



ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26

About this report

This annual report includes our activities and achievements for the 2025-2026 financial year (FY26) and summarises our future priorities. It has been prepared in accordance with the LAO's regulatory reporting obligations under section 63 of the *Land Access Ombudsman Act 2017*.

Public availability

Copies of this report are available from www.lao.org.au/annual-reports/. Please contact the LAO on 1800 717 550 or via the email address below to request a printed copy of this report.

Interpreter service



The LAO is committed to providing accessible services to Queenslanders from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. If you have difficulty in understanding the annual report, you can contact us on 1800 717 550, or via enquiries@lao.org.au and we will arrange an interpreter to effectively communicate the report to you.

Have your say

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The LAO welcomes your comments about the content of the report. Please send your feedback to the Land Access Ombudsman (the Ombudsman), PO Box 15148, CITY EAST, QLD, 4002, or email us at enquiries@lao.org.au.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the past, present and emerging Traditional Custodians and Elders of the state of Queensland and the land on which we operate. We respect the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

21 September 2026

The Honourable Dale Last MP
Minister for Natural Resources and Mines
Minister for Manufacturing
Minister for Regional and Rural Development
1 William St
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present the Land Access Ombudsman's Annual Report for the financial year of 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

This report is produced under the requirements of the *Land Access Ombudsman Act 2017*. It does not contain financial information.

Yours sincerely,



Warwick Squire
Land Access Ombudsman

Table of contents

About the Land Access Ombudsman (LAO).....	4
Our role	4
Our structure	5
Our jurisdiction.....	6
Matters we can investigate	6
Matters we cannot investigate	6
Our process	7
1. Assessment.....	7
2. Investigation	7
3. Facilitation	7
4. Outcome.....	7
Message from the Ombudsman	8
Dispute referrals in 2025-26	10
Referrals to other bodies	10
Case example: Negotiation and access issues affecting mining operations.....	11
Our actions	11
The outcome.....	12
Notice of Investigation	12
Notice about legislation breaches	12
Engagement	13
Community engagement	13
Online engagement	14
Financial Information.....	14
Glossary	15

About the Land Access Ombudsman (LAO)

Our role

The LAO is independent of the government, established under the *Land Access Ombudsman Act 2017* (the Act). During the 2025-26 reporting period, our primary role is to investigate disputes involving alleged breaches of Conduct and Compensation Agreements (CCAs) and Make Good Agreements (MGAs).

Our functions

During the 2025–26 reporting period, the Land Access Ombudsman exercised its functions under the *Land Access Ombudsman Act 2017* as it stood immediately before its repeal and replacement by amendments made under the *Resources Safety and Health Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2026*.

Throughout the reporting period, the Act prescribes the following statutory functions for the LAO:

- (a) to investigate, and facilitate the timely resolution of, land access disputes;
- (b) to refer or recommend to departments the investigation of—
 - (i) possible offences under section 53, 54 or 55; or
 - (ii) possible breaches, relating to access to land, of resource authorities;
- (c) to identify, and advise government entities about, systemic issues arising from land access disputes;
- (d) to promote public awareness of the ombudsman’s functions under paragraphs (a) to (c); and
- (e) other functions conferred on the ombudsman under this Act or another Act.

Our values



Integrity

We are honest, ethical and accountable in everything we do.



Adaptability

We respond to changing needs, emerging issues and the evolving land access environment.



Respect

We treat people fairly and value different perspectives and experiences.



Communication

We communicate openly and clearly to build trust and understanding.



Collaboration

We work constructively with stakeholders to support positive land access outcomes.



Leadership

We demonstrate professionalism, responsibility and a commitment to continuous improvement.

