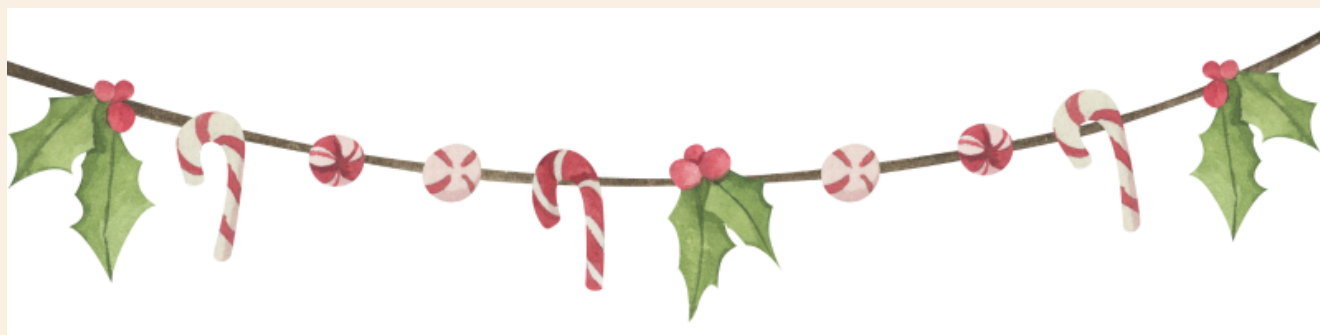


[View this email in your browser](#)



## Quarterly Newsletter - December 2025



### Message from the Ombudsman, Ruth Owen CBE

As we approach the Christmas period, I'd like to briefly reflect on our achievements.

Our complaints volume is steadily increasing and so far, this year we have resolved a record number of complaints - many about tax debt, which remains an issue of ongoing concern for me and, I know, many of you. I continue to encourage the ATO to take a more tailored and empathetic approach to debt collection, ensuring they consider an individuals' or businesses' circumstances.

Earlier this year, we cleared our complaints backlog which had grown in recent years, and we are continuing to improve our operations to ensure we can resolve complaints as quickly as possible.

We reshaped out systemic reviews to make them shorter, sharper and more focused on the key issues that matter.

We've completed three systemic reviews into important topics:

- [Identification and management of financial abuse in within the tax system](#)
- [Letters from the ATO](#)
- [ATO's registered agent phone line](#) and service offered to agents.

We also took on an additional review at short notice. [An own motion review into the ATO's management of a complex and long-running case](#), which we will complete in the new year. We've just released our [refreshed work plan](#), outlining the reviews we'll undertake in the coming months.

We released our [2026-29 Corporate Plan](#) and [2024-25 Annual Report](#) which outline our achievements and some interesting stats and case studies.

I've been pleased to meet thousands of stakeholders across the country at tax community events and engagements. I am encouraged by the many passionate people who are helping everyday Australians to meet their tax obligations, whether you are a tax professional or specialise in supporting the community and unrepresented taxpayers.

In particular, it was a privilege to work with a variety of stakeholders and people with lived experience to bring attention to the shocking issue of the weaponisation of the tax system by perpetrators of financial abuse. I am proud of the impact of our work and I am continuing to seek progress on legislative reform on this important matter, in addition to the recommendations I made to the ATO, which they are now implementing.

In 2026, we have an ambitious agenda. We continue to focus on finding ways to deliver faster outcomes on complaints and an improved experience for our customers. And we'll continue to raise awareness of our services and extend our reach, including with First Nations people.

We also plan to extend our reporting, through improved use of data and analytics, so we can provide more insightful reporting on systemic themes identified through complaints and reviews.

I'd like to say a big thank you to all the wonderful people in the tax profession and in the community with whom we work, for your strong support, encouragement, feedback and collaboration this year. We are a small but impactful team and I'm looking forward to seeing what we can achieve in 2026.

Wishing everyone a safe and restful holiday period and we look forward to working with you in 2026.

### **In this issue**

- Complaints snapshot
- ATO's registered agent phone line
- Refreshed FY 25/26 work plan
- Update: the ATO's management of GIC remission
- Christmas shutdown arrangements



## Complaints snapshot

It has been a busy year for our complaints team. So far in 2025, we've received 2,339 complaints and finalised 2,253, closing more than 96%, to ensure Australians receive timely, fair and independent investigation of their tax complaints. This strong result was achieved while continuing to improve our systems, processes and the quality of service to our customers. We are still not where we want to be in our service levels but we see opportunities for ongoing improvement in the year ahead.

