

Integrity Committee Update

for the period of January to May 2020

Members

Nikola Stepanov	Committee Chair and Queensland Integrity Commissioner
Brendan Worrall	Auditor-General, Queensland Audit Office
Alan MacSporran QC	Chairperson, Crime and Corruption Commission
Pat Vidgen	Electoral Commissioner
Kathleen Florian	Independent Assessor
Rachael Rangihaeata	Information Commissioner
Phil Clarke	Queensland Ombudsman
Robert Setter	Chief Executive, Public Service Commission
Ross Barnett	Queensland Racing Integrity Commissioner

Integrity Agencies

Queensland Audit Office

The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) staff continue to work well remotely. We have been in a good position to deliver our services due to the effectiveness of our operating model and our reliable technology.

We continue to engage with our clients at a similar frequency and are using secure online systems to conduct our audits. We have actively focused on maintaining our relationships despite no in-person communication or travel to audit sites. When COVID-19 challenges first arose, we proactively communicated with our clients on how QAO is going to operate, and how we will collaborate with them to reflect the unique challenges many of them are facing.

We are supporting government on its program responses to COVID-19. In particular, around highlighting any residual risks in the design of response programs, and revisiting engagement audit strategies where new programs have been implemented. These government-led responses need to be supported by sound controls to manage any additional risks, and effective governance and leadership must continue. QAO's role in providing independent oversight is key.

Our [blog series](#) is providing advice for a range of stakeholders during COVID-19. We are publishing three to four posts per month covering topics such as maintaining controls, asset valuations, volatile investments, cash flow management, cyber security risks and more. These COVID-19 related posts have collectively been viewed over 2,000 times.

We also participated in an integrity agencies joint advisory group to provide advice for public sector leaders on maintaining reputation during a pandemic. We continue to present externally at conferences such as the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) Civic Leaders Conference and host our own events such as a live stream briefing for audit committee chairs.

On 5 May 2020, we tabled [Evaluating major infrastructure projects](#) (Report 14: 2019-20). We are continuing with most of our planned reports to parliament, but are extending some timelines to reflect client needs. We have been effectively briefing parliamentary committees on our reports via video streams.

Importantly, we are regularly communicating with our workforce via weekly emails from the Auditor-General, a live stream Q&A, and an intranet microsite to house updates and support, including resources from the Employee Assistance Program. We have recently conducted a staff pulse survey to collect feedback on our response to COVID-19, and to support planning for the next phase.

Our focus for the next phase will be on the best way to deliver our audits in a timely manner as remote working arrangements, or other changes, continue for many entities. We will continue to deliver our insights via day-to-day engagement with our clients, our reports to parliament, blog series, fact sheets and briefings. We are planning for a safe, effective and productive 'return to office' whilst carefully assessing risk and supporting our decision-making with appropriate governance process.

- Brendan Worrall

Crime and Corruption Commission

By way of update for the Crime and Corruption Commission, I can say that every cloud has a silver lining. We had been progressing to a position of being able to work remotely for some time but the COVID-19 crisis has escalated that project substantially. We are now all remotely enabled and the transition has been extremely well managed. We have about half of our staff routinely working remotely now and the technology is amazing especially given our security requirements. I have to say that I am particularly proud of our Information Technology people who have worked tirelessly to make all this happen in record time.

The larger question, not just for us but across the public and private sectors I suspect, is the capability of the workforce to work productively from home. I do not think enough attention has been given to this aspect. Everyone is different, some people are more self-sufficient and resilient than others and some are just not cut out to work on their own. I think the answer in part lies in managing the workforce so that people are routinely rotated back to the workplace, so they are able to maintain physical contact with their colleagues. This can be achieved in a customised manner to recognise the differences in capability and personal choices. Much more work needs to be done in that space I think.

Otherwise, it is business as usual for us. We have had to redeploy a limited number of the Queensland Police Service officers to assist with border control and the like and some other staff to assist in contact tracing, but our main investigations are progressing as usual.

- Alan MacSporran QC

Electoral Commission Queensland

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) has been focused on the preparation and delivery of the quadrennial local government elections which was held on 28 March 2020.

The elections were delivered in a dynamic environment, heavily impacted by a number of planned and unforeseen factors:

- The emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic following the commencement of the election period
- The development and implementation of a new Election Management System for the ECQ
- The simultaneous conduct of two State by-elections for the electoral districts of Currumbin and Bundamba, and
- The commencement of legislative amendments arising from the Operation Belcarra reforms on 20 January 2020.

