KNOBBLING THE OMBUDSMAN
Terry Mills MLA
Date 15th June 2010

The capacity of the Northern Territory Ombudsman to carry out her duties has been hampered by the Government’s refusal to increase her agency’s funding during the 2010-11 budget process.

During Estimates Committee hearings today, the Ombudsman outlined how a submission she made for an extra $400,000 in the upcoming budget was rejected as part of the Budget process.

Opposition Leader, Terry Mills, said the Ombudsman plays a crucial watchdog role in the Northern Territory and that her request for additional money should have been supported in by the Government.

Instead she got next to nothing.

"By definition, the role of the Ombudsman is intended to be a window into the decision making processes of all levels of Government," Mr Mills said.

"The role of an Ombudsman is to investigate Government – and Carolyn Richards has been very diligent in holding this Government to account, particularly in the area of child protection.

"For that reason, I was surprised to learn today that her request for additional funding to continue the good work she has done was rejected by a budget sub-Cabinet.

"It’s extremely disappointing the Government saw fit not to allow the Ombudsman to enhance her investigative capacity by increasing her funding.

"In fact, the Ombudsman’s budget was slashed in real terms, increased by only $12,000 on the previous financial year to $2.502 million. When inflation is taken into account, this is a reduction.

"It appears the Ombudsman has to find operational activities from staff wages."

(Budget documents attached)

Further comment: Terry Mills 0418 833 594