Transcript of Radio Ombudsman podcast #5

Emily O'Reilly, European Ombudsman: What it takes to be an effective ombudsman

Rob Behrens: Good morning everyone. This is Rob Behrens here welcoming you to Radio Ombudsman, and welcome to all our listeners growing all over the world and thank you for your excellent feedback. I said that we were having some stellar guests coming, and today I'm very pleased to be able to confirm that by welcoming the European ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly. Emily, you're extremely welcome.

Emily O'Reilly: Thank you so much.

Rob Behrens: Most of you will know that Emily is a polymath. She has succeeded in everything that she's done. She's been a very successful journalist, she's been an author, she's been a national ombudsman, and now she's the European ombudsman. So, we're very lucky to have you, thank you for coming on. It's the tradition on this programme, Emily, for my guests to say a little bit about where they were born and brought up and what values they brought with them.

Emily O'Reilly: Well, first of all, thank you very much. It's a great honour for me to be invited onto Radio Ombudsman, and thank you. I was born in the middle of Ireland, in a small town called Tullamore, and I lived there until I was seven, and my father in his work was transferred to Dublin. So, I lived there, I've lived there all of my life. I was in school in Dublin, in university in

Dublin, and after that, after a brief period abroad, I became a journalist. I suppose this really stemmed from a great curiosity that I had as a child, I would read everything.

My father was very interested in politics, and any election that was on, I would follow. Whether it was British or American, Irish elections and so on. So, I became very interested in that. I was very curious as a child, and eventually, after college, even though I had done languages and literature at college, when I reflected back on what it was that really motivated me, the interests I had, the people I was attracted to, I realised it was pointing in one particular direction, and that was journalism.

So, I was lucky in those days, which would have been the early 1980s, it wasn't strictly necessary to have a degree in journalism. Very few people actually had degrees or diplomas in journalism, people came in from different walks in life. So, I got an apprenticeship on a small magazine, and then pretty shortly afterwards I became a grandly titled education correspondent for a Sunday newspaper, and that was the start of a fantastic 20 years in journalism.

I think the interest went back to childhood, to my father's particular interest in politics and current affairs, and to, I think, just my natural curiosity as an individual.

Rob Behrens: So, you were obviously very successful as a journalist, you were journalist of the year and woman journalist of the year. Did you enjoy it?

Emily O'Reilly: I can honestly say I loved every moment of it. In the sense that they often say if you find something that you love you'll never

work a day in your life, and that was how I considered my job. I remember I used to be, certainly in the early days if it was a bank holiday and I couldn't work, I'd be upset. It was just wonderful. To be a part of everything that was happening, and of course during the '80s and '90s the troubles, as we call them in Ireland, were still ongoing in Northern Ireland.

So, I was based in Belfast for a number of years during the height of the Troubles, and when I look back now, especially when we're commemorating the Good Friday Agreement and so on, to think that I was there. It was being a part of history. At the time you think you're just getting up, and this week my assignment is Belfast, or my assignment is that. Then when you reflect back you see, as well without being too pious about it, what an incredible privilege it was to have been part of that.

I suppose later, when I was married and I became a parent of quite a few children, and I suppose journalism gave me that flexibility, as well, in that I could work to a certain extent to my own design. My editors tended not to care when or where I worked, or even how I worked, as long as I delivered copy. So, in that sense it enabled me to have that career, both as a journalist and later as ombudsman, and later as a mother of quite a large family, as well.

Rob Behrens: So, what was it that caused you to cease to be a journalist and become the national ombudsman for Ireland?

Emily O'Reilly: I'd been in journalism for about 20 years, I was very happy there. I was working actually in the Sunday Times at the time, the Irish edition of the Sunday Times, and I was approached, literally, by the government, by the Finance and Pubic Service minister at the time. He told me that my predecessor, the late

Kevin Murphy, was about to stand down, and would I be interested in the role. Now, it took me a long time to consider whether I would be or not, because I loved journalism. I didn't see myself getting out of writing, as such, at all. It was the only thing I was good at, as well.

It was my particular skill, and it was my passion, but the role wasn't just that of ombudsman. It was also that of information commissioner. So, I was the appeals body for freedom of information requests. This would have been a few years before the British FOI regime came into play. I would also be a member of the standards in public office commission, be on the referendum commission. So, it was a multi-faceted job. So, in the end I said yes, and parliament supported me overwhelmingly. Which was great, because it gave that great legitimacy to my appointment, and so I began.

