as the Investigation Lead and takes charge of the investigations of the complaints brought to my office by the public on the decisions, actions and mismanagement by the government.

2. Destiny Tara-Tolevu - the Compliance Lead held a Contract role previously that transformed to the current post in ensuring that my Office is performing its investigations are in compliance with the legislations that we are mandated to work under as well as ensuring that the government is also in compliance with their mandates.

3. Purohittam Anantha Kumar – Corporate Services Lead was welcomed in to our team on 30th June 2025 with immense experience as an Accountant and has landed running in his new role. Anan as we call him has fit in very comfortably and managing his new role with commitment and has settled in well.

4. Investigations Officer -Vacant to be filled soon with 5 Applicants to be interviewed next week and we look forward to onboarding the successful applicant. This role is to replace

Edouard Bataillard whom we wish well in his new role and to thank him for his past service to the Ombudsman Office.

My team and I also wish to extend our many thanks to Ms Pehau Browne the former Corporate Services Lead for her much appreciated service and we wish her all the very best in her future endeavours.

The Minister Mac Mokoroa as the Minister of the Ombudsman, with the Ombudsman Niki Rattle, accompanied by Rosslyn Noonan the National Human Rights Institution Specialist of Asia Pacific Forum, Ms Tepaeru Tauraki -Human Resources Manager of the OPSC, Ms Shelly Berry, the Manager for Inclusive Education from MoE, Dr Hannah Cummings, Nurse Practitioner Tohoa Cummings Breast Cancer and Cervical Cancer Screening team travelled to the Northern Group on a Consultation visit on the National Human Rights Institution establishment in the Ombudsman Office as our 5th Mandate, The people of the Islands of Penrhyn, Manihiki, Rakahanga and Pukapuka were able to give feedback on an intensive Consultation that is captured in a full Report. Sadly, we did not visit Nassau due to rough seas but there were Nassau locals visiting and were able to attend the sessions in Pukapuka.

I and my staff are pleased to share with you this Report to Parliament about the achievements of our Office through commitment and dedication with consideration of their human rights, as well as the challenges due to constraints of human and financial resources.

The below photo is of the Minister Mac Mokoroa who is the Minister of my Office, catching up with the Member of Parliament Akaiti Puna of Manihiki, at the Manihiki Airport on our way to Rakahanga for consultation with the Community on the Establishment of the National Human Rights Institution as the 5th Mandate in my Office.

E kore roa e rava ta matou hakamaitakihanga ia kotou, e, te hiti tangata o te Pae Tokerau I to kotou Aroha e te Maitaki tei haka'ari mai kia matou, Te Atua te Aroha kia kotou katoatoa.

Minister Mac Mokoroa and MP Akaiti Puna – Manihiki

NG Consultation Team

The photo above is the remaining members of the dynamic Consultation Team starting left: Ms Tepaeru Tauraki Human Resources-Manager OPSC, Ms Rosslyn Noonan NHRI Specialist of The Asia Pacific Forum (APF) Ombudsman Niki Rattle, Ms Tohoa Cummings-Senior Nurse Practitioner-Cook Islands Family Welfare Association (CIFWA), Ministry of Health, Doctor Hannah Cummings-CIFWA, MOH, Ms Shelly Berry, Manager for Inclusive Education-Ministry of Education.

These two photos very clearly show the importance of the engagement of my Office with the Minister and the Member of Parliament, the Government, the Civil society group, Overseas Partners and the communities of the most remote islands of the Cook Islands in the Pae Tokerau. The success of this excellent journey of consultation is through its reaching out to

government ministries with same interests, and civil society organizations with the same interests and the international organization who needed cooperation and partnerships to realize their wishes and I would say that this was a win-win situation for each of our team members and the communities that we visited.

A comprehensive Report is available on this Project on our website under Admin Reports.

On the 26th of September the Ombudsman Office celebrated our 41st Anniversary by inviting our Minister Mac Mokoroa with 30 College Students and their teachers which was a new initiative, first-time engagement for us and that will be an ongoing relationship with our colleges. This proved to be a mutual, happy and a beneficial event for all present. The students expressed their positive views on the work of the Ombudsman.

Minister Mac Makoroa addressing the students

College students and teachers

Metua, the Investigation Lead was able to take the students on a journey of our functions within our Office with the main responsibility of the investigations of the complaints from the community about the decisions, actions and mismanagement of the government. Hence the importance of dealing with the public according to their legislation and policies to keep the public happy and not make complaints. It is about fairness for all and is achieved by

doing the right thing in serving the public. When the public is happy with the service provided as they expect, they will not complain and that is what we expect and want.

The students asked some relevant questions on interviewing after the session and mentioned how happy they were to have this opportunity as they were not aware of the functions of my Office. One student said during his interview that he would like to work in my Office and that was music to my ears and this is an avenue of outreach we will maintain in to the future in reaching out to the future leaders as they consider their pathways and keeping them in country if they do not go further afar.

Kia Manuia e te katoatoa.

Niki Rattle
Ombudsman

3. INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Ombudsman has 4 Mandates of the Ombudsman Act 1984, the Disability Act, 2008, Official Information Act 2008 and the Police Act 2012 with an intended inclusion 5th Mandate of the National Human Rights Institution within the Ombudsman Office.

The functions of the Ombudsman are not well known by the members of the public and yet it is an Office that has a major and important responsibility in ensuring that the public is treated with fairness for all as it is our Vision. The Ombudsman is an ***Independent Agency,*** not a Ministry of the Government and it makes it more confusing for many public members which then raises the question ***as who are we really and what do we do.***

I take this opportunity to introduce you to my office and better still, to help you to know and to understand our Maori name of ***Te Mato Akamoeau,*** in simple terms, it means a body or a place or people to cool down, or to calm down, or to remove anger, or to pacify someone or people who are hurt or are in distress, or are frustrated or are extremely disappointed.

So clearly when a person comes to make a complaint, it is important that we recognize their feelings as mentioned above, be empathetic, have an open mind, listen well, remain impartial, allow the person to express themselves freely.

The original Ombudsman Office was first established in Sweden in 1809 and its original name is "**the protector of people"** Why do people need protecting from who and what, one wonders.

In the Cook Islands Ombudsman Act 1984 you will find in Section 3 (1) the following sentence; "**There may be appointed an Ombudsman who shall be an Officer responsible to the Parliament.**

The Ombudsman of the Cook Islands is responsible to the Parliament to maintain its ***independence, Impartiality and Accountability since its main job is to investigate the government.***

<u>This relationship helps to ensure the following</u>:

1. ***Independence***: by reporting to the Parliament, the Ombudsman can maintain Independence from the executive branch (the Cabinet and the King's Representative) and investigate complaints against government without interference.
2. ***Accountability*** is to be accountable for their actions and decisions, ensuring transparency and integrity in their work.
3. ***Oversight***: Parliamentary oversight helps ensure that the Ombudsman Office operates effectively and efficiently.