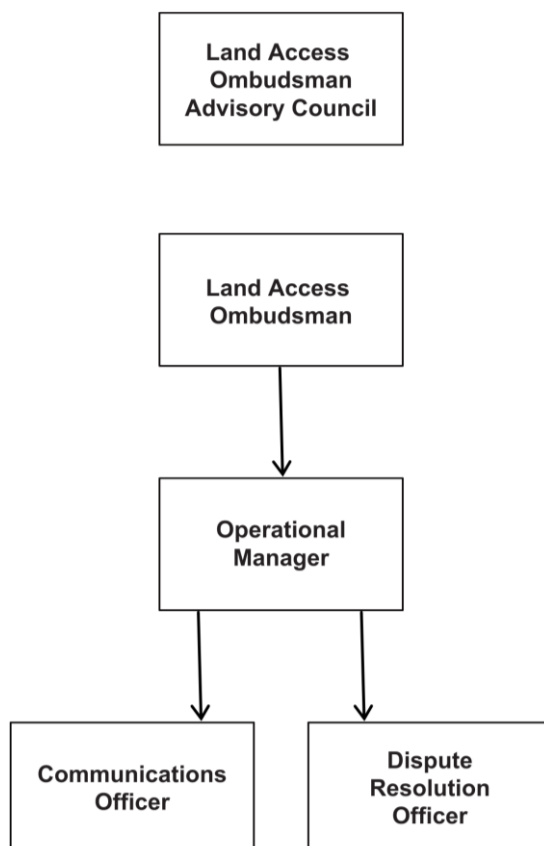
Our structure

The former Land Access Ombudsman (the Ombudsman), Ms Jane Pires, operated independently and was not subject to direction by any person or entity. The Ombudsman reported on the activities of the Office to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Minister for Manufacturing and Minister for Regional and Rural Development, the Honourable Dale Last MP.

Ms Pires completed her term as Land Access Ombudsman in November 2025. The Project Manager then served as Acting Land Access Ombudsman while continuing to lead the transition of the Office to a statutory body, which took effect on 1 July 2026. Warwick Squire was officially appointed Land Access Ombudsman from that date. Mr Squire holds this role as a dual role alongside his position as CEO of Coexistence Queensland.

A Dispute Resolution Officer and a Communications Officer also supported the Office. The Dispute Resolution Officer managed enquiries and dispute resolution activities. The Communications Officer, who joined the Office in September 2025, led stakeholder engagement, communications, and outreach activities.

From 1 July 2026, the LAO is overseen by the LAO Advisory Council, which comprises the same members as the Coexistence Queensland Board.



Our jurisdiction

Matters we can investigate

For the 2025–26 reporting period, the Land Access Ombudsman's investigative jurisdiction was determined by the Land Access Ombudsman Act 2017 as in force before its repeal and replacement by the Resources Safety and Health Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2026. The matters outlined below therefore reflect the functions and investigation powers that applied under the former Act throughout the reporting period.

We investigated matters referred to us when the party:

- has an existing CCA or MGA
- believes the other party is not complying with their obligations under the agreement
- has made a reasonable attempt to resolve the issue.

Matters we cannot investigate

We could not investigate:

- when the CCA or MGA is under negotiation, or subject to a minimum negotiation period or cooling off period
- the content of legislation or government policies
- a decision made by Cabinet, a Minister, or a chief executive of a government department
- a matter that is, or has been, the subject of a court proceeding or an arbitration
- a matter that is, or has been, the subject of an investigation by a department
- compensation agreements for mining leases and mining claims under the Mineral Resources Act 1989
- access agreements
- matters outside of Queensland.

Our process

1. Assessment

When a dispute is referred to the LAO, we gather information to determine whether we can investigate the issue. This might include:

- finding out what (if any) attempts have been made to resolve the dispute (including if it has previously been before court or investigated by government)
- requesting information from both parties
- reviewing the CCA or MGA.

2. Investigation

If we can investigate the matter, our dispute resolution team will take reasonable steps to examine and help resolve the issue. This could include:

- requesting information from both parties and (potentially) government departments
- holding meetings and interviews with each party, separately or together
- visiting and inspecting sites
- providing alternative dispute resolution options
- consulting with technical experts.

3. Facilitation

Our goal is to preserve the long-term relationship between parties to find a mutually beneficial outcome. Where appropriate, investigations may progress to a facilitation stage. At this stage, the case remains open, and the dispute resolution team works with the parties to clarify issues, facilitate discussions and explore options for resolution. This may include a conciliation approach, where the LAO can provide a view on what the agreement requires and assist the parties to identify a way forward.

4. Outcome

On completing an investigation, the LAO issues a Draft Notice of Investigation Outcome and invites both parties to respond. Comments from both parties are considered before the Ombudsman issuing a final Notice of Outcome.

If a dispute is resolved through our investigation, the Notice will include details of the resolution.

If either party does not feel the dispute is resolved, the notice will include:

- advice about the merits of each party's position
- recommendations about how the dispute could or should be resolved
- reasons for the advice and recommendations.