The impact of the pandemic saw a significant shift in the voting patterns of the Queensland public compared with previous elections:

- 1.2 million people voted during the two-week early voting period (500,000 in 2016)
- 470,000 postal votes were returned of the 570,000 issued (320,000 returned in 2016)
- 37,000 people who cast a telephone vote – (500 in 2016), and
- 750,000 people who voted on election day at a polling booth (1.6 million in 2016).

Despite the challenging circumstances in which the 2020 elections were delivered, the turnout for the local government elections was approximately 77 percent. By comparison, the turnout for the 2016 local government election was 83 percent. Notwithstanding the record number of postal votes and social distancing requirements for scrutineering, all Council positions (over 550) were declared in three weeks compared to 2.5 in 2016.

The ECQ is now focussing on the requirements for the State Government election on 31 October 2020.
- Pat Vidgen

Office of the Independent Assessor

As the body that deals with complaints about councillors' conduct, the Office of the Independent Assessor (OIA) took a proactive approach to the state-wide local government polls in March, providing information to a variety of stakeholders at timely intervals. This included a joint integrity agency press conference with the Crime and Corruption Commission, the Queensland Integrity Commissioner and the Electoral Commission of Queensland. In the interest of natural justice, the

OIA also wrote to all current complainants to encourage them to keep matters confidential in the lead up to the election, and until due process had been followed.

Despite COVID-19 our operations have continued as normal, particularly as most complaints about councillor conduct are ordinarily lodged online. About 80 percent of assessments have continued to be conducted within 21 days, and investigations into alleged misconduct have progressed with the OIA moving to meetings via teleconference or video link.

Brisbane City Council (BCC) came under the OIA's jurisdiction after the elections, meaning the OIA now deals with all 77 local governments in Queensland.

Online platforms have allowed the OIA to conduct interactive information sessions with newly elected councils, although one in-person session was held with BCC.

Another key post-election task has been to review outstanding matters against councillors who have not returned to office. The OIA has determined to dismiss lower-level complaints as further action represented an unjustifiable use of resources and not in the public interest. However, serious matters against former councillors continue to be progressed either by an investigation or referral to the OIA's legal team.

For first-time councillors, the OIA has announced amnesty which runs from 5 May- 5 August 2020. For these three months the OIA will not investigate or prosecute complaints against this group unless the matter is serious. Instead we will communicate with the subject councillor to help build their capacity and strengthen this important sector.

The OIA has also collaborated with Queensland State Archives to develop a new guide outlining the rules and risks for Queensland councillors when using messaging apps to discuss council business.
- Kathleen Florian

Office of the Information Commissioner

The Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC) continues to work effectively remotely. We acted quickly to ensure business continuity by enabling our entire workforce to work remotely and adapt to online delivery of services. We were supported by an existing mobile laptop fleet for all staff, O365 environment and VPN remote connection. All services and functions have been continued remotely, with a short interruption to postal mail, however almost all communications are by email or our secure bulk electronic file transfer facility.

While we have continued to experience record demand, many agencies and other parties, have experienced difficulties in participating as promptly due to disruption and redeployment of personnel to critical services for COVID-19. Due to high current workloads and incoming applications, OIC has not experienced any shortage of work for our staff. Agency participation in all

our functions is important to our work and will impact on finalisation of reviews, complaints and audits.

OIC has issued joint statements with national privacy and information access commissioners:

- [COVID-19 response from Australian privacy regulators](#) - *As entities move fast to find solutions to public health and economic problems, Privacy Commissioners and Ombudsmen reiterate the value of conducting short-form Privacy Impact Assessments to help ensure personal information is handled in a way that is necessary, reasonable and proportionate.*
- [Transparency and access to information in the context of a global pandemic](#) - *Public bodies must recognise the value of clear and transparent communication, and of good record-keeping, in what will be a much analysed period of history.*
- [The duty to document does not cease in a crisis, it becomes more essential](#)

A National COVID-19 Privacy Team between the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and states and territories has also been convened to respond to proposals with national implications. Commissioners have also been briefed by Australian Government representatives together at key points and provided feedback in relation to the COVID Safe app and related legislation.

OIC has also issued advice to agency practitioners about a range of issues relating to dealing with access applications and privacy issues that have arisen during COVID-19 and subsequent agency workforce and operational arrangements. Webinars were held and FAQs provided to assist all agencies and help ensure fair, consistent and appropriate outcomes for the community.