The relationships also allow the Ombudsman to:

1. ***Independently Investigate*** Complaints about government agencies and officials
2. ***Report findings***: Report findings and provide recommendations to Parliament, improving transparency and ensuring accountability in government.
3. ***Build Public Trust:*** foster public trust in government *by ensuring that* complaints are handled impartially and efficiently.
4. ***Capacity building:*** provide training and programs for government officials to enhance their understanding of good governance principles and practices.
5. ***Community engagement***: engage with the community to raise awareness about the role of the Ombudsman and promote good governance practices.
6. ***Collaboration***: collaboration with other independent institutions as Officers of Parliament to promote good governance and accountability in the government.

It is my belief that when the government and the public/everyone get to understand the position and functions of my Office, we will be seen in a positive light as it's role is to protect the public and at the same time to improve the services of the government to the people that the public services serve.

With the above measures in place to allow the Ombudsman Office to perform its mandated responsibilities, it also appears appropriate for the Parliament to consider "An Officers' of Parliament Committee to be established in Parliament"

By being responsible to Parliament, the Ombudsman can establish and promote good governance in the Cook Islands.

4. VISION, MISSION & VALUES

Our VISION the Office of the Ombudsman aims to:

Promote Fairness for All

Our MISSION the Office of the Ombudsman aims to achieve its vision by:

- Conducting **independent** and **impartial investigations** initiated upon receipt of complaints or acting on its own initiative, with **fair and reasonable** results.
- Developing a ***collaborative*** public service culture which upholds **fairness**; fosters **dedication**, **continuous improvement** and **commitment**; and promotes **transparency** and **accountability**, taking into account our **Cook Islands cultural values**.

Our VALUES Te Mato Akamoeau – Office of the Ombudsman includes the values of the Public Service as well as those specific to its office:

- Quality
- Integrity
- Impartiality
- Honesty
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Respect
- Independence

5. NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The Office of the Ombudsman's functions are aligned with the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA). Refer to Appendix 1 for the goals of the NSDA.

We hope to achieve our goals with the following strategies:

- To conduct efficient and effective investigations of complaints and systemic reviews.
- To increase awareness amongst government agencies of their rights and responsibilities to minimize public complaints and investigations.
- To create greater public awareness of the Ombudsman's role and enhance the reputation of the Ombudsman in its Independence status.

The establishment of the National Human Rights Institute, when endorsed by the Cabinet will increase the number of NSDA Goals the Ombudsman Office mandate will align with.

The Cook Islands has ratified the Conventions of the rights of people living with Disabilities, the Convention of the Rights of Children, the Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and many others.

There is evidence of progress toward the establishment of the NHRI within the Ombudsman Office gained through wider Consultation within the Pa Enua Tokerau that was not met before 5-9 May 2025 where an inclusive consultation was held with the community and their input is well documented for future use.

The Minister of the Ombudsman has given his endorsement for the establishment of the NHRI within the Ombudsman Office.

We anticipate the support of a healthy budget to enable the establishment of the NHRI that is supported by a Cabinet Directive and the ground work of the dissemination of information to the public to be realized in the near future.

The Constitution of the Cook Islands Part IV Art 64 holds the Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the people of the Cook Islands.

6. MANDATES

The four pieces of legislation that determine the jurisdiction of the Cook Islands Ombudsman are:

- The Ombudsman Act 1984 (Ombudsman Act),
- The Official Information Act 2008 (OIA),
- The Disability Act 2008 (Disability Act) and
- The Police Act 2012.

The Ombudsman Act mandates that the Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the administrative decisions or recommendations of Government Ministries and Crown Agencies.

Government Ministries and Crown Agencies that fall within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction are listed in Schedules 1 & 2 of the Ombudsman Act 1984 as substituted in 2007. They include:

- Government Ministries
- Crown Agencies
- Island Councils*
- Statutory Corporations
- State-Owned Enterprises

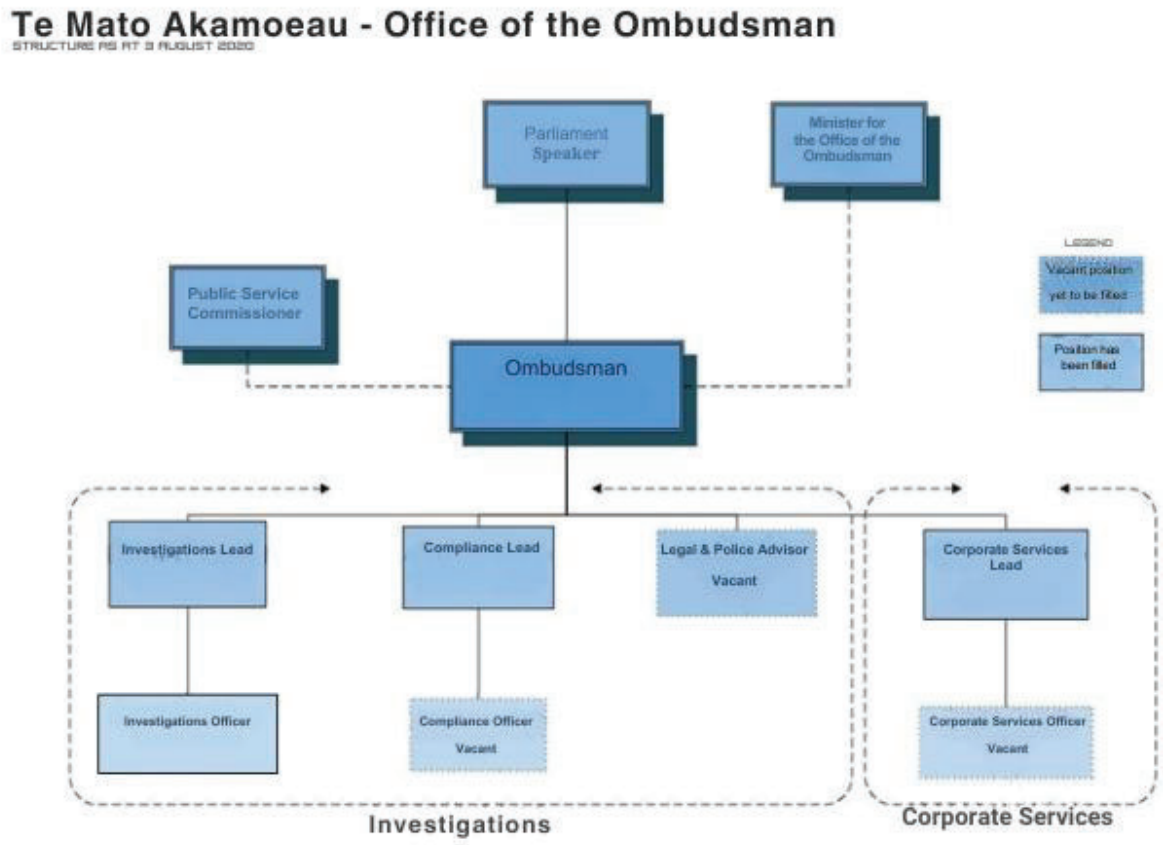
Currently the schedule is being updated to include all the Crown Agencies that have been renamed or the newly established agencies by the Crown Law Office.

