

Parliamentary Complaint Handling Procedures

5. Receiving and registration

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Overview

All contacts to the office, including parliamentary complaints, need to be registered. In most cases, these are received by a dedicated intake team in the first instance however at times other staff will receive and register complaints. Regardless of who receives the complaint, that person has to receive the contact, register it in Resolve, conduct an initial assessment and either finalise it or refer it on for further assessment.

This Procedure explains how to receive, register and assess complaints to ensure that they are processed efficiently and accurately.

Purpose	Explain how to receive, register and undertake an initial assessment of contacts and parliamentary complaints
Workflow	<i>Previous Step:</i> Procedure 4 - Jurisdiction <i>Next Step:</i> Procedure 7 – Assessing and deciding complaints Procedure 12 – Deciding complaints
Scope	Does not cover the use of systems used to receive complaints.

5.1 Receiving complaints

5.1.1 Complaint channels

The majority of parliamentary complaints are received directly by telephone or via the Office’s [online complaint form](#). However, we also receive complaints through a number of other channels.

Telephone complaints are generally received directly by an intake team, however at times they may be received by other staff during the course of another complaint. All other complaints are triaged by an intake Site Supervisor and allocated to an intake officer for action.

Table 5.1: Complaint channels.

Complaint type	How received
Telephone	People call 1300 362 072 or designated specialist lines (Indigenous and ACT phone numbers). Calls progress through an Interactive Voice Response system before answer by an intake staff member.
Web complaint form	Online complaint forms are lodged and a Resolve record is automatically created using the information in the form.
Email ¹	Emails that arrive to the <i>ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au</i> mailbox are digitally inspected by Resolve’s <i>Email Watcher</i> functionality to determine if there is an open case to which the email can be automatically attached. If not, it will create a <i>Contact Case</i> , which will appear under the Contacts tab on the Resolve Home Screen.

¹ Please note: email is one of the least efficient ways for us to receive a complaint. For this reason, we do not publicly advertise the *ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au* mailbox nor promote the availability of this channel. We will, however, receive and assess any emails received.

Complaint type	How received
Fax	Received directly to the <i>ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au</i> mailbox with a <i>Contact Case</i> created.
Letter	Received by the mail team in Canberra or a State office and scanned into Resolve as a New Document in the <i>Unallocated Public Contact</i> tab.
Social media	The communications team will monitor the Office's Facebook and Twitter accounts and will refer any identified contacts or complaints to the <i>ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au</i> mailbox
In person	We can receive complaints in person in several ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when a member of the public presents at an Office location (whether unannounced or for an agreed appointment) • during outreach activities such as community events or visits, or • during detention or other inspection activities.

5.1.2 Receiving complaints – non-intake staff

Sometimes, officers who are not in an intake team will receive complaints. For example, a person may make a complaint directly to you:

- by email to your individual work address or another team mailbox
- during outreach activities such as community events or visits
- during detention or other inspections
- written on forms or surveys
- when a person visits the office
- during a meeting with an advocate.

It may not be appropriate to take a person's individual complaint through one of these channels. In these circumstances, it is appropriate to refer them to the usual channels set out above. However, if you do take the complaint, you **must** do the following:

1. **Obtain** the person's contact details, including their full name and preferred contact information. If the person does not want to provide these details, you should still refer the complaint to the intake team and advise the person that we may be unable to take action on the complaint (see Procedure 2.2.5).
2. **Advise** the person that we will assess their complaint. You must not advise them that we will investigate.
3. **Send** the information to the intake team's email address (IAT@ombudsman.gov.au) within **two** working days.

5.2 Registering complaints



The order in which you will create a person record and a complaint file will vary, depending on how you receive the complaint. The process for registering a web complaint is set out at [5.2.6](#). This incorporates email, fax and letter complaints. The process for registering a telephone complaint is set out at [5.2.7](#). All other complaint types are registered as outlined at [5.2.8](#).

5.2.1 Person records

Person records contain personal information about a complainant, including:

- the person's name and contact details (including any alias or preferred names)
- any requirement for an interpreter or translator
- any adjustments to the way the Office will provide services to the person, where the person has a disability (see [Procedure 2.3.1 and 2.8](#))
- if they identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- any restrictions the office has placed on the services it provides to the person (see [Procedure 2.7 – 2.8](#))

5.2.2 Existing and multiple person records



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Complaints by email – Email Watcher

Email Watcher in Resolve monitors all email correspondence to the office through the ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au inbox and conducts an automatic search of the information contained in the email (e.g. reference numbers, email address) to determine whether it relates to an existing complaint.

Where Email Watcher identifies that the email relates to an existing complaint, it will attach the email to the relevant complaint file in Resolve. If it cannot identify that the email relates to an existing complaint, it will create an unmatched Contact Case in Resolve for assessment by an intake officer.