Across the year, several trends have emerged. The top three complaint categories showing growth are: Director Penalty Notice (DPNs), refund offsetting and payment arrangements.

The most common factor contributing to complaints continues to be deficient communication, information or advice provided by either the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) or Tax Practitioners Board (TPB). An important aspect of our investigative role is to provide clarity on how the ATO or TPB reached a decision. In some matters we find the actions taken by the ATO or TPB are reasonable; however, delays or gaps in communication often contribute to the taxpayer's dissatisfaction. These complaints provide valuable insights into where the ATO or TPB's policies can be improved to benefit taxpayers.

This case study illustrates how we handled a tax debt interest remission issue, which is the subject of a review we're currently undertaking.

### Case study: Communication in relation to interest remission

*Please note: Details have been adapted to protect privacy.*

"Oliver" has fallen behind on several years of tax lodgements after relying on incorrect information provided by an unauthorised former tax agent. As a result, approximately \$185,000 of general interest change (GIC) accrued on his account.

Wanting to fix the problem, Oliver contacted the ATO. During a phone call, he reasonably understood that once all outstanding lodgements were completed and the total debt established, the GIC would be considered for remission. Relying on this understanding, he prioritised bringing his lodgements up to date.

When Oliver later applied for remission, the ATO refused on the basis that the delay in payment was within Oliver's control and that he should have made earlier payments – contrary to the understanding Oliver had been given over the phone.

Oliver lodged a complaint with the Tax Ombudsman. After reviewing the call recordings, we observed that the ATO officer's statements reasonably conveyed that remission could be available once all lodgements were complete. We considered the ATO's refusal to be inconsistent with the expectations set during that call and that the advice provided contributed to the delay in payment.

We recommended that the ATO reconsider remission for the period after the phone call. The ATO agreed and as a result approximately \$40,000 in GIC was remitted.

Oliver expressed genuine relief that the outcome finally aligned with what he had understood from the initial ATO advice.

This case study highlights:

- The importance of clear, accurate and consistent advice, particularly when taxpayers rely on ATO guidance to make final decisions.
- The role of independent review in identifying inconsistencies between advice and decisions and correcting them.
- The real-world impact of independent scrutineers supporting fair evidence-based outcomes where a taxpayer acted reasonably based on information provided to them.



## **ATO's registered agent phone line**

We've completed our review into the effectiveness of the ATO's registered agent phone line and service offer to agents, finding increased agent dissatisfaction with poor service and evidence of a strained relationship with the ATO.

Registered tax agents play a vital role in the tax system, representing 62% of individual taxpayers and 96% of other taxpayers. While the ATO encourages agents to use its online services, many still rely on the phone line to resolve issues that cannot be managed digitally.

We found a mismatch between what agents expect from the service and what the ATO currently provides. Most calls are answered by general call centre staff, rather than a dedicated team, which can limit the technical support available to agents with complex queries.

We also found that agents often contact the ATO because they cannot complete their queries online. Improvements to digital services will help to reduce pressure on the phone line and improve the overall service for agents.

The ATO accepted 13 of our 14 recommendations and has committed to improving its digital services, staff training and engagement with the agent community. We will soon commence a review into the [ATO's online service for agents](#).

We thank all those who shared their experiences through submissions, surveys, and consultations earlier this year. Your feedback was invaluable in shaping our findings and final recommendations. We know many of you share our disappointment that the ATO did not agree our recommendation to route agents' calls to more experienced

staff. We will continue to review the evidence of the quality of the phone service to agents and drive for improvements in that service, as well as stronger relationships between the ATO and tax practitioners.

[Access the report](#)



## Refreshed workplan unwrapped ahead of Christmas

We've released our refreshed work plan, outlining the topics we'll be investigating in the remainder of this financial year.

Thank you to all our stakeholders for your valued contribution to our recent consultation process and for telling us the biggest challenges in the tax system currently.

Topics include:

- The ATO's approach to General Interest Charge remissions - in progress
- Own-motion review into systemic issues raised by specific, long running taxpayer complaint - in progress
- Online Services for Agents - due to commence Q3 2025-26
- How the ATO engages with First Nations taxpayers - due to commence Q3 2025-26
- ATO's use of Director Penalty Notices - yet to commence (dates to be confirmed).