When this listing is competed in the Schedule, it will be presented to the Executive Council for endorsement.

*Complaints regarding elected members, are reported to the *Chief of Staff - Office of the Prime Minister*

7. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

A new structure was approved on 8 May 2020 by the Public Service Commissioner to assist with the vision of building strong foundations in our transformative journey. Previously the structure included the role of an Assistant Ombudsman and a Corporate Services Manager who both reported directly to the Ombudsman. The next line of reporting was two Senior Investigations Officers and one Legal & Policy Officer with one Investigations Officer reporting to each of the Senior Investigations Officers. The decision to restructure was based on a knowledge gap which created an unnecessary bottle-neck which affected operations during the office's approval process. The below new flat line structure for the management team is to encourage cross-skilling and transparency between each function.



8. OUR FUNCTIONS

The Ombudsman has six main functions:

1. Investigating maladministration;
2. Investigating complaints about access to official information;
3. Investigating complaints about unlawful discrimination against persons with disabilities;
4. Investigating complaints about Police conduct;
5. Acting as Human Rights Office of the Cook Islands; and
6. Participating in the Cook Anti-Corruption Committee.

8.1 Investigating Maladministration

Under the Ombudsman Act 1984 (OA), I investigate 'maladministration' a broad term that encompasses biased, neglectful, incompetent and unfair administration by Government Ministries and Crown Agencies. This can be on receipt of a complaint, or on my own initiative.

Where complaints cannot be resolved, I form an independent opinion on whether the conduct at issue was wrong, unreasonable or contrary to law. I can make whatever recommendations I think fit in order to remedy maladministration. I can report to Parliament if appropriate action is not taken on my recommendations.

8.2 Investigating Complaints about Access to Official Information

The Official Information Act 2008 (OIA) allows people to request information held by Ministers, Ministries and Crown Agencies, including their own personal information. Providing timely access to government-held information helps the public to:

- participate in government decision making;
- understand why decisions were made; and
- hold the government to account.

The principle of availability underpins the OIA, which means that information must be made available on request, unless there is a 'good reason' for withholding it. The Act specifies what these 'good reasons' are.

Under the OIA, I investigate complaints about decisions on OIA requests, including delays and refusals. Where complaints cannot be resolved, I form an independent opinion on the agency's decision. I can make whatever recommendations I think fit. However, they are not binding but implementing them will improve the performance of the Ministry in serving the public and elevating satisfaction.

My recommendations are binding, unless vetoed by Order in Council, made by the King's Representative.

8.3 Investigating Complaints about Police Conduct

Under the Police Act 2012 (PA), I investigate complaints about:

- alleged misconduct or neglect of duty by the Police, and
- Police practices, policies or procedures that have personally affected the complainant.
- Non-response or lack of response to complaints from the public

Complaints must be made to the Police Commissioner first. Complainants can then come to me if their complaint is not investigated or they are dissatisfied with the outcome.

I can also investigate incidents involving death or serious bodily harm caused by or appears to have been caused by a member of Police, which must be notified to me by the Police Commissioner.

Tragically, there have been two fatal cases under the Police Act, which are particularly devastating for the parents of young teenagers. Such occurrences must be handled with the utmost care, empathy, and compassion. It is essential to remember that every victim involved in an accident has a family and community behind them, so be mindful of the broader impact. Ensure that all proper procedures are followed and be responsible.

My Office has conducted multiple training courses with the Police to enhance their understanding of the functions of the Ombudsman including our jurisdiction over the Police Act. We emphasize the importance of delivering their duties and responsibilities to the public according to the standards that are prescribed in their General Instructions and other training instruments.

I can oversee a Police investigation, or defer action on a complaint until the Police have investigated. Complaints may also be resolved by conciliation.

After investigating (or receiving a report of the Police investigation), I form an

independent opinion on the conduct or policy complained about, and make whatever recommendations I think fit. I can report to the Solicitor-General and the Minister of Police if appropriate action is not taken on my recommendations.

An Agreement of Intent between the Police Commissioner and the Ombudsman is in consideration of re-signing to make a commitment of adhering to legislation and reducing the numbers of Complaints from the public.

However, the Agreement of Intent must be adhered to, in its intention to be practicalized to hold the Police accountable to the public according to its legislation, General Instructions and Policies. This way the numbers of complaints are reduced, the public is happy and the Police are satisfied with their service.

8.4 Investigating Complaints about Unlawful Discrimination against Persons with Disability

The Disability Act 2008 (DA) recognizes that persons with disability are entitled to the same rights and privileges as any other person. It also makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone because of their disability.

People can complain to me if they believe they have been discriminated against because of their disability. People can also complain to me on behalf of those who believe they have been discriminated against because of their disability. I can deal with these complaints under the DA or the OA.

Under the DA, I can help the parties to reach a settlement or make recommendations after investigating a complaint. In contrast to the OA and OIA, it is possible to complain about private entities under the DA.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the deaf community filed a complaint with the Ombudsman's Office, citing discrimination based on disability. They felt excluded from important information disseminated on television and radio, which was delivered solely through spoken language. Although captions were sometimes used, they moved too quickly for many to follow, and the community stressed the critical need for a sign language interpreter, as they were being left out of essential, life-saving information.

The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Office of the Prime Minister were identified by the Crown Law Office as the most appropriate agencies to implement sign language services. However, this proved challenging, and the Ombudsman approached the Public Service Commissioner to adopt a whole-of-government approach, as the issue spans across different ministries, particularly in areas like disaster management.

The deaf community envisions training people in sign language, raising awareness of their needs, and being included in community affairs. They also want to feel safer during disasters and emergencies, with full inclusion in these critical communications. After all, the Cook Islands has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the deaf community expects the government to honour this commitment.

The Public Services Commissioner has given his support in working with the Heads of Ministries and my Office in these areas in promoting a whole of government approach in handling such situations into the future.

8.5 Acting as the Cook Islands Human Rights Office

In 2007, Cabinet appointed the Ombudsman to be in charge of the Cook Islands Human Rights Office, and this still stands. The Minister responsible for the Ombudsman Office Hon. Mac Mokoroa presented the Submission to Cabinet proposing to Cabinet to:

- Approve the Ombudsman be conferred with additional functions, powers, and protections to become the NHRI of the Cook Islands;
- Approve the drafting of a Bill to amend the Ombudsman Act 1984 ('the Act') to establish the Ombudsman as the NHRI;
- Approve additional appropriations necessary to ensure the Ombudsman is effectively resourced with appropriate staff and operations resources to fulfil the functions as the NHRI.

The submission to Cabinet was deferred due to a lack of fiscal space.

In practice, this means that I will have regard to international human rights standards, and the fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed by Article 64 of the Cook

Islands Constitution, where relevant when exercising my powers and functions under the Ombudsman Act, the Police Act and the Disability Act.