I suppose people did tend to say to me was I, sort of, poacher turned gamekeeper, and I said no, because in fact I was in, as ombudsman, the exact same space as I was as a journalist. Between the people and the state, mediating, and being independent in both my roles.

Rob Behrens: Was there a difference? Did you have to use your discretion more as an ombudsman than a journalist?

Emily O'Reilly: Yes, well, you put your finger on it. I had to keep my mouth shut, really, a bit more would probably be a better way of putting it, but I still found ways. I remember when I actually left the job to become European ombudsman I said I wasn't going to park the first 20 years of my professional life at the gate when I became Irish ombudsman. I felt whatever I had to

contribute, it was partly the way I use words, partly the way I thought about things, partly the way I conceptualise things.

I remember quite early on, I would have been an ombudsman about a year, year and a half, and I was asked to take part at a particular conference in County Clare, in the West of Ireland. It was about values and citizenship and all of that.

At that time we were in an economic boom, Celtic Tiger. But while it was wonderful for everybody to see the economy so uplifted and to see nearly full employment and all of that, and an end, to a certain extent, to emigration, which had been the lot of the Irish for so many centuries, really, there were certain concerns that society was changing, becoming more secular, becoming more materialistic. The usual things that happen, I suppose, when a country, almost overnight, becomes rich, relatively.

At the time, my children were going out of early childhood and into adolescence, and I suppose I was reflecting on the society that they were about to enter into. So, I sat down and I spent a few days writing this piece, and I suppose timing is everything.

I think it was a good speech, it brought together a lot of my thinking and I did quite a lot of research in terms of thinkers, or I suppose public philosophers that I would have admired. It created quite an impression at the time, but I remember some people in my office were a little bit critical of me. Probably to my face, but also arguably behind my back when I left the room, because they were a little bit concerned, and understandably so because they had the office's best interest at heart as well, that perhaps I was stepping a little bit outside my remit, my mandate.

I didn't think that I was, I wasn't critiquing any particular policy choice by governments. In fact, I was praising the fact that, at

the time, as we saw it, good policy choices had been made that enabled what happened to happen. There might be a different evaluation now, but rather it was looking at society from the vantage point of a mother and a parent who was deeply involved in the health system, the education system, and all of that. From my experiences as an ombudsman, and also, even though brief as it was, and from my experience as a journalist.

That was a way that I found of being able to still have that journalistic piece in, in terms of being able to write and express myself while still maintaining, within the lines of my work as an ombudsman.

Rob Behrens: This is what the Canadian ombudsman, Nora Farrell, calls ‘structural impartiality’.

Emily O’Reilly: Okay.

Rob Behrens: It’s the idea that you can’t be an effective ombudsman unless you live the experience of the people who are going to come to you. That is relatively new in Europe, and yet you manifested it long before it became fashionable.

Emily O’Reilly: Well, thank you. It is an interesting way of looking at it. I remember, as well, one of our former colleagues, Alice Brown had been the Scottish public services ombudsman. I remember she said one time: “Live it, don’t laminate it”, and I thought that was a brilliant mantra for all of us. Now, I think we all have to remember that as ombudsmen we’re privileged

people as well. We're generally middle class, we tend to be well educated. So, in terms of that real, experiential thing we cannot feel what people who are in marginalised communities feel.

At the same time, I think we have to at least have that imaginative impulse that allows us to do that. I think that when we are explaining our cases, and I know you have done this very recently in relation to the work you have been doing, I think it has to be what the children in the classroom call 'show and tell'. Allow people to tell their experiences, and for us to mediate it through an actual experience as well, that is very important, because I have found that people are stressed by all sorts of situations. Sometimes you and I as ombudsmen can't help them.

Sometimes their local authority can't help them, or whatever, and they're going to go through a difficult experience, but it is made far less difficult if they feel they have been able to talk to somebody. If they feel that somebody has heard them as an individual, not as case number A, B, C, or D, and you have a sheet in front of you, and this is the protocol, and this is what you say. People sense that, and it is deeply upsetting for them. If you hear them, literally, and in the way of really trying to understand what they're feeling, the stress levels go down.

Even if they walk away without their mission accomplished, they'll have felt that their dignity has been respected, and they feel empowered by that and heard. They've been given solace because of that.