Message from the Ombudsman

As Land Access Ombudsman, I am pleased to present the 2025-26 Annual Report for the Office of the Land Access Ombudsman (LAO).

Preparing for a new chapter

The 2025–26 year marked a significant period of transition for the LAO and represents the final year of operation under the Office's previous legislative framework. Building on the reforms introduced through the *Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024*, an important milestone was reached in March 2026 when the *Resources Safety and Health Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2026* was passed by the Parliament.

The Act contains the legislative amendments necessary to support the LAO's transition to an independent statutory body, expand its jurisdiction and establish new governance arrangements. The new framework commenced on 1 July 2026.

Throughout FY26, the Office undertook extensive preparatory work to support this transition. This included governance and organisational planning, workforce and capability development, stakeholder engagement, operational readiness activities, and the development of systems and processes to support the LAO's expanded functions. This work has positioned the Office to deliver enhanced services and meet the evolving needs of Queensland's land access framework.

Delivering our services

While preparing for these reforms, the LAO remained focused on its core role of providing independent, impartial, and accessible dispute resolution services. During the year, the LAO received 30 contacts.

While many matters fell outside our jurisdiction, we continued to assist stakeholders by providing information and directing them to the most appropriate organisations and government agencies for support. Through this work, the LAO continued to promote awareness of its role and help stakeholders navigate often complex land access matters. The Office also continued to monitor emerging issues across Queensland's land access landscape.

Strengthening relationships

Strong relationships remain central to the effectiveness of the LAO. Throughout the year, we engaged with landholders, resource authority holders, government agencies, peak bodies, and regional communities to improve understanding of land access issues and raise awareness of our services.

Key engagement activities included participation in the Land Court Annual Conference in Charters Towers and the Landholder Support Program in Rolleston, alongside other government and industry forums. As part of the transition to a statutory body, the LAO also consulted with a range of key stakeholders, including government agencies and integrity bodies, to help inform governance arrangements, operational readiness, and future service delivery.

Looking ahead

As the newly appointed Land Access Ombudsman, I am honoured to lead the LAO into this next phase. The transition to a statutory body on 1 July 2026 represents a significant milestone in the evolution of the LAO.

Over the coming year, our focus will be on delivering the reforms and opportunities created through the LAO's expanded role. Key objectives include:

- implementing the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan and embedding the LAO's new governance framework
- successfully establishing the LAO as an independent statutory body and ensuring the organisation is well positioned to deliver its expanded functions
- building organisational capability and capacity to support a broader jurisdiction and meet future demand
- strengthening awareness and understanding of the LAO's services through targeted stakeholder engagement and education
- expanding our presence in regional Queensland and continuing to build trusted relationships with landholders, resource authority holders, industry, government, and communities and
- maintaining a strong focus on accessibility, independence, and fairness as the foundations of our dispute resolution services.

Success will be measured by the implementation of these reforms and our ability to deliver practical, timely and effective outcomes for the stakeholders and communities we serve.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank landholders, community members, industry representatives, government agencies, and stakeholders across Queensland for their continued engagement and support. I also acknowledge the contribution of my predecessor, Jane Pires, whose leadership helped guide the organisation through a period of significant reform and laid the foundations for the LAO's transition to an independent statutory body.

Finally, I thank the LAO team for their professionalism, dedication, and adaptability throughout a year of substantial change. Their commitment has ensured the Office is well positioned to deliver on its expanded role and continue providing trusted, independent support to Queensland stakeholders.

I look forward to working with stakeholders as we begin this new chapter.

Yours sincerely,



Warwick Squire

Land Access Ombudsman

Dispute referrals in 2025-26

Between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026, the office received 30 contacts about possible dispute referrals.

Disputes received by Telephone	Disputes received Online	Disputes received by email	Disputes received during external engagement event or walk-in to the office
17	0	13	0

28 contacts were determined to be out-of-jurisdiction and referred to other entities to provide help and support. Based on the 30 dispute contacts received, we commenced preliminary enquiries on two, which did not proceed to the investigation stage once assessed. Three enquiries about the LAO or its services were received.