However, since May this year, my Office has been able to fulfill extra activities to meet further achievements that has prompted the Cabinet Submission to be prepared and presented to the Cabinet again for the 2026-2027 budget consideration.

8.6 Participating in the Cook Islands Anti-Corruption Committee

In 2011, the Government ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and established an Anti-Corruption Committee. The Committee is tasked with the coordination of anti-corruption initiatives, including reporting on progress in implementing UNCAC.

I am part of the Committee, along with the Solicitor-General, Commissioner of Police, Head of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), Director of the Cook Islands Audit Office, Financial Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM), Public Service Commissioner, and Chief of Staff of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). There have been discussions on a change of Chairmanship from the Secretary of MFEM to the Office of the Public Services Commissioner but that has not been yet endorsed by the CAC Members.

The Committee does not operate under any specific statute and does not hold any additional powers beyond those already granted to its members through their individual mandates and roles. In practice, this means I will consider the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) when relevant in carrying out my duties under the Ombudsman Act (OA), Official Information Act (OIA), Public Administration Act (PA), and Disclosure Act (DA). The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) hired a consultant with support from UNCAC, and after extensive consultations, he developed a National Anti-Corruption Strategy, which is currently awaiting Cabinet approval. This strategy was widely consulted on and translated into Māori to make it easier to share with the public.

It is vital that the Anti-Corruption Committee attends to the Cabinet Endorsement of the Cook Islands National Strategic Plan as an important action to enable the purpose that it was developed for the co-ordination of anti-corruption initiatives including reporting on the progress of anti-corruption initiatives, including reporting on progress in the implementation of UNCAC to preventing and combatting corruption in the Cook Islands.

9. OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Outlined in the following are our:

- key achievements
- the overview of complaints
- key challenges &
- Mitigation strategies.

9.1 Key Achievements

9.1.1 Community Engagement and Outreach Activities

Police Recruit Training Session

Date: 30 September 2025
Location: Cook Islands Police Headquarters
Facilitators: Destiny Tara-Tolevu (Compliance Lead) and Metua Taurarii (Investigations Lead)
Audience: Police Recruits and Maritime Division

Overview

As part of its mandate to promote good governance, accountability, and fairness, the Office of the Ombudsman conducted an interactive training session for new Police recruits. The session was designed to strengthen inter-agency collaboration and to promote understanding of the Ombudsman's role in investigating complaints, particularly those relating to Police conduct.

Objectives

- Build awareness of the Ombudsman's role and complaint-handling processes.
- Encourage Police recruits to view complaints as opportunities for improvement rather than criticism.

- Promote collaboration and mutual respect between the Police and the Ombudsman's Office.
- Reinforce the importance of integrity, transparency, and accountability in public service.

Session Highlights

The session was divided into three key parts:

- **Who Are We? What Do We Do?** – Introduced the Ombudsman's history, mandate, and four complaint areas (Government, Official Information, Police, and Disability Discrimination).
- **A Shared Goal** – Explored shared values and responsibilities between the Police and the Ombudsman, with group discussions and real-life examples.
- **Speak Up or Stay Silent** – Addressed barriers to making complaints and encouraged an open mindset toward feedback and continuous improvement.

Methodology

The session used PowerPoint presentations, group discussions, and reflection exercises to encourage participation and learning. Feedback was gathered using QR codes, paper forms, and verbal input.

Outcomes

- Improved understanding of the Ombudsman's oversight functions.
- Strengthened cooperation between the Police and the Ombudsman.
- Positive participant feedback—100% found the session relevant and informative.
- Increased openness among recruits toward handling complaints constructively.

9.1.2 41st Anniversary

College Outreach Programme

Date: 26–27 September 2025
Prepared by: Metua Taurarii (Investigations Lead) and Anan (Corporate Services Lead)
Guest of Honour: Hon. Mac Mokoroa, Minister of Education, Justice, Youth and Sports

Overview

To commemorate the 41st Anniversary of the Office of the Ombudsman, a College Outreach Programme was held to engage senior secondary students in Rarotonga. The initiative aimed to build early awareness of civic responsibility, fairness, and accountability by introducing students to the role and functions of the Ombudsman. This outreach replaced the traditional public debate, aligning the celebration with youth education and engagement.

Objectives

- Introduce students to the Ombudsman's mandate and complaint process.
- Encourage early understanding of public accountability and citizens' rights.
- Shift perceptions of complaints from criticism to constructive feedback.
- Promote youth engagement in transparent and fair governance.

Participants

Representatives attended from:

- **Tereora College:** 10 students, 1 teacher
- **Nukutere College:** 4 students, 1 teacher
- **Papaaroa College:** 4 students, 1 teacher
- **Titikaveka College:** invited but unable to attend

A total of **19 students and 3 teachers** participated, alongside the hon. minister and media representatives from CITV and Cook Islands News.

Programme Highlights

- **Opening & Welcome:** Led by the Ombudsman, acknowledging 41 years of service.
- **Ministerial Remarks:** Hon. Mac Mokoroa commended the Ombudsman's contribution to governance and civic education.
- **Interactive Presentation:** Students learned about the Ombudsman's functions, mandate, and complaint process.
- **Engagement & Discussion:** Students actively participated, asking questions and sharing reflections on fairness and accountability.

