

OFFICE OF THE COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

MEDIA RELEASE

OMBUDSMAN GIVES EVIDENCE AT ROBODEBT ROYAL COMMISSION

09 March 2023

On 8 and 9 March 2023, former officials of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and current Ombudsman, Iain Anderson, voluntarily appeared to assist the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme (the Royal Commission).

On 10 January 2017, in response to a high volume of complaints, the Commonwealth Ombudsman commenced an own motion investigation into the Robodebt scheme.

As part of that investigation, the Commonwealth Ombudsman requested the then Department of Human Services (the Department), now Services Australia, provide relevant documents and information, including legal advices, under section 8 of the *Ombudsman Act 1976*.

Evidence presented by the Royal Commission shows the department withheld certain documents and information from the Commonwealth Ombudsman. This is extremely disappointing as it demonstrates department officials did not engage with the Ombudsman in good faith. Their actions hampered the Ombudsman's ability to determine if the Robodebt scheme was fair, reasonable and lawful.

In his evidence, Mr Anderson made clear his intention to, where necessary, use the full suite of powers available to him under the *Ombudsman Act 1976* to provide independent and impartial oversight of public administration.

The Ombudsman's statement, tendered by the Royal Commission on 9 March 2023, is available on the Office of the [Commonwealth Ombudsman's website](#).