

Meeting of the OPCAT Advisory Group 20 May 2022 COMMUNIQUÉ No. 1, 2022

On 20 May 2022, the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's (the Office) OPCAT Advisory Group (OAG) held its first meeting for 2022 and welcomed Ms Lorraine Finlay, the Human Rights Commissioner, and Ms Vicki Mau, Australian Red Cross, as observers. Mr Josef Szwarc, Foundation House, attended on behalf of OAG member Mr Paris Aristotle. Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, and Ms Symone Andersen, Acting Senior Assistant Ombudsman (ACT Ombudsman), attended as invited guests.

Apologies were received from OAG members Professor Bronwyn Naylor and Mr Aristotle.

The OAG noted:

- the first meeting of Australia's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) Network, facilitated by the NPM Coordinator, was held on 8 March 2022 – the communiqué for which can be found [here](#)
- the extension to 20 January 2023 for the implementation of the Australian Government's obligation to establish NPMs
- the Commonwealth NPM's return to in-person inspections of immigration detention facilities around Australia in the lead up to the end of the 2021-2022 financial year
- the NPM Coordinator's engagement with international counterparts in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and South Africa to learn and share lessons about coordinating a multibody NPM framework
- the ACT Ombudsman's role as part of the recently nominated multi-body ACT NPM, and
- the Office's presentation in March 2022 to the *Future Justice and Corrections Summit*, on recent developments in OPCAT implementation in Australia and the importance of the preventive mandate.

Dr Gauntlett presented to the OAG on the importance of listening to and incorporating the lived experiences of people with disability when implementing OPCAT. Dr Gauntlett noted the progress of the disability rights movement in Australia, the high number of individuals in Australia who have some form of disability, the broad scope of places of detention captured by OPCAT, and considerations of how NPMs can engage with disability organisations effectively. OAG will continue to consider engagement with civil society, including disability organisations, to support OPCAT implementation.

The Office also advised that its online OPCAT webform went live on 1 March 2022. The webform allows public and community stakeholders to communicate with the Office about its OPCAT functions via the Office's [website](#).

The Office also noted the upcoming release of its *Monitoring Immigration Detention Report* covering the period July 2020 to July 2021. The report can be found [here](#).

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In 2020, the Commonwealth Ombudsman established the OPCAT Advisory Group (OAG) to provide expert advice and guidance to the Ombudsman about the functions and responsibilities as an NPM and as the Coordinator of the Australian NPM Network. The OAG's terms of reference are available [here](#).

More information on recent OPCAT developments in Australia can be found [here](#).