Outcomes

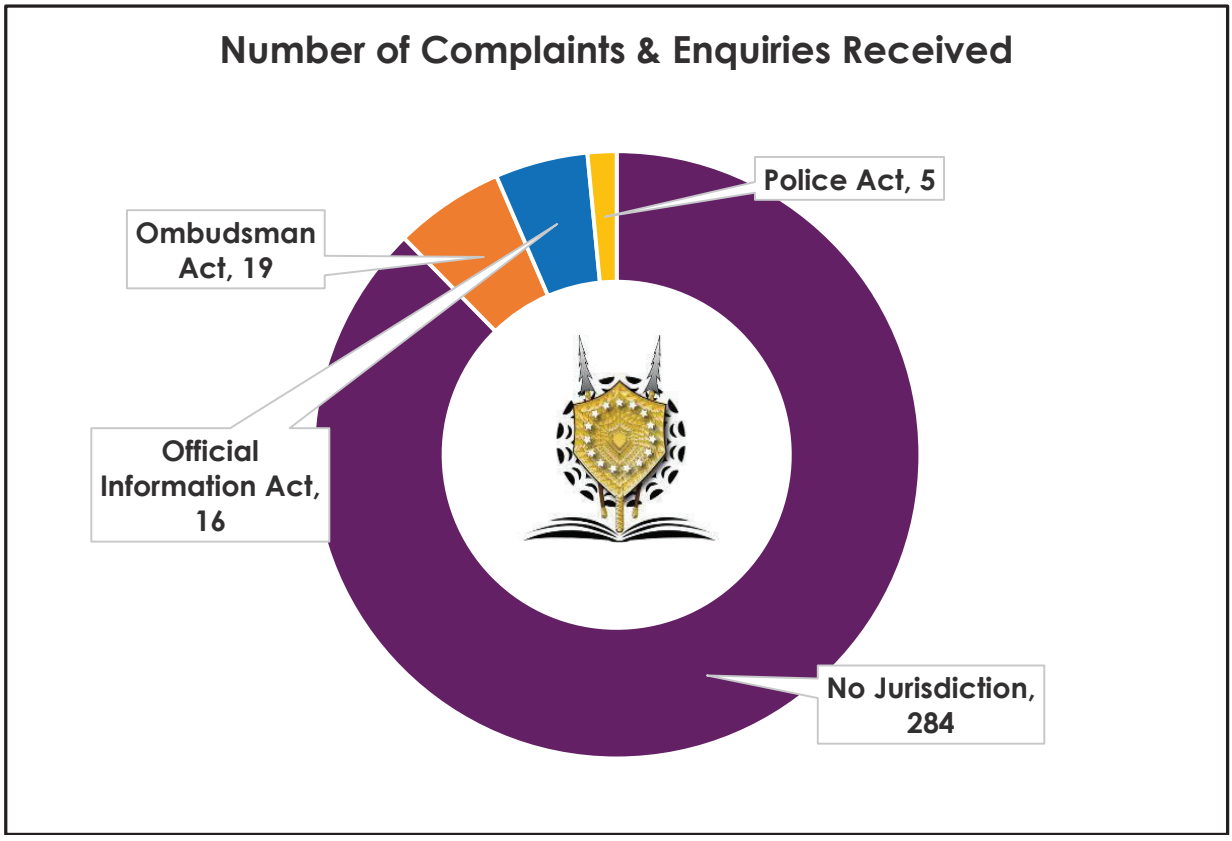
- Greater youth awareness of the Ombudsman's role in promoting fairness and transparency.
- Strengthened partnerships between the Ombudsman, schools, and media.
- Positive feedback from teachers and students on the interactive and relevant session.
- Meaningful commemoration of the 41st Anniversary through civic education.

9.2 Complaints

9.2.1 Te au tare (the numbers)

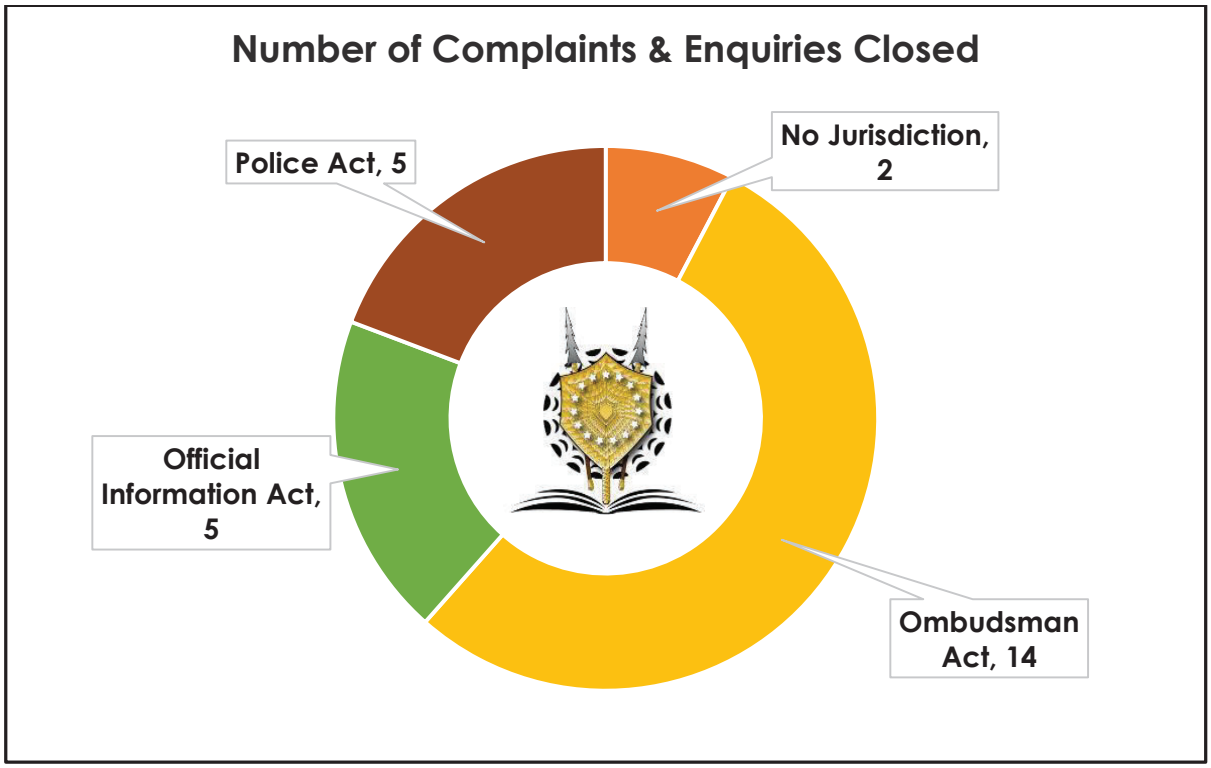
My Office *received* a total of – three hundred and twenty-five (325) complaints and enquiries this year as follows:

- Nineteen (19) Ombudsman Act 1984 (OA) matters;
- Sixteen (16) Official Information Act 2008 (OIA) matters;
- Zero (0) Disability Act 2008 (DA) matters;
- Six (6) Police Act 2012 (PA) matters; and
- Two hundred and eighty-four (284) matters outside my jurisdiction



My Office **closed** a total of twenty-six (26) complaints and enquiries this year as follows:

- Fourteen (14) Ombudsman Act 1984 (OA) matters;
- Five (5) Official Information Act 2008 (OIA) matters;
- Five (5) Police Act 2012 (PA) matters; and
- Two (2) matters outside my jurisdiction



9.3 Case Notes

9.3.1 Case Note 1

Legislation: Official Information Act 2008
Agency: Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM)
Ombudsman's Finding: Complaint partially upheld

Background / History of Complaint

The Office of the Ombudsman received a complaint concerning the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management's (MFEM) refusal to provide a less redacted version of a recruitment report. The complainant had requested access to the "Recruitment Summary" for a recent Director of Revenue Management Division position under the Official Information Act 2008. The report released by MFEM was heavily redacted, particularly regarding applicant information and interview results.

What Happened

The complainant believed the redactions were excessive and that the withheld information did not compromise the privacy of any natural persons. MFEM maintained that its redactions were made under section 8(2)(a) of the OIA to protect privacy, especially of the applicants and panel members involved in the recruitment process.
The Ombudsman initiated an investigation under section 30 of the OIA and sought further information from MFEM, including an unredacted copy of the recruitment report and an explanation for the redactions applied.

Findings

The Ombudsman reviewed the documents, obtained legal advice from the Crown Law Office, and consulted the New Zealand Office of the Ombudsman regarding the interpretation of privacy provisions under the OIA.
It was found that:

- MFEM was justified in withholding the names of applicants and panel members to protect their privacy under sections 8(2)(a) and 29(1) of the OIA.

