



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

VICTORIAN OMBUDSMAN 50TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION
Tuesday 31 October 2023

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Jeffrey Kennett AC, former Premier of Victoria

David Southwick MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, *representing the Leader of the Opposition*

Deborah Glass OBE, Victorian Ombudsman and **Tim O'Neil**

Members of Parliament

Ombudsmen from around Australia and the Asia and Pacific

Former Ombudsmen and senior representatives of the integrity and oversight agencies

Distinguished guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

It's a pleasure to welcome you all to Government House this evening.

When this important institution was established in 1973, the newly appointed Ombudsman, Sir John Vincent Dillon CMG, wrote a letter to the editor of *The Age*.

In it, he insisted that the Victorian Ombudsman should be "*a man of integrity, impartiality and competence.*"

While Dillon may not have anticipated a woman in this role, he would likely have agreed that each of the four Ombudsmen who followed him have illustrated those fundamental values.

Indeed, across the last five decades, this institution, and the people who represent it, have maintained a commitment to fairness, integrity, respect for human rights and the need to hold public organisations to account.

Much has been achieved through this commitment.

When the Victorian Ombudsman role was created in 1973, it was the third in Australia, following Western Australia in 1971 and South Australia in 1972.

And, it wasted no time catching up with its predecessors.

Between 1978 and 1990, investigation reports explored a wide range of issues including disturbances in Pentridge Prison, the development of Blue Rock Dam in Gippsland, the removal and placement of inter-country adoptive children and complaints surrounding the pollution of a local factory.

It was the case, as Ms Glass has wisely put it, that *“No problem with the bureaucracy was too small, no bureaucrat too mighty.”*

Since those early years, the Victorian Ombudsman has further developed into an institution capable of ensuring government bodies are accountable for the actions they take, – which is an important attribute of a healthy democracy.

Whether it's a 92-year-old woman struggling with a leaky roof while living in public housing, or a whistleblower reporting on alleged mismanagement within some agencies, each case is managed with integrity and care.

This approach represents values that are shared across cultures and countries, and I'm delighted to have representatives from across the Australasian and Pacific Region joining us this evening.

The Australasian & Pacific Ombudsman Region Conference brings together those engaged in this field from across the region to discuss the critical issues relevant to your work.

Indeed, as we face the contemporary issues of a changing climate, artificial intelligence and a shifting world order, it is vital that bodies that act to provide for accountability in our public institutions work collaboratively and cohesively to ensure government bodies act in the best interests of their communities.

Congratulations to the Victorian Ombudsman, and its staff, for your tireless work in ensuring integrity and fairness are upheld within our State.