

FEDERAL POLITICS

Ombudsman ready for PS

By VERONA BURGESS,
Public Administration Writer

The Commonwealth Ombudsman, Philippa Smith, has received a \$1.5 million a year funding boost in the Budget and says she will be using the money to target systemic problems in key public-service departments.

First cabs off the rank for her scrutiny will be the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission; the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the cross-over between the Department of Social Security and training programs; the Department of Immigration; and the Australian Taxation Office and the Child Support Agency.

These are the agencies already high on her list of most frequently complained-about.

The budget increase, which will boost her staff by 15 to 94, will enable her to use her powers to initiate inquiries instead of just following up individual complaints.

She said yesterday that it would allow her to do more investigations into the systemic problems which emerged as a result of large numbers of complaints on the same subject or about the same agency.

"In this way we hope to prevent complaints arising in the first



Commonwealth Ombudsman Philippa Smith: Complaints about ATSIC, DEET, Social Security head list for scrutiny after \$1.5 million boost.

place, not just resolve individual complaints."

Some of the money would also be used to improve the Ombudsman's outreach programs, to get to disadvantaged groups and community groups who were not using the office normally. She would allocate some staff to focus on particular issues and make contact with key community

groups. It would become a two-way process.

"I am determined that ordinary people who have dealings with a government department or authority and who have exhausted other avenues know they can come to my office confident that their complaint will be dealt with efficiently, effectively and impartially."

Customs officers ask that their fate be decided

Customs officers involved in the Midford Paramour case, who have been waiting for months to find out whether they will be charged with disciplinary offences, have written to a range of federal politicians asking for help.

The officers have asked that their fate be determined soon. They also want the Minister for Customs, Chris Schacht, to immediately forward a report by the former Comptroller-General of Customs, Frank Kelly, about their "levels, functions and suitability" to the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Public Accounts.

The committee, whose inquiry led to \$25 million in compensation to the victims, originally asked for the report by December 18, 1993. Senator Schacht received it from Customs in February, but has not yet dealt with the matter.

A spokeswoman said this week that Senator Schacht would deal with it as soon as possible.

The officers say that the former Comptroller-General, Frank Kelly, reported to Senator Schacht that a legal opinion which he had commissioned from Roger Gyles, QC, said there were no grounds for disciplinary action against any officer.

Meanwhile, Senator Schacht said this week that the future of Mr Kelly was yet to be resolved. He resigned his statutory office at the time of the Conroy report and was appointed senior adviser at the Department of Industry with a special determination allowing his salary to

continue at a secretary's level. The Senate disallowed the determination.

In answer to a question by Liberal backbencher Alan Ferguson, Senator Schacht said Mr Kelly had not taken up the new job because it had been designed as the equivalent of a Secretary's level. Mr Kelly, who was on accumulated annual leave, was now at a substantive level of deputy Secretary unattached to the Customs service. His future was a matter for discussion and negotiation with the appropriate Public Service officers.

● The Treasurer, Ralph Willis, has refused to confirm or deny that the tax office is seeking capital-gains tax on compensation paid to one of the Midford victims.

In reply to a question taken on notice from Liberal backbencher John Watson, Mr Willis cited the secrecy provisions of the tax law.

He was informed, he said, that the compensation payments were assessed on the basis that they would be subject to the application of the tax laws and that the formal written advice from the Government had been that the compensation had been assessed on a pre-tax basis.

Senator Watson said later that the answer was "not quite truthful" because he had copies of a Government letter to one of the victims saying the amount was intended to be non-taxable.

He said he was not sure what position had been reached with the tax office since he asked his question.

— VERONA BURGESS

Nurses earn a special day



Woden Valley Hospital renal nurses Mary Arndt, left, and Kay Michel prepare yesterday for a home visit.

By AMANDA UHLMANN

There's more to being a nurse than changing bandages and bed pans.

A nurse has to be part social worker, part dietician, part teacher, part advocate and, importantly, part friend.

And to renal nurses Mary Arndt and Kay Michel the people they see when travelling around NSW country and the ACT are more than patients.

"They are real heroes and heroines," Mrs Arndt said. "You just admire them so much for their strength."

One woman on their Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis program (monitoring her renal dialysis at home) was holding together her extended family, looking after young children and running a business.

To these people the nurses become more than health workers.

"We've had some of our patients

for six years," Mrs Arndt said. "You get very involved, you know them very well. We just do everything we can to support them."

Today is International Nurses Day, and Colleen Duff, ACT branch secretary of the Australian Nursing Federation, said the community needed to understand how much nurses gave of themselves.

Mary Peters works in Hennessy House with the rehabilitation of the mentally ill and says of her job, "In some respects it's like bringing up another family. It's teaching them cooking, budgeting, where to buy clothes, what's appropriate behaviour."

A mental health nurse had to be, "Everything — and still the nurse, watching for symptoms of their illness and making sure they're taking their medication."