- However, the extent of redaction applied to the applicants' summaries and scores was unreasonable. The information could have been released in a form that removed only identifiable details, as it did not, by itself, compromise personal privacy.
- The heavy redactions were inconsistent with the principle of availability and public interest in transparency and accountability within public service recruitment.

Outcome

The Ombudsman formed the opinion that MFEM:

- Acted reasonably in withholding names of applicants and panel members.
- Should release the summaries and scores of all applicants, ensuring names and other identifiable details are redacted.

The Ombudsman recommended that MFEM provide the complainant with:

- The shortlisting result summary (total scores and percentages for all applicants, names redacted);
- The interview score summary (individual panel scores and averages, with names redacted); and
- Interview summary notes (with only identifiable information redacted).

This approach ensured the balance between the protection of personal privacy and the public's right to access official information, as intended under the Official Information Act 2008.

9.3.2 Case Note 2

Legislation: Ombudsman Act 1984

Agency: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI)

Ombudsman's Finding: Early resolution achieved – complaint withdrawn by complainant

Background / History of Complaint

The Office of the Ombudsman received a complaint from a business owner regarding delays in the processing of a foreign worker application by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI). The complainant operates a local produce business and had sought to employ an overseas worker to support his farming and retail operations after struggling to find local labour.

In April 2024, he began the application process with Immigration. However, he experienced repeated delays due to administrative requirements, such as being asked to fill in additional forms on separate visits and having to make new appointments for each submission. The complainant also alleged that Immigration staff provided minimal assistance, and on one occasion, a staff member hung up the phone during a follow-up call.

What Happened

The complainant paid the required $960 permit fee on 6 June 2024 but continued to receive no update on the progress of his worker's application. He lodged his complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman on 15 July 2024, citing delays, poor communication, and unprofessional behaviour from Immigration staff.

Following receipt of the complaint, the Ombudsman notified the Secretary of MFAI and sought an early resolution under section 11 of the Ombudsman Act 1984, requesting a prompt update on the status of the application

Findings

The Ombudsman noted that while there was an initial lack of communication and delay in handling the foreign worker application, MFAI took steps to address the matter once notified. The early intervention approach by the Ombudsman's Office encouraged MFAI to expedite communication with the complainant, leading to a satisfactory resolution without requiring a formal investigation.

During a follow-up phone call with the complainant on 12 August 2024, the complainant confirmed that he was satisfied with the Ministry's actions and requested closure of his complaint

Outcome

After confirming the complainant's satisfaction, the Ombudsman closed the case and the Ministry was formally notified of the case closure.

This case illustrates how early intervention and agency engagement can successfully resolve complaints without the need for full investigation, particularly in matters involving service delays and administrative inefficiencies. It also highlights the importance of clear communication and timely updates from agencies to prevent escalation of public complaints.

9.4 Key Challenges

9.4.1 Non-Response

This continues to be a real challenge and while it is understandable that Ministries are busy and have multiple responsibilities, there is also the tendency not to give the complaints any importance as my Office has to follow-up constantly. There is a need for the Ministries to understand that while they don't respond, the delay goes on and it is not fair to the complainant and the problem is exacerbated with frustrations.

9.4.2 Capacity & budget constraints

With investigations being the main function of my Office with, one Investigation Lead and One Investigation Officer is not enough to handle the intensive work involved in consulting with various people, gathering information, and writing reports at different stages of the investigation process for both the Ministry under investigation and the complainant, as well as other relevant parties. It is a demanding role, and the capacity to deliver is extremely limited.

The Ombudsman's budget has not increased in many years, making it impossible to hire additional Investigation staff.

9.4.3 Public Awareness campaigns

This is an area that the Office improved some with the Police training held at their premises and at the Ombudsman Office and ongoing. However, the delivery could be better with extra staff as existing staff are spread too thin. The team supports the Public Service by providing awareness presentations for new recruits during staff orientation. Since the onboarding of the new Corporate Services Lead, he is able to update the Facebook page and website, which has not been maintained due to time constraints. Funding that was available through a Project with Asia Pacific Forum has allowed us to reach out to the public a little more via the radio and the television. Although we use free media sometimes, we do need additional funding support planned public awareness campaigns aimed at reaching both Rarotonga and the Pa Enua. We are grateful for the financial support from regional and international donors, which has allowed us to visit the Northern Group.

9.4.4 Independent and impartial

The independence of my office is being challenged, and it is unclear why, as an Officer of Parliament, I am answerable to a different Minister rather than the Minister of Parliament, who I believe should be responsible for supporting the Ombudsman's budget. It is also important that my office's budget be independent and separate from Ministries and Crown Agencies in view of our role of the oversight of the work of the ministries in serving the public. The Ombudsman Act (OA) states that the Ombudsman's travel expenses should be covered under the Civil List, like a Minister's, but this has not been observed as per the legislation.

My experience of my three years in the role is that the Ombudsman Office and other independent agencies would function better if an **Officer of Parliament Committee** was to be established separately by Parliament for the Independent Agencies to be accountable to with their Annual Reports. The oversight of the Ombudsman office by the Officer of Parliament committee can be responsible in holding the Ministries accountable for implementation of the recommendations that are given by my office.

9.5 Mitigation Strategies

9.5.1 Public awareness

Public awareness needs to be supported with adequate funding and staff to ensure the public understands the functions of the Office and how to access its services. Additionally, there should be internal government awareness to ensure that Ministries understand our role. We do not take sides but work to ensure fairness for both the public and the Ministries.

9.5.2 Advice and training

My Office has been fortunate to receive advice and high-quality investigation training from the New Zealand Ombudsman's staff over the years. More recently, we have also benefited from expert training throughout the Pacific. However, we are unable to attend regional or international Ombudsman staff training due to a lack of available funding. We also need a Policy and Legal Adviser in our Office, and this is included in the Cabinet Submission for the Mandate of the NHRI inserted in to the Ombudsman Office and reduce delays in obtaining expert assistance. Included with this staff will be the education and Outreach staff for NHRI as well as other areas of the office. This will be including the mainland and the Pa Enua.

9.5.3 International and regional relations

My Office is a member of the Australasian Pacific Ombudsman Region (APOR) and the International Ombudsman Institution (IOI). As of October 2023, I serve as the President of APOR, which also makes me a Director on the IOI Board. However, my Office lacks the funding necessary to participate in these roles without external support.

As the President of the Australasian Pacific Ombudsman Region, I continue to participate in that role and with that privilege includes my role as the APOR Executive Member of the International Ombudsman Institution that is stationed in Austria.

The APOR held its 37th Annual Member's Meeting in Taipei Taiwan, R.O.C. on 3 September and its regional Conference 4 September with the theme of "*Diverse Practices and Development and Challenges for Ombudsman and Human Rights Work*.

Although I supported their office in the preparations of the Meeting and Conference, I was not able to perform my duties as the President as I did not attend due to circumstances beyond my control.

