

12 October 2007

Freedom of Information

Independent Review Panel

Chair Dr David Solomon AM

Panel Members Simone Webbe, Dominic McGann

Secretariat Catherine O'Malley

A fresh look at Freedom of Information

Premier Anna Bligh has released the terms of reference for an independent review of Queensland's Freedom of Information Act 1992 giving the review panel "what in any assessment could only be described as the widest possible terms of reference to look at best practice around Australia and to look at best practice around the world."

The terms of reference require the review panel to consider the principles and purposes of the Act, the effectiveness of the processes it establishes and the ways they could be made more efficient and user-friendly.

The panel will also consider the administration of the FOI Act and its costs to government and to users.

In identifying ways to improve and modernise the FOI regime, the panel must consider other recent reviews of FOI laws nationally and internationally, and the operation of the system in an evolving technological environment.

Particular issues that have to be addressed include balancing the public interest in access to information against the need to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of decision-making processes in government.

The panel must also consider the relationship between freedom of information and the protection of privacy.

The panel is chaired by Dr David Solomon, a journalist, author and lawyer who was head of the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC) in 1992-93. The other members are Ms Simone Webbe, a former Deputy Director-General of the Premier's Department, and Mr Dominic McGann, a partner with the law firm McCullough Robertson. They also are lawyers and were involved with EARC in the early 1990s.

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The panel is required to produce a discussion and issues paper that will be made public late in January next year.

It will then seek public submissions and consult widely with people who can contribute to the review. It has already begun consultations with experts and people involved with the FOI process, both inside Queensland and elsewhere.

The panel is required to present its final report to the Queensland Government by the middle of next year.

Dr Solomon said the terms of reference specify a large number of issues for the panel to investigate. However the terms of reference make it clear that the panel is not limited to these issues only.

He wants anyone who believes the inquiry should consider specific problems not directly raised in the terms of reference to raise these directly with the panel. The terms of reference will be publicised in advertisements in the press over the next few days.

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