It could be mentally and emotionally taxing working with 20 adults, aged mainly in their 20s and 30s, who needed constant, low-level attention.

Australian Nursing Federation organiser Karina Boyd has been nursing since 1978, and even though her role is now to support working nurses, she sees herself still as first and foremost a nurse.

"I'm still in that caring role [that nurses fill] but I'm caring for nurses now, in a nurturing role."

She said nursing was a bit like being a parent, being there exclusively for another person, who was dependent upon you. And just like parents, nurses often didn't get the recognition they deserved.

Mrs Duff said, "I think the community should recognise the pressures on the system impact on nurses more than any other health professional... [nurses feel] client needs come first and might put themselves at risk — at the end of the day that costs the system. They are not real advocates for themselves when they're advocating for patients, putting patients first."

War criminal search 'hindered'

By JODIE BROUGH

Australia's \$30 million search for war criminals was hindered by the 40-year delay in beginning inquiries and was wound up before some viable investigations could be completed, an Attorney-General's Department report has concluded.

The report's authors were sharply critical of one case, referred to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, where the Government's decision not to fund final inquiries had been "disappointing and difficult to understand".

The 600-page report is the last will and testament of the Special Investigations Unit, set up by the

Hawke Government to find Nazi war criminals.

A chronicle of how the unit carried out investigations from 1987 to 1992, it was tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, with no fanfare and was ignored in the Budget scramble.

The Government has had the report since early this year, but there has been no impetus to make it public.

It details a saga of missed opportunity, with many suspects and key witnesses dying before prosecutions could be mounted, and obstruction by eastern-bloc bureaucracies.

"The clear observation to be made about the [investigations unit's] work is that there could

have been many war crimes trials in Australia and, in respect of some alleged major war criminals, if action had been taken years or decades earlier," the report said.

In 14 major investigations detailed, most of which dealt with murders committed in the eastern bloc, the investigations unit concluded that there was substance to the allegations.

However, two accused had died while the rest of the cases lacked sufficient evidence.

While "strong cases", evidence had been "lost or destroyed, witnesses were dead or untraceable; other witnesses were simply unable to recall clearly the events in question".

In all 841 people were investi-

gated, of whom 542 were located, mostly in Victoria, NSW and South Australia.

Of these, 819 investigations were dropped.

This was mainly because the person was dead or died during the investigation (261 cases), or because they could not be found (247).

Eventually three South Australian men, Ivan Polyukhovich, Heinrich Wagner and Mikolay Berezowsky, were charged with war crimes, but none was convicted.

The charges against Berezowsky were dismissed in July, 1992, due to a lack of witnesses.

Polyukhovich was found not guilty last May after the judge

warned of the dangers of a conviction 50 years after the alleged crimes.

The Wagner prosecution ended because of his ill-health last December.

The fourth case referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions, involving a person identified only as PU 38, was among a number of investigations effectively dropped when the investigations unit ceased operations in June, 1992, despite the investigations unit's insistence that it could be prosecuted.

Police have since decided against proceeding, because the costs would be high with no guarantee of success.

Hornet crashed due to pilot error: inquiry

By IAN McPHERDAN,
Defence Reporter

Pilot error has been blamed for the crash of a Royal Australian Air Force F/A-18 Hornet fighter aircraft with the loss of two occupants in May, 1992, at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland.

A summary of the inquiry into the crash, which was tabled in Parliament yesterday, found that the aircraft flew into the ground after its pilot probably miscalculated at the end of a bombing run.

The report also found that rigid adherence to procedures following a target strike and the presence of low cloud in the exercise area both could have contributed to the accident.

Both the pilot, Flying Officer Robert Jensen, 23, of St Huberts Island on the NSW central coast, and his passenger, Defence Science and Technology Organisation scientist Dr Michael Howlett, 36, of Melbourne, died instantly when the aircraft exploded in a fireball.

The exercise, with two Hornet aircraft, was planned initially as a high-level attack, but was changed to a low-level sortie due to cloud in the target area.

The two aircraft separated 4.5

nautical miles from the target and the ill-fated fighter was observed to crash on the side of a ridge on Cape Clinton.

The inquiry found that for reasons unknown and contrary to procedures, Flying Officer Jensen decided to regain the originally intended egress path below cloud.

"In so doing he placed his aircraft in a turning, descending manoeuvre from which recovery in the height remaining was impossible," the report said.

The inquiry found a number of possible contributory causes including pilot frustration, spatial disorientation and tunnel vision.

It also found that Flying Officer Jensen's relatively limited experience in the application of F/A-18 air-to-ground tactics may have increased the likelihood of his misjudging the handling of related non-standard situations including safe recovery from a descent close to the ground.

The RAAF Board of Inquiry has recommended changes to pilot briefing procedures relating to inadvertent cloud entry and specifying a well defined point at which a decision would be made on whether to continue or abort the attack.