Referrals to other bodies

We received and referred 21 enquiries to other bodies as the team assessed them to be out of our jurisdiction under section 36 of the Act. Themes in out-of-jurisdiction enquiries include:

- enquiries about negotiating or renegotiating CCAs
- requests for legal advice
- complaints about a local government decision
- complaints about property developers
- complaint about state government decisions
- complaints/enquiries about resource issue not related to CCAs or MGAs
- complaint about disputes with neighbours
- complaints about road access

Where dispute referrals were out-of-jurisdiction, the LAO referred the enquiry to the below organisation or body:

Organisation	No. of forwarded referrals
Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development	8
Queensland Ombudsman	4
DETSI	4
Crime and Corruption Commission	1
Queensland Building and Construction Commission	1
Valuer-General	1
NSW Fair Trading	1
Titles Queensland	1
Department of Home Affairs	1
Local Government, Water and Volunteers	1
Local Council	1

Investigations

While the LAO did not complete any investigations during the 2025–26 financial year, we provided support through preliminary enquiries where specific land access concerns were raised. These enquiries allowed us to engage with stakeholders, gather information, and explore potential pathways for resolution.

The following is an example of cases that were referred to the LAO. After conducting preliminary enquiries, these cases were not investigated further.

Case example: Negotiation and access issues affecting mining operations

The LAO was contacted by a small-scale mining operator (the resource authority holder) seeking assistance with ongoing access issues. The resource authority holder advised that the concern was not with the landholder they held agreements with, but with the landholder's daughter, who occupied the property and was allegedly preventing the resource authority holder and its contractors from accessing the mining leases and continuing operations.

The resource authority holder held several concurrent agreements with the landholder. However, the Conduct and Compensation Agreement (CCA) had expired approximately six months before they contacted the LAO. The resource authority holder explained that a key source of tension related to the use of an access track, particularly following wet weather. The resource authority holder maintained that use of the track was permitted under existing arrangements and that they had contributed to road repairs in accordance with the agreement, as well as making additional payments as a goodwill gesture.

The resource authority holder advised that restrictions on access were affecting production and increasing costs. They also expressed concerns about future negotiations, noting they would soon need to negotiate agreements for additional mining leases and were concerned that the existing relationship challenges would make those negotiations more difficult.

The outcome the resource authority holder was seeking was assistance to enforce the terms of the agreements and help the parties move beyond the existing hostilities so future negotiations could occur in a more constructive setting.

Our actions

The LAO discussed the matter with the resource authority holder and reviewed the circumstances surrounding the agreements and access concerns. The resource authority holder was advised that, at the time, the LAO's jurisdiction was limited to disputes about alleged breaches of existing CCA and MGAs. As the relevant CCA had expired before the dispute arose, the matter fell outside the LAO's jurisdiction and the LAO was unable to provide direct assistance.

The resource authority holder was advised that the Department of Natural Resources Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development (DNRMMRRD) may be able to assist with the matter. The LAO also explained that details of the enquiry could be referred to DNRMMRRD for consideration with their consent.

The outcome

The matter was referred to DNRMMRRD for further assistance. This case highlights one of the limitations of the former LAO framework. While the parties were experiencing ongoing land access issues and concerns about future negotiations, the LAO could not assist because there was no eligible dispute relating to an existing agreement.

From 1 July 2026, the expanded role of the LAO includes mediation and dispute resolution services during the negotiation and re-negotiation of agreements. Under the new framework, matters such as this may be suitable for mediation, providing parties with an additional pathway to access independent support and work through issues earlier.

Notice of Investigation

As per the process and the Act, despite two preliminary enquiries being commenced in 2025-26, we did not issue a Notice of Investigation Outcome (section 51 notice) during this reporting period.

Notice about legislation breaches

No formal referrals were made in 2025–26 regarding investigations under section 53 of the *Mineral and Energy Resources (Common Provisions) Act 2014*, section 54 of the *Water Act 2000*, or section 55 of the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*.

Engagement

Promoting awareness and understanding of the LAO's role remains a key priority under the Act. By engaging with stakeholders across Queensland, we seek to ensure landholders, resource authority holders and communities understand how the LAO can assist with land access disputes. During 2025–26, engagement activities focused on strengthening relationships, increasing awareness of the LAO's services, and supporting preparations for the LAO's transition to an independent statutory body.

Community engagement

In 2025-26, the LAO worked to:

- strengthen stakeholder awareness and understanding of the LAO's services
- maintain relationships with key government, industry, and community stakeholders
- support preparations for the Office's expanded jurisdiction and transition to a statutory body
- identify emerging land access issues and trends across Queensland.

