

Shh... secret state rules

DAVID KILLICK

TASMANIA'S bid to shake its reputation as the "secret state" has faltered as public authorities continue to misinterpret Right to Information laws to conceal information that should be made public.

The Tasmanian Ombudsman says the vast majority of appeals against decisions to withhold information are overturned, but appellants are waiting an average of 18 months for their cases to be reviewed amid a massive backlog.

It comes despite repeated commitments from the state government for greater transparency, particularly relating

Vast majority of appeals for info upheld

to right to information requests.

Ombudsman Richard's Connock's office is responsible for external reviews of decisions made under the Act.

"Of the 19 external review decisions completed in the 2021-22 reporting year, only three affirmed the decisions of the relevant public authority," he said in his annual report.

"The significant majority varied or set aside the decisions, and two of the decisions in which the public authority's decision was affirmed included significant criticism of the

manner in which the assessed disclosure application had been handled," he noted in his report.

"That 95 per cent of the external reviews dealt with in the 2021-22 financial year identified issues with the manner in which the public authority had responded to a request for assessed disclosure is of concern.

"The express object of the RTI Act is clear in relation to its pro-disclosure focus, seeking to increase government accountability and acknowledging that the public has a right

to the information held by public authorities who are acting on behalf of the people of Tasmania.

"Too often, sadly, adherence to this object is not evident in practice and a closed, and at times obstructive, approach is taken when responding to requests for assessed disclosure which come before my office."

The report noted that there are 100 further appeals awaiting a review, roughly the same as a year before.

The average wait time for a review is 587 days.

Tasmania has been dubbed the nation's "most secret state". Former premier Gutwein promised reform in 2020 and revealed that 30 per cent of RTI requests receive no information at all, the worst performance in the nation.

The number of overall complaints lodged with the Ombudsman rose by 27 per cent from 2020-21 to 2021-22 to reach 907 for the financial year. The bulk of the complaints were about state government departments.

Of the 887 complaints dealt with during the periods, 44.5



Richard Connock, Tasmanian ombudsman

per cent were declined, referred of out of jurisdiction; 5.5 per cent were discontinued; 39 per cent were found to have no defective administration and 11 per cent were either partly or fully substantiated.

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DERWENT PIPERS TO ONCE AGAIN TARTAN UP THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT



Derwent Scottish Pipe Band members, Kaye Robertson, Randall Smith, and Rick Baxter. Picture: Linda Higginson

SARAH PERILLO

MEMBERS of the Derwent Scottish Pipe Band are getting into the festive spirit as they prepare for the Hobart Christmas Pageant.

The pageant is returning to the city for its 40th instalment on Saturday after a two-year Covid-induced hiatus.

The band is the only group to have been involved in every one of the 40 pageants.

President of the band and pipe major Rick Baxter has been a member for 29 years.

"The pageant is something we look forward to every year; it's part of our history," he said.

"We swapped traditional bagpipe music and Scottish tunes for Christmas carols a couple of years ago and everyone seems to love it. We get lots of waves and smiles and see kids' faces light up - it really encourages us to keep doing what we love.

"We have really missed playing at the pageant over the last few years so it's great to be back."

This year's show will include more than 40 floats and over 1000 participants.

The event fills the streets of Hobart with floats, dancers and marching bands from a diverse range of community, school, sporting clubs and charity groups.

Children and families can visit Myer, where Santa will be making a special appearance for family photos, and enjoy a range of "pageant pop-up parties" that will be held around the city throughout the rest of the day.



Football historian Damian Dillon and the State Library's Ross Latham. Picture: Linda Higginson

Preserving footy's past with eye on future

JARROD LAWLER

TASMANIAN football historian Damian Dillon believes a proposed new multi-purpose stadium in Hobart would be the ideal place to house a state of the art Tassie football museum.

A museum of that nature got one step closer to reality in Hobart on Monday with a pop-up display launched at the State Library in Hobart.

The temporary display showcases some iconic pieces of Tasmania's footballing history with a plan in mind to find a more temporary home to house the memorabilia in the near future.

Among the memorabilia is a prized photo of Tasmania's 1958 National Carnival team signed by captain coach at the time John Leedham as well as future Tasmanian captain and coach Trevor Leo.

Mr Dillon, a Tassie footy historian for almost 20 years, said a proposed new stadium would be the perfect place to showcase and celebrate the state's rich footballing history.

"If a stadium comes to fruition that would be the ideal place to have it," Mr Dillon said.

"With locals and interstate visitors coming in to Hobart for AFL games they could go and see what we've got on display

before the game and learn a bit about our history."

"It's important to preserve what items are remaining and preserve the culture and heritage we've got," he said.

"This display that started in Hobart today will showcase what we have but what an ideal place a museum in a stadium would be so if it does go ahead we'd love to be thought about for a little space somewhere there."

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