S. Korean envoy fears another N-arms race

South Korea's Ambassador to Australia, Byong Hyon Kwon, has warned that a nuclear-armed North Korea could cause a chain reaction of nuclear capability, particularly in Japan.

In a submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade yesterday, Mr Kwon said leaving North Korea unscathed over its refusal to allow International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors access to its nuclear facilities would undermine the credibility of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

He said it was unclear whether North Korea's "brinkmanship" was covering up a nuclear weapons program or just a gimmick to gain maximum concessions from South Korea.

Mr Kwon said North Korea had only two options.

It could remain in the non-proliferation treaty and accept the atomic energy agency's safeguards or risk international censure and punitive sanctions.

He said Australia and South Korea had grown closer since last year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group leaders' summit in Seattle and urged Australia to cooperate with South Korea in preparation for the next summit in Indonesia in November.

He advocated a dynamic partnership to lead other countries in the region towards "a lofty goal of Asia-Pacific community, which in my naked eyes is already dawning".

— IAN McPHERDAN

Burglars work with residents at home

A woman returned to her home in Kiddle Crescent, Richardson, on Monday morning just in time to disturb a thief who was searching her bedroom.

The woman's husband had left the house at 9.15am and the thief had gone straight to work, smashing a glass panel beside the front door.

Once inside, the burglar had searched the main bedroom, removing a wedding ring and an engagement ring, before leaving in a hurry when the woman returned at 9.30am.

A couple had their credit cards, bank books and cash stolen while they were at home in Dods Place, Watson, on Sunday night.

Some time between 8.30pm and 11pm, while the family was in the living room, a burglar slipped in through an unlocked laundry door and removed the handbag from on top of the washing machine and the wallet from the top of the freezer.

A glass rear door was smashed at a house in Coranderrk Street, Reid, between 11.30am and 12.30pm on Monday. The thief grabbed a VCR and a CD rack with 40 CDs.

A resident of Lapere Street, Red Hill, was burgled on Monday morning while he was in his back yard.

The front door of the house was left unlocked between 9.30am and 10.30am while the resident did some gardening. During that time a thief



walked in and took a wallet with cash and credit cards from the living-room floor.

A public phone was stolen from a club in Stirling early on Monday.

A security guard checking the club at 4.10am found an external door had been forced open and an attempt had been made to smash open the cash drawer of a poker machine. The burglars moved to a public phone which they tried to force open. Giving up, they grabbed another phone and escaped.

A woman was burgled while she vacuumed in Pinkerton Circuit, Kambah, on Monday.

Some time between 5pm and 6pm while the woman was upstairs, a burglar pulled the mesh off a screen door, opened an unlocked sliding door and removed a wallet from the kitchen bench.

A burglar left a trail of mandarin peonies at a unit in Currie Crescent, Griffith, on Monday.

A window at the front of the apartment was forced and the burglar stopped only to pilfer a manda-

rin before grabbing a stereo system, five CDs and the keys to the unit's deadlock and the secure underground car park.

A trail of peonies was found from the kitchen into the car park.

Two next-door offices in Townsend Street, Phillip, were broken into on the weekend. In both cases the front doors were forced open, the premises searched and cash stolen.

Three houses in Middleton Circuit, Gwirrie, were broken into on Monday in similar fashion.

In all cases a window at the rear of the house was smashed, all the drawers emptied on to the beds in the master bedrooms and the best pieces of jewellery stolen. A video camera was stolen from one of the homes.

A thief fell through the roof of a garden shed in the back yard of a house in Hennings Crescent, Richardson, on Monday.

The thief appeared to have been trying to reach the roof of the house when the shed collapsed under him. The thief had a look around and stole some power tools.

A prescription for Prozac, an anti-depressant, and 12 CDs were stolen from a house in Lort Place, Chisholm, on Monday.

If you have any information that might assist police investigations in any of these, or other matters, please call 249 7444 or contact police operations on 11 444.

Coalition moves to alter Austudy

Federal Opposition senators attempted to force through measures to help more children of low-income farmers receive Austudy support, a move the Government is baulking at because it would cost \$10 million.

The Opposition action centres on an error by a government department which, in information kits, said that the assets test would not be applied to potential students if their parents had qualified for a Department of Social Security healthcare card.

This would have helped an estimated 2000 applicants, mostly from struggling farming families, to qualify for Austudy through the cards held by their parents, income-poor but asset-rich because of the value of their farms.

In the Senate yesterday, South Australian Liberal Senator Baden Teague won support for his amendment striving to enshrine such an exemption in legislation.

The Government was defeated in the Senate yesterday by 43 votes to 27 in the vote on the amendment to change the Student Assistance Amendment Bill 1994, which will now pass to the House of Representatives, where the Government has a majority and is likely to reject the Senate's changes.

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