Rob Behrens: I remember, Ann Abraham said to me that when she first joined the parliamentary ombudsman's office, the job description said that people might enjoy the job if they'd been

a librarian. That's no offence to librarians, but we've moved on from that, and we have to be able to communicate effectively with people who quite often have been traumatised or bereaved in a way which makes the conversation very difficult.

Emily O'Reilly: Yes, and there's another practical part of it as well. As we know, the media likes stories and likes telling stories. If we as ombudsmen have good stories to tell then the chances are they are more likely to be mediated. More people will hear about us, and that people who may not have known that we can at least attempt to help them would be more encouraged to come to our offices to seek help.

Rob Behrens: So, Emily, how long were you the Irish ombudsman for?

Emily O'Reilly: I was the Irish ombudsman for 10 years, from 2003 until 2013.

Rob Behrens: That's a long time.

Emily O'Reilly: It is a long time. It tends to go by in a blink. I always think when you have a particular tranche of time, a particular period of time for your contract or for your mandate, I think your life goes faster. As soon as you hear you've got a mandate for five years, you automatically add five years onto your life, it seems to whizz by. Whereas in journalism, it tended to go just from week to week, story to story. So, it wasn't that. It was ten years, and I think certainly towards the end I managed to accomplish a lot of the bigger pieces.

The Freedom of Information Act, for example, had been severely restricted just before I became information commissioner, and it took a while for events and people like myself, offices like my office, to convince the government to change that. We also managed to have the Ombudsman Act amended, to reflect more properly the public administration of 2013, rather than 1983 when the office was created. So, a lot of those big blocks were completed, or close to completion, by the time I left.

Rob Behrens: I think you also got universities towards the end, is that right?

Emily O'Reilly: Yes, universities, and a big thing for the information commissioner, the police came under our mandate. The police, or the Gardai, as we call them in Ireland, had always strongly resisted that transparency and that accountability. We also got a lot of agencies, including some of the big financial agencies that had been set up in the wake of the financial crisis. So, that was very important.

Rob Behrens: Okay, so then you became the European ombudsman, or ombudswoman. I'll ask you about the gender elements of that, but that's a whole different kettle of fish. For those who don't know, you have to be elected.

Emily O'Reilly: You have to be elected, and that was certainly a different kettle of fish. It was probably the most stressful thing I ever went through in my life. I'd been working in election mode for about a week when I thought: "Well, hats off to any politician who does this more than once, because it is incredibly stressful."

The way it works is it's probably the only office within the European institutions that is directly elected, as such, by the parliament. Nobody else has any hand, act or part in it. So, for example, if the commissioners, the auditors who form the court of auditor, the judges who form the European court of justice, they're all government nominees.

So, your government or my government puts forward candidates, and while there is a vetting process essentially, unless they're complete idiots, they tend to be appointed. With the ombudsman, it's different. I was not an appointee of my government. I went forward purely on the basis of, "I'm the Irish ombudsman, and I'm going forward," and that was it. Then it's in 2 steps, the first step is that you have to get the signatures of 40 MEPs, which given that there are over 700 MEPs doesn't seem like a hard job.

When you're an independent and unknown, and when you're up against, as I was in my case, two very long-standing MEPs from the two big political blocs in the European parliament, that would be the centre right, the European People's Party (EPP), and then the centre left, which would be the Social Democrats. That was very difficult, because they could simply send the list down the table and get their colleagues to sign up. Whereas I had to work pretty hard for that. While it was hard at the time, I didn't regret it, because it was a great learning curve for me.

I had to go in, and I probably met maybe about 100 MEPs over the course of the campaign. So, you go into their office, they might be from Bulgaria, they might be from the UK, France, Slovenia, anywhere, and you learned a bit about their lives. You learned a bit about their politics. Sometimes you'd go in and the TV from home would be on, because they say such and such an event is happening, you talk about that. So, it was

a great learning curve in terms of that cultural piece about the union, as opposed to the political piece about the union.

So, anyway, once I got the signatures then there was a vote in the European Parliament in Strasburg. So, I tied with the candidate from the EPP, and then the second and third round of voting, so anyway at the third round of voting I won. The Social Democrat candidate was voted out and the Social Democrats supported me, along with the other parties. The Liberals, ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), and other groupings.

Rob Behrens: It must have helped having been a journalist and an ombudsman, having that on your CV.