I am grateful to the President of the Ombudsman of Control Yuan and their staff for the excellent conduct of a successful meeting with the Support of Iain Anderson of Australia as the Chairman who is a Director on the International Ombudsman Institution from APOR and all the APOR members who were able to join the Meeting.

The 2025 APOR Conference reaffirmed the vital role of Ombudsman institutions play as guardians of integrity, human dignity and democratic resilience in the face of change.

committed to continuing their collaborative efforts to enhance the institutions visibility, effectiveness, and public trust across the region.

9.5.4 Legal advice for Ombudsman

While all Ministries and Crown Agencies can seek legal assistance from the Crown Law Office (CLO), it is important to recognize the independence of my Office in obtaining legal advice and opinions. The CLO's first priority is the Government, and since my Office investigates Ministries and Crown Agencies, it is essential that we have our own Policy and Legal Adviser. This would provide immediate support to our investigators and ensure that my recommendations are well-informed and thoroughly advised. The recent discussions with the CLO is that a staff who is a lawyer within a workplace must take his name as a lawyer and we will observe the need for our legal staff to work with the CLO.

10. FINANCIAL AUDIT REPORT

For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

The following section presents the audited financial statements of the Office of the Ombudsman for the financial year ended 30 June 2024. These statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards and audited by the Audit Office. The report provides a detailed account of the Office's financial performance and position for the year, ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

(Refer to the following pages for the full audited financial statements.)

COOK ISLANDS
GOVERNMENT

COOK ISLANDS AUDIT OFFICE

P.O. Box 659
Avarua, Rarotonga
Cook Islands

Phone: (682) 21-231
Fax: (682) 25-231
Email: perca@cookislands.gov.ck
http://www.auditoffice.gov.ck/

Independent Auditor's Report

To the readers of the financial statements of the Office of the Ombudsman for the year ended 30 June 2024.

Report on the audit of the financial statements

Unmodified Opinion

In my opinion, the accompanying financial statements of the Office of the Ombudsman ("Office") on pages 7 to 23:

i. present fairly in all material respects the Office's financial position as at 30 June 2024 and its financial performance and cash flows for the year ended on that date; and
ii. comply with generally accepted accounting practices as defined by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management Act 1995-96 and International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) issued by the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board.

We have audited the accompanying financial statements which comprise:

- the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2024;
- the statement of financial performance, the statement of changes in equity, the statement of appropriations and cash flow statement for the year then ended; and
- notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

My audit was completed on 30 June 2025. This is the date on which my opinion is expressed.

The basis for my opinion is explained below. I outline the responsibilities of the Ombudsman and my responsibilities for the financial statements and audit of the Office. I also comment on other information.

Basis for opinion

I carried out my audit in accordance with International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAI), which incorporate ISSAI 130 Code of Ethics issued by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI Code of Ethics). My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements* section of this report.

I have fulfilled my responsibilities in accordance with ISSAI. Other than in my capacity as auditor I have no relationship with, or interests in, the Corporation. I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Responsibilities of the Ombudsman for the financial statements

The Ombudsman, on behalf of the Office is responsible for:

- the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with IPSAS;
- implementing necessary internal control to enable the preparation of a set of financial statements that is fairly presented and free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; and
- assessing the ability to continue as a going concern. This includes disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless they either intend to liquidate or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

The Ombudsman is responsible for overseeing the Office's financial reporting process.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements of the Office as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an audit report that includes my opinion.

Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISSAI will always detect a material misstatement. Misstatements are differences or omissions of amounts or disclosures, and can arise from fraud or error. Misstatements are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the decisions readers make based on the financial statements of the Office.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISSAI, I exercise professional judgement and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. Also:

- I identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements of the Office, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, because fraud can involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- I obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control used by the Ombudsman to prepare the financial statements of the Office.
- I evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used, and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the Ombudsman.
- I conclude on the appropriateness of using the going concern basis of accounting that has been used by the Ombudsman to prepare the financial statements of the Office, up to the date of my auditor's report, based on the audit evidence I have obtained.
- I evaluate the overall presentation, structure, and content of the financial statements of the Office including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements of the Office represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

I communicate with the Ombudsman, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal controls that I identify during my audit.

I am responsible for expressing an independent opinion on the financial statements of the Office and reporting that opinion to you based on my audit. My responsibility arises from the Public Expenditure Review Committee and Audit Act 1995-96.

Other Information

The Ombudsman is responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included on pages 1 to 23 but does not include the annual financial statements of the Office and my auditor's report thereon.

My opinion on the financial statements of the Office does not cover the other information and I do not express any form of audit opinion or assurance conclusion on that information.

In connection with my audit of the financial statements of the Office, my responsibility is to read the other information. In doing so, I consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements of the Office or my knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If, based on my work, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact. I have nothing to report in this regard.

Independence

While carrying out this audit, my staff and I have complied with ISSAI 130 Code of Ethics issued by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI Code of Ethics), and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

Desmond Wildin
Director of Audit
Rarotonga, Cook Islands

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

STATE OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

In New Zealand Dollars	Notes	Actual 2024 $	Budget 2024 $	Actual 2023 $
Revenue				
Funding from the Crown	2	300,359	300,359	301,000
Aid Revenue	9	14,555	-	900
Total Revenue		314,914	300,359	301,900
Expenditure				
Personnel Expenses	3	232,467	232,468	240,556
Depreciation	10	3,920	6,000	4,861
Aid Expenses	9	14,555	-	900
Other Expenses	4	61,891	61,891	48,204
Total Expenditure		312,834	300,359	294,521
Operating Balance before Gains and Losses (OBEGAL)		2,080	-	7,379
Net Surplus / (Deficit)		**2,080**	-	**7,379**

Explanations of major variances against the budget are provided in Note 15.

The accompanying notes should be read in conjunction with these Financial Statements

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AS AT 30 JUNE 2024

In New Zealand Dollars	Notes	Actual 2024 $	Actual 2023 $
Assets			
Current Assets			
Cash and Equivalents	5	-	-
Debtors and Other Receivables	6	154,931	150,769
Aid Receivables		-	900
Total Current Assets		154,931	151,669
Non-Current Assets			
Property, Plant, and Equipment	10	830	4,750
Total Non-Current Assets		830	4,750
Total Assets		155,760	156,419
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Creditors and Other Payables	7	127,565	117,980
Aid Liabilities		-	900
Employee Entitlements	8	22,706	28,130
Total Current Liabilities		150,271	147,010
Total Liabilities		150,271	147,010
Net Assets		**5,489**	**9,409**
Equity			
Contributed Capital		21,166	21,166
Accumulated Surplus / (Deficit)		(15,677)	(11,757)
Total Equity	11	**5,489**	**9,409**

The accompanying accounts should be read in conjunction with these Financial Statements

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

In New Zealand Dollars	Note	Actual 2024 $	Actual 2023 $
Balance at 1 July		9,409	14,270
Net Surplus/ (Deficit)		2,080	7,379
Return of surplus to the Crown		(6,000)	(6,240)
Depreciation payable to the Crown		-	(6,000)
Balance as at 30 June	**11**	**5,489**	**9,409**

