



**ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY - ANNUAL REPORTS HEARINGS - 2 NOVEMBER
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ACT INTEGRITY COMMISSION

INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER'S OPENING STATEMENT

Approaching the end of its third year of operation, the ACT Integrity Commission is deeply immersed in its core function of investigating allegations of corrupt conduct. I use the term 'immersed' advisedly, for the rising tide of 'corruption reports'—the collective term for complaints and notifications made under the *Integrity Act 2018* (***the Act***)—continues to be challenging for the Commission's small workforce.

As is the case for most complaints-handling external scrutiny bodies, especially new and small entities, it is difficult to anticipate future workload. Making a complaint or allegation of corruption is often simply, and sometimes anonymously, done, but examining it to ascertain whether it should be dismissed, referred or investigated, is usually a much more time-consuming and formal process. Sometimes an apparently obvious allegation of seemingly suspicious behaviour can turn out, on closer and detailed examination, to have a benign explanation; conversely, an apparently innocuous report of a single irregular transaction can materialise as the tip of an iceberg of dishonest procurement. It is perhaps an ineluctable facet of the human condition, that an integrity agency must prepare for when, not if, matters of troubling corruption significance will arise.

The year currently in review has been such a year, with just two matters rapidly soaking up available resources already committed to other but somewhat less important investigations and where other proposed investigations have been on hold, a situation likely to continue through 2022-23. Some of the detail of two matters is already in the public domain, but it is not appropriate to expand further on the investigative methods currently being undertaken by the Commission except to say they involve examining a relatively large number of witnesses and analysing very large numbers of documents.

I am acutely conscious that a lack of public output, and in particular an absence of findings of corrupt conduct, may be perceived in the community as a lack of effectiveness of the Commission. Several things can be said about that. Firstly, an important public interest is served by reports that, in particular cases apparently involving corrupt conduct, no such conduct has occurred, thus giving confidence that in those cases integrity of government has been maintained. Secondly, the perception fails to recognise both the scale and complexity of the investigative process likely to be involved in adequately considering what is always a serious matter where corruption is in issue. Given the need to prioritise serious and systemic corrupt conduct, these investigations will often absorb almost all of the Commission's legal and investigative resources and take a lengthy period to resolve. Furthermore, the potentially serious adverse inferences that could be drawn from public knowledge of the Commission's mere involvement in a matter, not to mention the consequences of its ultimate findings, necessarily require the Commission to take deliberate and careful steps to ensure the privacy and reputation of individuals is properly protected.



A further factor affecting the Commission has been the impact of the pandemic. The Commission is not alone in this experience of course, but the fact that the social disruption caused by the COVID-19 outbreak began a mere three months after the Commission first opened its doors has had an adverse impact on the Commission's ability to build a cohesive and efficient workforce and workflow. Related to this, the pent-up demand for staff, especially in the public sector, has resulted in a high turnover of staff in the Commission, with an inevitable detrimental effect on continuity.

Despite these challenges, the Commission is making significant progress in its work and I look forward to increasing public engagement in and understanding of its vitally important functions.