Emily O'Reilly: It did, yes. I mean, I had no doubt that I was a good candidate, and I actually had no doubt, I remember I used to say to people, it was probably the first job that I went into that I was pretty certain I could do a good job, because I had amassed that amount of experience. As a journalist, as an ombudsman for 10 years, and I think I was 55 at the time. So, I had life experience as well. I also had a very good overview and sense of the office, because my predecessor, Nikiforos Diamandouros, as European ombudsman he chaired the network of member state ombudsman and those candidate countries and so on.

So, I had been part of that network and was very aware of the office, would read its annual reports, just out of normal professional interest every year. So, I had a good idea of the good points about the office, but also how I could make improvements. When you're in a political arena what, to me, was stressful, if you're going for a job generally it's behind

closed doors. You go forward, you put your CV, you do an interview, and that's it. This was very open, and also you didn't know what was happening. Whether there were deals being made in the corridors, whether there were trade-offs being made, you didn't know.

So, there was a great sense of uncertainty about it, which was the main reason why I considered afterwards politicians to be incredibly brave people that they go forward, because it's not necessarily merit that brings you through sometimes. I do hope in my case it was, but I think very often it wasn't.

Rob Behrens: Oh, I'm sure it was, but let me put two things to you. Ombudsmen struggle with appointment and legitimacy. Across the world, not everyone is appointed on merit. Very few ombudsmen are actually elected, as you are. So, it gave you and gives you a legitimacy that other people don't have, which is a plus factor, but would you accept that it creates a risk of the successful candidate needing to be a populist, close to the people who elected her or him?

Emily O'Reilly: Well, I think an ombudsman stands or falls by their independence, and by the view of them not being, I don't know… about working in a political arena, because we all work in a political arena. If you were to get involved in the Windrush affair at the moment, you would be stepping into a political area.

Rob Behrens: We'll come onto that.

Emily O'Reilly: If you go back to my appointment as Irish ombudsman my predecessors, and it's still the case now with marginal difference, were selected by the government. Somebody who was seen to be independent, to have a profile and all of that. So, there wasn't that competitive process at that level. What gave me in particular legitimacy as Irish ombudsman was that even though I was appointed by, or nominated by, a government of a particular stripe, every single person in parliament supported me right across the board.

That, to me, was very, very important, and then I was finally appointed by the president. So, alright, this was a process in which there were political candidates running, but the way I have done my work, as I did in Ireland, was to seek the widest possible consensus for what I do. Once something becomes a partisan issue and the ombudsman is seen to be partisan, then that is end game as far as I can see. Not as far as I can see, it is end game. So, all of the work that I do I'm very careful in terms of any political engagements I might go to, that it's made clear what my role is.

In terms of engagement with individual MEPs or parliamentary committees, I always strive to just give my views as I see them, as affected by my mandate, by the law, and by codes of conduct, and by the principles of good administration. After that, whatever happens, happens.

Rob Behrens: It's difficult for all of us, as ombudsmen, to make a direct connection with citizens. In my case there's still an MP filter for parliamentary complaints, so you have to go through your MP. In your case it's even more complicated because the European Union in Brussels, Strasbourg is a long way from citizens of the European Union. How do you address that?

Emily O'Reilly: Well, you put your finger on the problem, obviously whatever about the difficulties in a member state, particularly in a small member state like Ireland, most people would tend to know the ombudsman. Different in the UK, obviously, a much bigger and wider constituency, and different ombudsmen, obviously. So there are challenges there, but it's very, very difficult in the EU. Most citizens in most of the member states would have very little awareness even of the big institutions and what they do, let alone a small body like the ombudsman.

Now, I was very aware of that, obviously, when I became European ombudsman. So, my strategy was to try and effect good administrative change for citizens, as widely as possible throughout the union. Even if none of them ever knew me or ever needed to know me. So, to that end I've used strategically my power of own initiative. So, I deal with the complaints that come to me, whether from citizens, civil society, businesses, whatever, who have a complaint against one of the European institutions, agencies, or bodies.

I also, over the last number of years, have pursued a number of strategic systemic investigations. So that if the result of my work has been that trade negotiations become more transparent in terms of records that are released, the people who advise, or the committees, expert groups that advise the commission on very important regulations that affect all of us, if there's more transparency around them. Any of those issues that I do will have an impact on people who could spend the rest of their lives happily not knowing about the European ombudsman.

