



Ombudsman Tasmania

WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH 2026

STATEMENT FROM TASMANIAN OMBUDSMAN, DR GRANT DAVIES

Ombudsman Tasmania has recommended additional checking procedures be mandated for public authorities after multiple incidents of personal information, including names, home addresses and phone numbers of private citizens, being wrongly released in documentation requested under the *Right to Information Act 2009* (the RTI Act).

In some incidents, the personal information related to children who had been placed in state care due to concerns about sexual abuse.

The recommendation, along with four others, forms part of a report following an investigation initiated by former Tasmanian Ombudsman, Richard Connock, who retired in June last year. Mr Connock started an own motion investigation* after becoming aware of multiple incidents of public authorities releasing personal information which was exempt under s36 of the RTI Act.

When publicly releasing the [investigation report today](#), the current Tasmanian Ombudsman Dr Grant Davies said the investigation found a lack of documented procedures regarding the collection and release of information under the RTI Act in a number of public authorities.

“There are legal protections about personal information in the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004* (PIP Act) but these can be weakened if there are inadequate safeguards in place,” Dr Davies said. “The investigation showed that errors in the release of personal information during RTI applications was not an isolated issue but an uncontrolled risk that was happening with some frequency.

“The public rightly expects their personal information to be appropriately handled by public authorities. For this to occur, the Personal Information Protection Principles of the PIP Act must be reflected in practical guidance to staff and embedded into administrative processes.”

The two most significant incidents related to the City of Hobart municipal council and the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP).

“A more targeted review was undertaken of the City of Hobart and DECYP - due to the known incidents at these agencies - and the Departments of Health (DoH) and Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM), due to high volume of information requests received by them and the significant amount of personal information held by these public authorities,” Dr Davies said.

The more targeted review involved an audit of 10 randomly selected files from each public authority. Of the files randomly selected for audit at DoH and DPFEM, 30% had released personal information in error. Of the files audited at the City of Hobart and DECYP, this figure rose to 40%. None of these errors on the audited files had previously been detected by the public authorities.



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The report makes the following recommendations:

1. All public authorities should document and implement procedures which mandate additional checking of the information intended to be released under the Right to Information Act 2009 when this contains personal information assessed as being exempt under s36 of that Act.
2. All public authorities should develop a written guidance document to inform their staff as to how to respond to the inadvertent release of personal information identified as exempt under s36 of the Right to Information Act 2009. This should contain an expectation that, if practicable, the affected individuals be notified of the breach and the type of information released, and be informed of their rights under the Personal Information Protection Act 2004 to complain about the release of their personal information.
3. All public authorities should undertake an audit of their past 30 decisions or those made within the last 12 months under the Right to Information Act 2009 (whichever is fewer) in which information was found to be exempt under s36. This audit should ascertain if any personal information has been released in error and if process changes are needed to reduce commonly occurring errors. Appropriate steps should be taken to rectify any breaches of the Personal Information Protection Act 2004 if these are identified in the audit.
4. Any public authorities which regularly deal with information relating to children and victim-survivors of sexual abuse, specifically but not limited to the Department for Education, Children and Young People, should conduct an additional review of the appropriateness of their information disclosure practices. This review should focus on whether these practices limit harm and do not cause additional trauma, in recognition of the sensitivity of the personal information of which they are the custodians.
5. All public authorities should review their redaction methods and naming conventions regarding documents to be released under the Right to Information Act 2009 to ensure that these are effective and that personal information is not inadvertently released.

“Public authorities are entrusted with personal information, often provided in confidence and in circumstances of vulnerability,” Dr Davies said.

“Unlawful disclosure undermines public trust and taking reasonable steps to protect personal information is a legal obligation requiring genuine care and attention. Implementing these recommendations will reduce errors and improve administrative practices in Tasmanian public authorities.”

** An own motion investigation into the administrative action of public authorities may be carried out by the Ombudsman pursuant to s13 of the Ombudsman Act 1978 (the Ombudsman Act), where the Ombudsman considers it in the public interest to do so.*

Please note Dr Davies will not be making further comment.

Issued by Paula Catchpole on behalf of the office of the Ombudsman Tasmania 0472 832 514.