From 4-10 May 2020, OIC celebrated Privacy Awareness Week (PAW) with the theme ***Be Smart about Privacy***, raising awareness with agencies and the community. Speakers at an online launch event on 5 May included: Mr Phil Green, Privacy Commissioner, Queensland, Ms Angelene Falk, Australian Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner and Ms Julie Inman Grant, Australian eSafety Commissioner. OIC asked agency CEOs to raise awareness about key privacy messages during PAW. OIC also provided resources for agencies and the community including posters and privacy tips for working from home. OIC also promoted ***Be Smart about Privacy*** key messages through a social media campaign and articles and posts including those hosted by Public Service Commission and Neighbourhood Watch Queensland. Along with the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC), OIC promoted key messages arising from the findings and recommendations of the CCC's Operation Impala review about misuse of personal information.

OIC is also planning for a safe and effective return to our Mary Street office, whilst carefully assessing risk and supporting our decision-making with appropriate governance processes, consistent with Queensland Health, Public Service Commission and Office of Industrial Relations advice. We are also looking at what we have learnt during this period, improvements we have made that can be retained and further workplace flexibility.

- Rachael Rangihaeata

The Office of the Queensland Ombudsman

As with us all, the Queensland Ombudsman office (QO) has been impacted by the COVID-19 virus, particularly its services. From 18 March 2020 physical access to the QO was closed to the public, limiting public access to telephone, web, email and written contacts. This was extended by limiting telephone access from 23 March 2020. Currently, the QO has returned its public access to near normal. Public access to Floor 18, 53 Albert Street is still restricted, but all other channels are available. During March and April, the Prisoner Phone Link was maintained and a limited number of staff attended the QO.

The majority of staff are still working from home, with additional capacity and security upgrades allowing most usual activity to be undertaken. Across the board, contact (complaints and inquiries) with the QO during March and April was down somewhat from historic levels. Performance metrics (complaints and investigations) remain at comparable levels to previous years. The delivery of face-to-face training to agencies has been postponed until further notice. Web-based training and engagement activity is being developed for immediate delivery and as part of the new future for training, particularly to more remote clients.

I tabled a public report in the Parliament in April, utilising the Speaker's COVID-safe processes, the second dealing with handling of child safety complaints in the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

The QO has recently commenced planning for a return to "new-normal" operations, mirroring the national and State road maps out of COVID-19. Audits of the QO's COVID-safe work practices and environment ensure that this is done to support a return to full operations in the safest possible way. The plan utilises the Premier's timeline and critical events as milestones, particularly those related to schools, and is subject to review if events unfold contrary to current expectations.

Overall, I think the QO has coped well in the crisis, with a strong commitment from staff to keep services available. I am confident that this will continue and that any slight delays experienced over recent months will be caught up.

- Phil Clarke

Public Service Commission

A significant focus of the Public Service Commission (PSC) has been supporting the sector manage its human resources to respond to the challenges of COVID-19.

The Employee Mobilisation Service was established by the PSC to assist to mobilise employees to work beyond their agencies and across the public service to undertake and supplement essential and critical services, for example, contact tracing for people with COVID-19. The EMS has been developed to match available employees with emerging demand needs. Employees are deployed to perform new duties that emerge as a result of the outbreak, or duties essential to normal operations that have been impacted by staff availability due to COVID-19. The PSC procured an Information

Technology platform to assist in matching employees with demand and is continuing to coordinate with agencies to place available resources in areas where most needed. Over 500 employees have now been trained in contact tracing and are ready to be deployed when needed through the EMS.

The change to workplaces with staff required to work from home where they are able, presented new challenges to the sector. To address these and support the sector, PSC has regularly engaged with agencies through their Heads of Corporate, Chief HR Officers and public sector unions on a weekly basis to respond to issues as they arise.

Additional resources for managers were prepared to assist them to manage employees working remotely. This included:

- a checklist to help managers support effective remote working, continued employee productivity and high-quality service delivery
- frequently asked questions and answers
- advice on supporting employees affected by domestic and family violence (research indicates DFV is known to escalate during community and disaster events, such as COVID-19).

COVID-19 introduced levels of uncertainty, a potential loss of social connection and requirements for new working arrangements and environments increasing the risk that employees' mental health and wellbeing could be impacted. Practical tips and resources were prepared to help employees cope with any anxiety and stress that they may experience during this time.