My strategy as well was also to do issues of public interest that attracted the attention of significant media influencers, to use terrible jargon, in the member states, not just in the Brussels

bubble. So, my work has been mediated in some of the big German newspapers, in France, in many countries around the EU, and as a result of that we've had an increase in complaints. So, that's been the strategic working out of the plan.

Rob Behrens: Okay, well, you've got what I want. You've got the power of own investigation. Now, if we have ombudsman reform in the UK, which I hope is coming along the line, we must have, or we should have, that power. Could you explain to our listeners why it's so important to have that?

Emily O'Reilly: I believe it's critically important for an ombudsman. I think without it one is, to a certain extent, constrained in relation to what you can do, because the work you do is informed, I say only but obviously it's a huge part of our work, by the complaints that you get, and in the case of the UK there's the filter. I know there are ways in which that doesn't have to be the barrier that it might appear to be on paper, I understand that.

Then if you're an ombudsman and you're an engaged ombudsman, and we're speaking about being engaged with issues that really matter to the citizens, and you become aware of an issue that you think you could usefully deal with, there's some systemic issue in some government department or local authority or hospital trust, whatever, but you haven't had a direct complaint about it. It's in the ether, there might be chatter about it in media, or you might be aware anecdotally of cases.

Without the power of own initiative, you can't say, "Okay, well, I'm going to look at this. I'm going to grab it by the scruff of the

neck, I'm going to do a systemic complaint into that." Some of our biggest successes have come through that. One enquiry and it solves the problem for so many people. For example, when the so called TTIP [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership] negotiations, these are the trade negotiations between the EU and the US, were started a few years ago. They're stalled now while president Trump decides what to do with it.

We knew in the ether that lots of people had concerns that they weren't transparent, that all sorts of bad things were going to happen to the environment and so on. So, I thought, "Right, that is ripe for an own initiative investigation," and we did that, and as a result, not just through me but through parliamentary pressure and pressure from other member state parliaments and so on, we really created a transformation in the way that the relevant directorate conducted trade negotiations.

Without my power of own initiative, I would not have been able to have been as successful as I have been. Not in every investigation I've done, but in a number of key ones that I've done. Without that, I wouldn't have been able to raise the visibility of the office to the point where we are seeing a significant rise in complaints. Many of which have a significant public interest element to them.

Rob Behrens: I'll be using that in submissions that I make to parliament.

Emily O'Reilly: I'd be delighted if you would, it's very important.

Rob Behrens: So, thank you for that free advice, I think it's important. You mentioned the Windrush affair. We now know that the

government was given warnings about this in 2016, and had we had own initiative powers there is a case for saying that we might have looked at that in advance of the individual complaints which might eventually come to us. Now, we'll look at those on their merits and without prejudging it, but if we'd had the own initiative power with one investigation we might have been able to curtail what has been a pretty miserable story for a lot of good people.

Emily O'Reilly: Yes, I've been following this with great interest, because on so many levels in relation to administration, the politics, obviously, and to a certain extent it's feeding into the Brexit debate because people are talking about, "Well, if this is how you allegedly treated those people how can we trust that you will treat EU citizens in the future in a good way," and so on, and a human-interest level as well. Some of the stories have been particularly harrowing. I was thinking exactly the same thing that you were thinking, especially when I heard some exchange in the house of parliament the other day when what happened was described as an act of gross maladministration.

I thought, "Well, that's our territory," and I thought precisely that. It is an issue that fits exactly into the mandate of an ombudsman, and also what people would expect of an ombudsman's office. So, I think you're right, had you developed an awareness without necessarily getting particular complaints about it a few years ago, obviously your office with the power of own initiative would have been able to tackle it.

Rob Behrens: Can I return to the question of the political role of ombudsmen, and let me put this to you. Has there ever been a sense of

frustration on your part that UK ombudsmen have been reluctant to express a view about Brexit, for you?

Emily O'Reilly: How much trouble do you want to get me into, or yourself into? It's very interesting you should actually say that this week, because just the other day, two of my colleagues met with people from the Brexit taskforce in Brussels. We've been approaching it from the standpoint of the citizens, citizens' rights, knowing what their rights are, but also from the transparency of the negotiations, and in fact I met with the information commissioner last year, I think. For the word to go out that if people can't get records under FOI law here that is there a possibility, if they're held by an EU institution, that they can go there.

