



Wednesday, June 17, 2009

\$3 MILLION TO ESTABLISH NEW INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

Premier Nathan Rees introduced freedom of information legislation today to deliver on a promise to make the Government as open and accessible as possible.

“The legislation is the last step in delivering on our promise to make landmark changes to make Government decisions transparent to the community,” said Mr Rees.

“The reforms provide for an Office of the Information Commissioner and we have committed \$3 million for the establishment of this new independent body.

“The Commissioner will have the power to direct government agencies to provide the office with information, documents and records, to enter into premises to inspect records, and to call witnesses for the purposes of formal inquiries.

“The office will review decisions of agencies about releasing information and will report to Parliament on compliance with the legislation.

“The Information Commissioner will be dedicated to ensuring agencies understand and comply with their obligations under these new laws

“The Government has also provided for ongoing annual funding of around \$4 million to give the Commissioner the resources required to undertake these important oversight duties.

The Information Commissioner is a key part of a suite of reforms introduced to NSW Parliament today and three new bills were introduced including:

- The Government Information (Public Access) Bill which replaces the FOI Act and promotes pro-active disclosure of information.
- The Government Information (Information Commissioner) Bill which establishes a new, independent office of Information Commissioner.
- The Government Information (Public Access) (Consequential Amendments and Repeals) Bill which amends and consolidates other related legislation.

The Attorney General John Hatzistergos said that the interaction of privacy and freedom of information is being examined by the NSW Law Reform Commission.

“As we improve openness and accountability, we must ensure that the right of access to government information is balanced against the right to privacy,” said Mr Hatzistergos.

“As part of the future reform of privacy legislation, the Government intends to bring the Privacy Commissioner and the Information Commissioner together within a single office.”

Establishing the office of Information Commissioner separate from the Office of the NSW Ombudsman has received strong support from the NSW Law Reform Commission, the Privacy Commissioner, the Law Society of NSW and other stakeholders.