The LAO participated in a range of stakeholder engagement activities throughout the year, providing opportunities to share information, build relationships and better understand issues affecting Queensland's land access framework. These activities included:

Land Court Annual Conference – Charters Towers (August 2025)

Jane Pires presented at the Land Court Annual Conference, contributing to discussions on land access disputes, valuation matters and emerging issues affecting Queensland stakeholders.

Coexistence Queensland Landholder Support Program – Rolleston (September 2025)

Jane Pires participated in a landholder information session, raising awareness of the LAO's role and engaging directly with landholders experiencing resource activity.

Draft Surat Underground Water Impact Report 2025: Government Briefing – Brisbane (October 2025)

The LAO attended a government briefing on the draft Surat Underground Water Impact Report 2025 to remain informed of emerging issues relevant to landholders and resource authority holders.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Panel Workshop – Brisbane (May 2026)

The LAO attended an ADR Panel Workshop co-hosted by the Land Court of Queensland and Coexistence Queensland to support preparations for the Office's expanded jurisdiction.

In addition to these activities, the LAO undertook significant preparations, including discussions with several statutory bodies, industry and agricultural peak bodies, local government, and state government agencies, for its transition to a statutory body and expanded functions from 1 July 2026.

Online engagement

The LAO website continued to be a key source of information for landholders, resource authority holders and communities seeking guidance on land access matters. During 2025–26, website traffic increased significantly compared with the previous financial year, with total users increasing by 109 per cent from 2,276 to 4,755. Page views also increased by 84 per cent, from 5,975 to 11,010, while sessions grew from 1,703 to 4,188. This growth reflects increasing awareness of the LAO's services and continued demand for accessible information on land access matters.

Users most frequently accessed information relating to the LAO's role, dispute resolution services, CCAs and MGAs. The LAO's CCA infographic remained the most downloaded publication during the year, with 73 downloads, followed by the LAO Factsheet (67 downloads) and the 2024–25 Annual Report (51 downloads).

Direct communication complemented website engagement. During 2025–26, the LAO distributed an electronic newsletter to 123 subscribers, achieving a strong open rate of 71.54 per cent and a click-through rate of 10.23 per cent. The newsletter provided stakeholders with updates on the LAO's activities and engagement opportunities.

Social media remained an important channel for connecting with stakeholders and promoting awareness of the LAO's services. During 2025–26, LinkedIn followers increased by 20.5% to 300, while Facebook followers grew by 4.5% to 303. These platforms continued to support stakeholder awareness of the LAO and its role in Queensland's land access framework.

Looking ahead, the LAO will continue to strengthen its digital engagement approach to support the transition to an independent statutory body, using targeted communications and boosted social media content.

Financial Information

The financial statements for the LAO are included in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development 2025-26 Annual Report.

Separate financial statements are not required to be included in the Annual Report for the 2025–26 reporting period. However, following the legislative reforms introduced by the *Resources Safety and Health Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2026*, separate financial statements will be required in future annual reports.

Glossary

Term	Definition
(The) Act	<i>Land Access Ombudsman Act 2017</i> (Qld).
Case	The issues, situation and context surrounding a given land access dispute referral or investigation.
CCA (Conduct and Compensation Agreement)	A legally binding agreement between a landholder and a resource authority holder, setting out conditions and compensation for land access.
DETSI (Department of Environment, Tourism, Science, and Innovation)	The Queensland Government department responsible for environmental, tourism, science, and innovation matters.
Dispute	A conflict-based issue brought to the Land Access Ombudsman.
DNRMMRRD (Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development)	The Queensland Government department responsible for natural resources, mining, manufacturing, and regional and rural development.
Investigation	The process of LAO staff formally investigating a land access dispute referral that is found to be within the LAO's jurisdiction.
Landholder	The individual or business who owns or leases the land on which the disputed activity is taking place.
LAO (Land Access Ombudsman)	An independent statutory office that investigates certain land access disputes.
MGA (Make Good Agreement)	An agreement between a landholder and a resource authority holder outlining obligations for "making good" any impacts to water bores.
Out-of-jurisdiction	A matter that is not, under legislation, within the Land Access Ombudsman's authority to investigate or manage.
Referral	The contact a landholder, resource authority holder or their representative makes with the Office of the Land Access Ombudsman regarding a dispute and our ability to investigate it. Depending on context, it can also mean the action of LAO staff referring out-of-jurisdiction matters to another entity.
Resource Authority Holder	The company or organisation that has authority to access land for resource exploration, production, or extraction.
(The) State	The State of Queensland.