John Elferink  
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

Commissioner’s powers to tackle corruption and misconduct to be enhanced

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The Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner will have stronger and expanded powers to tackle corruption and misconduct under a plan outlined by the Northern Territory Government today.

Attorney-General John Elferink said the Country Liberals Government was determined to ensure any allegations of corruption and misconduct in public offices and public bodies were thoroughly investigated.

“The Northern Territory already has a range of investigatory bodies and a robust system to identify and prosecute criminal behaviour but we want to do everything we can to strengthen and improve this system,” he said.

“We have an Integrity Group in the Northern Territory that includes the Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner, the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Public Employment.

“The Government is asking the Integrity Group to urgently convene and consider how the current role and functions of the Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner, and its governing legislation, the Public Interest Disclosure Act, can be enhanced.

“The Integrity Group, which will be expanded to include the Police Commissioner, will be asked to provide input to Cabinet by the end of the month with the aim of strengthening legislation before the end of the year and establishing the enhanced Commission by the first quarter of 2016.”

The expanded Integrity Group will be asked to consider and provide input on matters such as:

- Appointing the Public Interest Disclosures Commissioner as an Officer of the Parliament, making the Commissioner answerable to Parliament;
- Renaming the Office to support a greater understanding of its role and functions, for example, the Independent Anti-Corruption and Integrity Commission or the Anti-Corruption and Public Interest Disclosure Commission;
- Extending the current powers of the Commissioner for ‘own motion’ investigations;
- Extending the jurisdiction of the Commissioner to enable investigations of Members of the Legislative Assembly and their staff without referral from the Speaker;
- Reviewing the adequacies of penalties under the Act for failing to co-operate with the Commissioner;
- What additional resourcing, if any, might be required for the Office of the Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures and the Special References Unit of the Northern Territory Police to enhance their capacity to
investigate allegations of corruption and misconduct.

Mr Elferink said the Integrity Group would consult with the NT Law Society and the Criminal Lawyers Association as part of their deliberations.

“This is about developing a solution that works for the Territory and not importing costly options used in other states that came about from systemic failures, particularly in the police service,” he said.

“We have a very capable police force that investigates without fear or favour, and agencies like the Office of the Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures and the Ombudsman that already independently investigate information about corruption and improper conduct by public officers within public bodies.

“This is about confirming the Territory’s commitment to root out corruption and misconduct in all its forms, while at the same time being financially responsible with taxpayers’ dollars and avoiding new, bloated, inefficient bureaucracies.”

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