

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

Our Ref: 2024-804167

Dear David

I refer to your complaint to the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) on behalf of the East Clifton Hill Residents Inc (ECHRI) about Australia Post.

Thank you for your ongoing patience, I sincerely apologise for our delay in progressing your matter.

I have considered your complaint carefully and I now have enough information to understand what has occurred. I am writing to explain my decision.

Your complaint

You told the office that:

- On behalf of the ECHRI, you wrote to Paul Graham, Australia Posts Managing Director and CEO to express community concern regarding the removal of Street Posting Boxes (SPBs) in your local area.
- At that time, you were aware that four of the SPBs in the locality had been summarily removed without any community consultation, although later enquiries suggested that more had been removed.
- While you accept that 'snail mail' is in decline, SPBs are still regularly used by the 'older' demographic.
- As local residents, the ECHRI is satisfied that without difficulty, a SPB could be installed at Clifton Hill station, which would provide a useful and convenient service for many in the community.
- You do not believe that Australia Post has undertaken any serious examination of suitable alternative re-locations of SPBs in the area.
- Further, you have requested Australia Post install recognisable signs with an arrow and a distance on a nearby lamp post, indicating the nearest SPB, in locations where the previous post boxes have been removed.
- Australia Post has rejected your requests.

Our role

Before addressing your complaint, it may be helpful if I explain our role. The Commonwealth Ombudsman is an independent and impartial organisation. Our role is to assess whether Australia Post has followed its terms and conditions in addition to complying with the relevant policies and procedures, and whether we think its actions were reasonable in the circumstances. We can make suggestions, but we cannot make Australia Post take a specific action or change its decisions.

This means we cannot direct or compel Australia Post change its decisions regarding the removal and re-location of its SPBs.

Assessment

While I acknowledge you remain dissatisfied with the decisions made by Australia Post, and how it has responded to your concerns, ultimately, there needs to be a plausible basis or a different outcome that we could help to achieve that would prompt us to investigate a complaint. We also

consider whether, in that context, we are likely to achieve a better practical outcome for the complainant.

Having considered all the information provided to the Office, whilst acknowledging the inconvenience you and your community have experienced, I cannot be critical of Australia Post's actions which appear to be consistent with its services terms and conditions. For this reason, I have decided not to investigate your complaint.

In accordance with the Australian Postal Corporation (Performance Standards) Regulations 2019, Australia Post is required to maintain 10,000 Street Posting Boxes (SPBs) across Australia. It is currently well in excess of this, with over 14,000. As people send fewer letters, the utilization of SPB's has reduced and, to that end, it is continually reviewing the number and location of these facilities to match consumer demand or manage ongoing issues.

As a Government Business Enterprise (GBE), Australia Post must balance providing services and fulfilling its Community Service Obligations, in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.

Against this background, Australia Post reserves the right to monitor and review the size and scope of the SPB network, within the requirements of the Australian Postal Corporation (Performance Standards) Regulations 2019.

While I recognise your concerns regarding the fact that your local community was not consulted prior to the removal of the SPBs within your area, and its refusal to put signage in locations where previous SPBs have since been removed, as outlined by Australia Post; while it may consider community feedback, it is not required to do so. Given our Office cannot direct or compel Australia Post take any certain action and noting it has acted within the terms of its service, I cannot be critical of its decisions in this instance.

Conclusion

I appreciate this may not be the outcome you were hoping for in contacting our Office and that you may be disappointed with this decision.

Our Office however will be retaining the details of your complaint to monitor and identify potential issues at the broader, systemic level. The decision to deal with aspects of a complaint in this manner does not mean that we consider your complaint to be unimportant. Instead, we may be able to achieve better outcomes and improvements to Australia Post's administration through ongoing monitoring, analysis and liaison on such incidents.

I have now closed your complaint. If you would like to discuss this decision, please contact me using the details below.

Thank you for bringing your concerns to the attention of the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Your Personal Information

The Ombudsman's Office uses personal information we collect from you to assist us with our handling of your enquiry. Further information about the way the Ombudsman's Office handles your personal information, including how you may access and seek correction of that information, can be found in the privacy statement available on our website www.ombudsman.gov.au

From time to time, we ask an external company to conduct surveys of people who have contacted us so we can collect feedback on our performance. Your personal information, including your contact

details, demographic statistics and basic information about your complaint such as when you came to us, how you lodged your complaint, the agency you are complaining about, how long it took us to resolve your complaint, and how we resolved your complaint, may be provided to that external company. If you do not agree to this happening and do not wish to be contacted about your experience using our services, please notify us by replying to this email. If you are unable to reply to this email, contact us on **1300 362 072**.

Yours sincerely

Jack
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