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## PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

30 JUNE 1977

### COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN - COMMENCEMENT OF OPERATIONS

On 17 March 1977 I announced the appointment of Professor J. E. Richardson, Robert Garran Professor of Law at the Australian National University, to the position of Commonwealth Ombudsman.

I am pleased to announce that Professor Richardson will take up his appointment on 1 July 1977 for a period of seven years. He will be supported by two Deputy Commonwealth Ombudsman who are expected to be appointed shortly.

The Ombudsman has power to investigate complaints made by citizens, organisations and associations against the administrative actions of Commonwealth officials. He may also conduct investigations on his own initiative. He will be concerned mainly with the way officials have handled a matter and will be looking at alleged bias, neglect, delay, incompetence or any other complaints that can be generally classified as bad administration.

The Ombudsman has power to gain immediate access to documents or premises and is able to interview officials or anyone else who may assist in his enquiries. All enquiries are made in private.

If the Ombudsman finds that some remedial action is required in relation to a complaint, he will make recommendations to the relevant department and to its Minister. Where in the opinion of the Ombudsman, appropriate corrective action is not taken, he may report directly to the Prime Minister and to Parliament.

All complaints to the Ombudsman must be in writing, although he and his officers may assist citizens to prepare their written complaints.

Eventually, the Ombudsman will have offices in all states. However, as from 1 July he will be located in the Prudential Building, corner London Circuit and University Avenue, Canberra City, postal address P.O. Box 442, Canberra City A.C.T. 2601, telephone (062) 475833.

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The establishment of the office of Commonwealth Ombudsman is one of a number of measures the Government is introducing to ensure that citizens have adequate avenues of appeal against administrative actions of officials.

In the field of administrative law, the Commonwealth legislation so far enacted, and the legislative proposals in train, will provide the most comprehensive machinery for the redress of grievances in any jurisdiction in Australia, and it may fairly be suggested, in any jurisdiction in the common law world.

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