

**Centrelink – CLA comment on 2005-2006 annual report
and 23 August 2006 media release
by chief executive officer, Mr Jeff Whalan**

2.34% of Centrelink employees found guilty of privacy breaches

A total of 585 Centrelink staff - out of 25,000 total staff – were sanctioned over 12 months for code of conduct violations ranging from 19 sackings to warnings.

As well as the 19 dismissals, 92 other people resigned.

More than 300 people had their wages cut or were fined, with most of the rest receiving demotions, reprimands or warnings, Centrelink chief executive officer, Mr Jeff Whalan, announced in a 23 August 2006 media release.

Five cases were referred to the Australian Federal Police or Director of Public Prosecutions.

"The overwhelming majority of our 25,000 staff perform their duties in a highly ethical and responsible manner," Mr Whalan said. "However I was concerned about an element which was not upholding these values.

However, the Centrelink 2005–06 annual report released in November 2006 reveals Centrelink privacy officers actually investigated 1267 reported incidents during 2005-6. If all these were found to be guilty, it would mean 5% of Centrelink staff were involved in privacy breaches.

Even 2.34% is deplorable in terms of privacy breaches for the main government agency behind the new national ID card due to be introduced in 2008 by Minister Hockey.

Of the enquiries finalised in 2005–06, the Centrelink annual report says, 426 incidents were substantiated as breaches of privacy/confidentiality. Eighteen per cent related to employees breaching conflict of interest rules in the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct.

– commentary by Bill Rowlings