The accompanying accounts should be read in conjunction with these Financial Statements

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

In New Zealand Dollars	Actual 2024 $	Actual 2023 $
Cash Flows From Operating Activities		
Funding from the Crown	296,197	276,908
Receipts from Aid	(15,455)	900
Payments to Employees	(237,892)	(228,606)
Payments for Aid	14,555	(900)
Payments to Suppliers	(60,412)	(48,132)
Net Cash Flows from / (used in) Operating Activities	-	170
Cash Flows from Investing Activities		
Net Cash Flows from / (used in) Investing Activities	-	-
Cash Flows From Financing Activities		
Net Cash Flows from / (used in) Financing Activities	-	-
Net Increase/(Decrease) in Cash and cash equivalents	**-**	**170**
Opening Cash Balances	-	(170)
Closing Cash Balance	**-**	**-**

The accompanying accounts should be read in conjunction with these Financial Statements

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

In New Zealand Dollars	Actual 2024 $	Actual 2023 $
Reconciliation of net surplus / (deficit) to net cash flows from operating activities		
Reported Surplus	2,080	7,379
Add / (less) Non-cash items		
Depreciation	3,920	4,861
Change in Employee Entitlements	7,243	10,998
Total Non cash items	13,243	23,238
Add / (less) movements in statement of financial position items		
(Increase) / decrease in Crown Receivables	(4,162)	(24,093)
Increase / (decrease) in Accounts Payable	2,106	-
Increase / (decrease) in Payroll Accruals	(12,667)	952
Increase / (decrease) in Sundry Creditors	3,585	972
Net movements in working capital items	(11,138)	(23,068)
Net Cash Flows from Operating activities	**-**	**170**

The accompanying accounts should be read in conjunction with these Financial Statements

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

STATEMENT OF APPROPRIATIONS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

In New Zealand Dollars

Year Ended 30 June 2024		Note	Appropriation Voted Original	Appropriation Voted Final	Revenue/ Expenditure Actual	Surplus / (Deficit)
Output 1:	Investigations & Review		176,465	172,454	169,589	2,865
Output 2:	Public Awareness and Training		70,047	68,455	69,937	(1,482)
Output 3:	Corporate Services		60,833	59,450	58,753	697
		2	307,345	300,359	298,279	2,080
Included in the Appropriation Vote:						
Other Revenue			-		-	-
Net Aid Revenue			-		-	-
Net Surplus / (Deficit)						**2,080**

Year Ended 30 June 2023						
Output 1:	Investigations & Review		170,120	170,120	98,174	71,946
Output 2:	Public Awareness and Training		70,047	70,047	98,174	(28,127)
Output 3:	Corporate Services		60,833	60,833	98,174	(37,341)
		2	301,000	301,000	294,521	6,479
Included in the Appropriation Vote:						
Other Revenue			-		-	-
Net Aid Revenue			-		900	900
Net Surplus / (Deficit)						**7,379**

For further details on the movements in the Appropriation Voted refer to Note 2.

11. FUTURE PRIORITIES

11.1 Review and Reform of the Ombudsman Act 1984

The Ombudsman Act 1984 will be reviewed to include provisions for establishing the Cook Islands National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) in the next budget. The Ombudsman will collaborate with Asia Pacific Forum (APF) and the Crown Law Office (CLO) to revisit the previous Cabinet submission on reforming the Ombudsman Act, incorporating the necessary powers to establish the NHRI. The review will also propose a budget for hiring a Policy and Legal Adviser, as well as an Education and Outreach staff member with an Operations budget. The new staff will need training in NHRI as soon as they are employed and the Ombudsman will ensure that a training program will be established as soon as possible.

The review and Reform of the Ombudsman Act should explore an extended term for the Ombudsman as 3 years is insufficient to be competent in the job.

11.2 Enhancing Professional Staff Training

To enhance professional staff training, it is essential to reinstate the role of the Assistant Ombudsman. This position is crucial for retaining institutional knowledge, ensuring sustainability, and facilitating succession planning, as well as providing ongoing staff training. Since Ombudsman come and go as their position is according to 3-year tenure, valuable knowledge can be lost; however, the Assistant Ombudsman has a longer tenure and can offer technical assistance to the rest of the staff. The former Ombudsman advised me to reinstate this position during our meeting when I started my work.

Although the Outgoing Ombudsman had agreed to the Structural changes of the Ombudsman Office, he did advise for the re-instatement of the Assistant Ombudsman for the reason explained earlier.

11.3 Enhancing Collaboration and Relationships with Stakeholders

To enhance collaboration and foster positive relationships with Ministries, Crown Agencies, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), it is important to work closely with these

groups. This collaboration will help them understand our role and the purpose of our mandates, which aim to improve government functions. Engaging with CSOs is particularly beneficial, as they are closely connected to the community and can complement our efforts effectively. These engagements would need to be well structured to ensure the roles and responsibilities of each, we engage with.

11.4 Promoting Public Awareness, Including the Pa Enua

To foster public awareness, especially in the Pa Enua, it is crucial that the public is informed about the role of the Ombudsman. This awareness will encourage individuals to engage with our Office and to feel confident in bringing forward their concerns or complaints, knowing that they will be recognized and treated fairly.

11.5 Strengthening Regional and International Relationships

Building regional and international relationships is vital for a small country like ours, particularly through the Australasian Pacific Ombudsman Region (APOR). Last year, at the retirement of the Victorian Ombudsman, Deborah Glass, during the APOR Conference, I was elected as the President of APOR and as a Director of the International Ombudsman Institution (IOI). This position was officially recognized at the IOI's four-yearly conference in The Hague. I am fortunate to have the support of the New Zealand Ombudsman team in this new role.

12. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: NSDA 2020+


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
NSDA 2020+ Goals
Status Trend
Summary of results
GOAL 8
Education and Innovation
ON TRACK, WITH POSITIVE PROGRESS TOWARDS GOAL
GOAL 9
Our Inclusiveness – Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion
OF CONCERN, AND CONTINUES TO REGRESS
The accessibility of public facilities for people with disabilities remains a pressing concern that requires attention, as it has been reported as "off track". On a positive note, the government support provided to NGOs is "on track".
GOAL 10
Agriculture and Food Security
ON TRACK, WITH SIGNS OF REGRESSION
GOAL 11
Our Biodiversity and Natural Environment
OF CONCERN
Achieving Goal 11 is a significant challenge, particularly on Rarotonga, where the development pressures are greatest.
GOAL 12
Climate Change, Resilience, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency
OF CONCERN, WITH SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT
GOAL 13
Cultural Heritage, History, Identity and Language
OF CONCERN
There is limited information about progress towards the goal.
GOAL 14
A Sustainable Population
OF CONCERN, WITH SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT
This goal gives limited information about progress towards the goal and a couple of indicators have not been reported on.
GOAL 15
Our Security, a Peaceful and Just Society
OF CONCERN
There are limited information about the progress towards the goal.