We wish we could investigate everything brought to our attention but we're confident the issues chosen will have the broadest impact for the tax profession and the community.

[Access our refreshed 2025-26 systemic reviews workplan](#)





## Update: the ATO's management of GIC remission

Our review into the ATO's management of remission of the general interest charge (GIC) is underway.

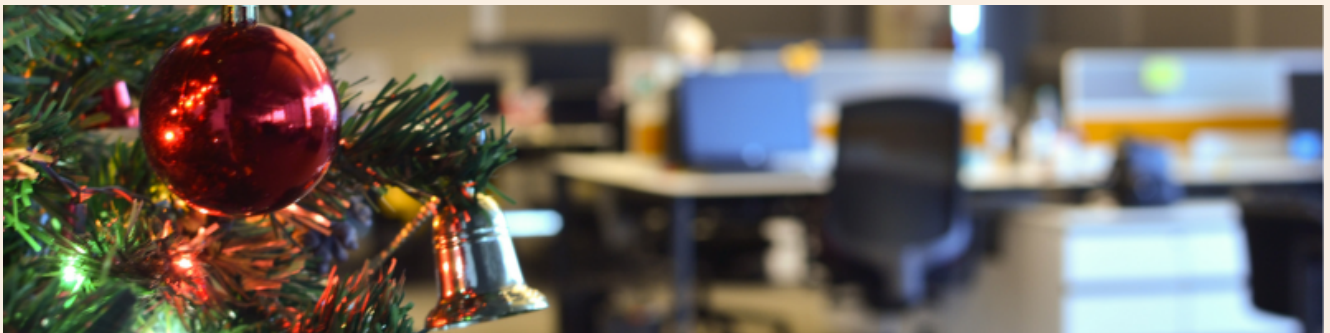
This review seeks to address concerns raised by the public that they do not understand how GIC remission accrues or why their requests are denied, and the lack of transparency and consistency, with different outcomes depending on the ATO officer or channel used.

We are examining whether the ATO's approach to GIC is:

- supporting fair, accurate and consistent decisions
- meeting community expectations
- meeting the principles of good tax administration, and
- supporting taxpayers with empathy and respect.

Thanks to everyone who provided feedback and participated in our recent GIC consultation process. We received valuable feedback from small business owners and individuals, tax professionals, professional bodies, community organisations, academics and government agencies, collected via several webinars, an online survey, and written submissions.

All that information is being reviewed and will inform our recommendations and final report which is due to be published in early 2026.



## Christmas shutdown arrangements

Like you, we plan to take some time off over Christmas. Our office will be closed from the afternoon of Wednesday, 24 December 2025 to Thursday, 1 January 2026 inclusive.

Our phones, emails and social media pages will not be monitored during this time. We will resume normal operations on Friday, 2 January 2026.

The Tax Ombudsman team wish you and yours a safe and restful holiday period and look forward to working with you in 2026.

## Key dates

If you are holding an event at which you'd like us to attend (in person or online) please don't hesitate to ask. We are keen to stay well connected with all our stakeholders and keep building our relationships and our profile. Contact us at [engage@taxombudsman.gov.au](mailto:engage@taxombudsman.gov.au)

- **25 December 2025 - 1 January 2026** – Tax Ombudsman Christmas shutdown
- **14 - 16 January 2026** - [ATTA Annual Conference](#), Wellington, New Zealand
- **13 February 2026** - [Grant Thornton Public Accounting Conference](#), Bendigo
- **5 - 6 March** – [The Tax Institute SA Tax Forum](#), Adelaide
- **12 - 13 March** - [The Tax Institute WA Tax Forum](#), Perth

## Media and Publications

- [Annual Report 2024-25](#)
- [CAANZ New Zealand Tax Conference address - 21 November 2025 \(53 mins\)](#)
- [CAANZ Small Firm, Big Impact - podcast - 3 December 2025 \(20 mins\)](#)
- [IPA Public Accountant article - 4 December 2025](#)

Contact us

1300 448 829

[engage@taxombudsman.gov.au](mailto:engage@taxombudsman.gov.au)

GPO Box 551, Sydney NSW 2001

[TaxOmbudsman.gov.au](https://www.TaxOmbudsman.gov.au)



**Tax**   
**Ombudsman**

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe](#)

If you have problems updating your details, or do not wish to receive any news and updates from the Tax Ombudsman, please email [media@taxombudsman.gov.au](mailto:media@taxombudsman.gov.au)

View our [privacy policy](#) for more information

