



History of the Office

The word Ombudsman is Swedish and loosely translated means "grievance person".

The word "Ombudsman" was first used in its modern sense in 1809 when the Swedish Parliament established the office of Justitieombudsman, who was to look after citizens' interests in their dealings with government.

Today, many countries have adopted the Ombudsman concept. The International Ombudsman Institute is an affiliation of 100 national ombudsman-type institutions.

Ombudsmen in New Zealand

The first New Zealand Ombudsman was appointed in 1962 under the Parliamentary Commissioner (Ombudsman) Act 1962. New Zealand was the fourth country, after Sweden, Finland and Denmark, to establish the office of Ombudsman.

Extensions to the Ombudsmen's jurisdiction

When the office was first established, the Ombudsman's jurisdiction was limited to investigating complaints about central government departments and organisations.

In 1968, the Ombudsman's jurisdiction was extended to include education and hospital boards.

In 1975, the legislation was consolidated in the Ombudsmen Act 1975. Under this Act, the appointment of additional Ombudsmen was permitted and the Ombudsmen's jurisdiction was significantly extended to include local government agencies.

In July 1983, the Official Information Act 1982 came into force. Under this Act, Ombudsmen were given the function of investigating and reviewing complaints about decisions made by Ministers of the Crown and central government agencies on requests for information.

In March 1988, the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 came into force giving Ombudsmen the function of investigating complaints about decisions made by local government agencies on requests for information.

3rd January 2001, the Protected Disclosures Act 2000 came into force.

This is commonly known as the "whistle-blower" legislation. Under this Act, Ombudsmen are responsible for providing advice and guidance to any employee who has made, or is considering making, a disclosure about serious wrong-doing in their work place (either public or private sector). The Ombudsmen are also one of the "appropriate authorities" listed in the Act to whom a protected disclosure may be made.

On 25 January 2005, the **Crown Entities Act 2004** came into force. Under this Act, Ombudsmen were given the function of investigating complaints against a number of crown entities, such as the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and the Commerce and Securities Commissions. The Crown Entities Act also allows the investigation of complaints which predate the start date of the Act.

A history - in print

"The Ombudsman in New Zealand" by Bryan Gilling (1998, Dunmore Press in association with the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs) describes the history of the Ombudsmen in New Zealand in more detail.