The message that came back from the Brexit taskforce was, to me, and when I talked to my colleagues in the UK, precisely about that point. About citizens' rights, concerns over what might happen, over the registration issue, for example, at the moment, and I haven't formally responded but I will be suggesting that we all get together. Either in Brussels or here, and we have a conversation about it. As to whether ombudsmen, I haven't heard that much, which isn't to say that ombudsmen haven't been speaking out, but it's about citizens.

I would have thought it is critical to your work. Now, at the same time, I suppose, we're still in a sort of a limbo situation. So much is still uncertain, and nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. So, what do you actually realistically start to work on? I think it would be good if connections started to be made, perhaps with authorities in Brussels, and that relationships develop so that when things get a little more challenging that links will be there to enable the ombudsmen to speak.

Now, I am fully aware of how contested this issue is at every level, and also people in Brussels feel mixed views about it. Sadness, really, would probably be the overwhelming one. I think the parliament's big piece in particular is around citizens and the treatment of citizens. That's coming across very strongly, and therefore I think if it is the wish of the UK ombudsmen to engage with that, then I think you would find an open door over there and a welcome for your views.

Rob Behrens: That's a very generous response, thank you. I think from the UK perspective, the dilemma for us is that to express a view about such a sensitive political issue before it was resolved, or has been resolved, to us, and we talked about it amongst ourselves, my colleagues and I, put us dangerously near the political dimension of things. Once there is resolution about what has been agreed then our responsibility is to make sure that people get what they are promised, and we will be working closely with our European colleagues to make sure that happens.

Emily O'Reilly: Yes. Well, that is good, because so many people are going to be affected by this. Again, it goes back to stress. Uncertainty is a huge stress on people, and I imagine there are so many people now, whether they're EU citizens living here or UK citizens living in the EU who are really stressed. Who can't make decisions. They're not big corporates who can just pack up and go very quickly. They're people who are planning careers, planning families, planning futures for their families, for themselves, and who don't know.

So, I think obviously the quicker the whole thing is resolved the better, and then the quicker that ombudsmen can start really

engaging in it, because the work of ombudsmen would be vital to that.

Rob Behrens: As we wrap up, can I ask you a couple of final questions? You've had a distinguished career, you've made a difference in every job that you've done. What advice would you give to a young graduate who works in my office about the possibilities of a career as an ombudsman?

Emily O'Reilly: Well, I think it's an institution, as you know, that has significantly expanded over the last few decades. I hear constantly now, "We need an ombudsman for this, we need an ombudsman for that." I think it's important to be clear about what it is and what it isn't. You're not an advocate as such, but I think there are significant opportunities for people who want to make careers in this world, but I would urge them not to be narrow in terms of their focus. Don't be narrowly focused on the law, and don't be narrowly focused on librarianship.

Really be engaged in the wide stuff of the world, read as widely as you can, because everything an ombudsman touches in their work touches on every aspect of our lives. To me, the colleagues that have always been the best in my office haven't necessarily been the ones with the stellar degrees. They're the ones who really engage with life, with the world, with current affairs, with politics. With all of the issues that come across your desk, and they're the ones who are really going to, not just make a great career for themselves in this world, but who are really going to enjoy it as well.

Rob Behrens: Okay, thank you. So, my last question is this. I'm aware that you're not finished, your career is still developing and we're going to watch it with fascination and interest, but what, so far, do you think you want to be most remembered for?

Emily O'Reilly: I think, I know it sounds like a cliché but it is making a difference. I felt safe to leave my job as ombudsman in Ireland because I had managed after many years to put in the two big, important building blocks that were needed to transform the office at that point. Bringing the ombudsman's office into the 21st century, and also persuading, with help of course and with other pressure groups, to bring Freedom of Information back to the high standard that it had had.

In the European ombudsman's office I think I have, hopefully, managed to make it relevant. I think certainly its visibility has increased. I can see the impact that it is having, and if you'll forgive me, given what we've talked about, independence and politics and so on, I think the work that we do has been part of the political debate. In the sense that people are now looking to see what is the ombudsman view on this, that, or the other. Not necessarily political issues, but issues that obviously are part of the political hinterland in which we do.

So that, to me, is important. That you haven't just gone in every day, gone through the case load, whatever, but that there is visible, tangible change and transformation when you've left the job.

Rob Behrens: So, you've used your imagination to do the best that you can, which has been remarkable.

Emily O'Reilly: Yes.

Rob Behrens: Emily O'Reilly, thank you very much indeed for being with us.

Emily O'Reilly: Thank you so much, it's been an absolute pleasure and an honour.

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