Email watcher does not create new person records or register complaints.

Merging existing/multiple person records



5.2.4 Cross-referencing complaints

If the person making the complaint has made a previous complaint about the same issue/s, this should be recorded on the complaint file. This helps to ensure that any officer who assesses the complaint is aware of all the information that may be relevant to the complaint.



5.2.5 Co-callers and OBOs

If two or more people are making a complaint together (co-callers), or a person is making a complaint on behalf of another person (OBO), this should be recorded on the complaint file. For more information about co-callers and OBO complaints, see [Procedure 2.2](#).



5.2.6 Process for registering a web complaint

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5.2.8 Process for registering other complaint channels

The process to register complaints received by all other channels is a combination of the telephone and webcase process. You should create a new complaint as covered in steps 1-3 and 6 of [5.2.7](#). Finish the registration process of steps 8 onwards of [5.2.6](#).

5.3 Intake assessment of complaints

Once you have registered a complaint, the next step is to assess it and determine how to action the complaint.

Assessment of a complaint at the intake stage is an assessment of whether the complaint should be:

- finalised, or
- referred to another team for further assessment, or
- referred to an Early Resolution Level 2 officer.

Procedure 7 explains how to identify issues and assess and decide what to do with parliamentary complaints. You should ensure you have read Procedure 7, however due to the limited assessment role of intake teams not all sections will be relevant to the day to day work of intake functions.

Instead, at the intake stage, complaints are assessed against certain applicable discretions (see [5.3.1](#)) or they are referred for further assessment ([5.3.2](#))

5.3.1 Decision – complaint should be finalised

As outlined in Procedure 7, section 6 of the *Ombudsman Act 1976* (Cth) and *Ombudsman Act 1989* (ACT) provide many discretions to decide not to investigate a complaint. At the intake stage, the most common and applicable discretions are that the complainant has not complained to the agency or the agency has not finalised its assessment of the complaint, or that the complaint has accessed or could access an internal or external review pathway.

Table 5.3: Common discretions not to investigate used at intake stage.

Scenario	Example
The complainant has not made a complaint to the agency.	The complainant has had some contact with the agency about their issue/s, but has not lodged a formal complaint in accordance with the agency’s procedures.
The complainant has made a formal complaint to the agency, but that complaint is still within the agency’s service standard.	The complainant lodges a complaint with the agency and contacts our Office the following day.
The complainant has a structured review pathway available to them.	The person disagrees with a decision made by the agency and is able to seek an internal or external review of that decision. Instead, they contact our Office about the decision.

5.3.2 Decision to refer a complaint for further assessment

If, at the intake stage:

- you are satisfied that the complaint is in our jurisdiction, and
- you do not intend to exercise any of the discretions set out in 5.3.1 above to finalise the complaint,

You should refer the complaint for further assessment. There are conventions of how certain complaints or issues are handled. If you are unsure to where a complaint should be referred, consult your supervisor.

5.3.3 Process for referring complaints



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5.3.4 Referral to Early Resolution Level 2 officers

For some complaints, we can facilitate the immediate transfer of a telephone complaint from an intake officer to a trained Early Resolution Level 2 officer (ERLO). In practice, this means an intake officer receives a telephone complaint and, on assessing that the complaint meets the requirements for ERLO assessment, can transfer the complaint to the ERLO without completing the full registration and assessment process. It then allows the ERLO to

gather and assess the information from the complainant at ‘first touch’. This produces a more timely and efficient response to the complaint.

This process only applies to certain designated agencies. At the moment, the only designated agency is Centrelink. As a general rule, you should use the phone transfer process for **all** complaints about those agencies that you would otherwise refer to the Early Resolution team for further assessment. ERLOs **must** accept the call.

You should not use the phone transfer process:

- to de-escalate a call or manage unreasonable complainant conduct, or
- where there is a potential s 35A disclosure issue (see Procedure 3.5.5)

Technical matters or coaching should not be discussed during the handover of a call from intake to an ERLO. If you have concerns about a complaint that was transferred, you should discuss this with your supervisor after the call.

5.3.5 Live phone complaint transfer process – intake officers



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5.3.6 Live phone complaint transfer process – ERLOs

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5.4 Escalation to supervisor

It may be appropriate to escalate a complaint to your supervisor when:

- the complainant requests to speak to a supervisor
- you identify a potential conflict of interest (see Procedure 7.1.1).

If the complainant raises urgent issues, including those that may warrant an s 35A release of information, you **must** raise these issues **immediately** with your supervisor. This all this applies to all complaints regardless of how you became aware of the threat or issue, or what the complaint is about.

More information about responding to threats of harm is available in the Office's [Policy and Procedures for Responding to Risks of Harms and Threats to Others](#). Procedure 3.5.5 addresses procedures for making a release of information under s 35A.

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