NO MORE MONEY FOR CASH STRAPPED OMBUDSMAN

The Ombudsman Office is set to again be starved of funds by the Martin Government.

During today’s debate of the 2005/06 Ombudsman’s Annual Report, the Government failed to commit to provide appropriate funding to the Ombudsman’s office next year.

Last year the Ombudsman was starved for funds until the Government was publicly embarrassed into providing an extra $94,000 to make ends meet this year.

“Today the Government invited further public embarrassment by failing to guarantee sufficient funding for the Ombudsman to do their job properly next financial year,” says Jodeen Carney, Leader of the Opposition.

“During Estimates last year we had the astonishing scene of the Ombudsman sitting next to the Chief Minister telling the Estimates Committee that funding cuts were making it impossible to deliver an effective service.

“At least it had the effect of prompting a one off payment of $94,000, but it’s clear more funds are required”.

“The Ombudsman has again warned the Government of a shortfall in finances but again the Chief Minister isn’t listening.

“Limiting the ability of the Ombudsman to do her job is indicative of the growing arrogance of this Government.”

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* Extracts of Ombudsman’s report regarding funding: next page
• “Over the last twelve months, difficult decisions had to be made about the extent to which the office could satisfy the expectations of those approaching it in the face of a static budget allocation and a backlog of investigations”. (page 5).

• In relation to the one off payment of $94,000, the Ombudsman said: “Without ongoing funding of at least that amount, the chances are that timeframes may again become unacceptable”. (page 7)

• “I am disappointed to report that over the past three financial years, activities associated with access and awareness have had to gradually be reduced because ‘efficiency dividends’ continue to impact on the funds available for discretionary activities. Access and awareness visits have reduced by 33% over the past three years…” (page 55)

• In relation to collaboration with other Ombudsman and conferences, the Ombudsman said: “There were opportunities to enhance these valuable collaborative relationships that have been financially out of reach over the last twelve months”.