The PSC HR assist line has received over 141 requests for COVID-19 related advice from managers and HR professional across the sector. The PSC is also running a series of "Pandemic plus" webinars to assist HR practitioners to support their agencies in these unique circumstances. Participation in the webinars has exceeded over 500 HR professionals and topics to date have included:

- Process and considerations for referring employees to independent medical examination;
- Discipline during a pandemic
- Managing performance during a pandemic.

The PSC produced a *Guide to identifying and supporting vulnerable employees* to assist employees to identify if they are at high risk from the effects of COVID-19 due to existing health conditions and/or their personal circumstances and for managers to support employees to work safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our focus over the coming months will be to support agencies to bring more employees back to the workplace, respond to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 and to continue to deliver on a range of priorities that support a high-performing, future-focused public sector.

- Robert Setter

Queensland Racing Integrity Commission

The Queensland Racing Integrity Commission (QRIC) has spent most of 2020 so far working with Racing Queensland, clubs and participants across the three racing codes to enable racing to continue in a restricted and modified form. The introduction of zones across the State for racing necessarily restricted the movement of jockeys, trainers, horses and importantly QRIC Stewards, vets and sample collection officers. To have sustained this activity with zero positives for COVID-19 (at the time of reporting) reflects a commitment from all parties to follow the rules which allowed racing to be one of the few businesses/sports to not have their business-as-usual model severely compromised or completely halted. Major compromises to important events including the winter racing carnival and the ongoing ban on crowd attendance reflect that racing will not resume to a commercial 'normal' for some time. In this environment our operations have not changed in scope or intensity and the Integrity Department is as busy as ever.

A major upside of the pandemic-induced home isolation has been a significant increase in adoptions through the Greyhound Adoption Program both in Brisbane and Townsville. We recently cracked the 200 barrier for the financial year with a significant spike in demand over the last three months.

Like other workplaces the forced transition to staff working remotely has provided significant and unexpected benefits. Harnessing those advantages will enable us to close down our CBD office by the end of 2020 and consolidate all of our staff and operations in one location resulting in significant recurrent annual savings.

- Ross Barnett

Office of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner

The office of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner is coming to the end of another very busy year.

As part of the Queensland Government's response to COVID-19, I was deployed to lead a commercial team to assist in the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other critical items, and the acting Integrity Commissioner, Bruce Barbour was stood up.

On returning to my role, I have remained part of the Whole of Government COVID-19 PPE & Critical items - Strategic Coordination Group.

More recently, my staff and I, in collaboration with members from the key partner agencies, Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Housing and Public Works have led a collaborative project, "Preventing the transmission of COVID-19: understanding the risk factors, barriers to transmission, and PPE needs and uses for Whole of Government".

Once completed, the assurance project will provide a better understanding of the types of environmental and contagion specific factors that need to be present, during a COVID-19 or other pandemic, for those in public service who may be involved in activities, such as frontline roles, that might place them at varying levels of risk of exposure to infection in their workplaces (i.e. work based

activities that may vary from a typically low risk of exposure through to activities that may carry a heightened risk of exposure.

On the advice front, I continue to receive a very high level for requests and have had to put measures in place to sustain the service. This includes referring potential advisees to alternative sources of advice and information.

As well, the lobbyist function continues to be very busy. Advices this year are running at over 30 requests received for formal advice. In comparison, in past years the number of lobbying advices has regular stood at around one to four per year (in total).

We have also been undertaking some very exciting public awareness work:

- By contributing as co-hosts alongside the Crime and Corruption Commission and the Inspector-General Emergency Management to the '**Leading Women's Podcast**' event. Leading Women is an inter-agency women's network including partner agencies: Queensland Police Service; Queensland Fire and Emergency Services; Public Safety Business Agency; and Queensland Corrective Services. On 15 May 2020, we delivered the event differently given the unprecedented times we are facing due to the current health crisis. We launched a series of podcast interviews with representatives from our partner agencies, who share their views on the topic of "Inclusion, not just diversity".
- We are currently planning for the '**Integrity in Health**' Series Podcast 2020, which will consider a range of topics around the mental health of medical professionals, available avenues of assistance, and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical professionals.
- Launching a new podcast series, "**IQ: Integrity in Queensland**" later in the year.

The health and IQ series' will be available on our website.

- Nikola Stepanov

Next Meeting

21 September 2020