

## A place for consumers to seek aid

Written by Administrator

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Its promotional tagline reads "Now Everyone Can Complain." Sounds somewhat like that of a no-frills low-cost airline but the National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) is very much a no-frills bureau where people can e-mail or call in to lodge their complaints on almost everything well, almost.  
After all, it is a unit formed under the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (Fomca) to handle complaints.  
Although still under Fomca, the NCCC is an independent body registered as a foundation-cum-NGO, with the motto "Fair, Easy, and Efficient" to describe its service to the public.  
Recently, a new chief executive took over the helm at NCCC.  
Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah, who has served Fomca for the last 18 years, may be new in his current post but certainly not new in experience.  
"Fomca does not handle complaints; every other complaint they get is directed to NCCC," said Muhammad Sha'ani in an interview with StarMetro at his centre in Petaling Jaya.  
"While we deal with complaints related to consumers, we do not handle commercial complaints though."  
The NCCC, he said, was started in 2002 but officially began operations in 2004.  
"We are partly funded by the Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry while the rest comes from fund-raising programmes."  
Muhammad Sha'ani said based on its 2006 annual report, the four highest complaints concerned housing (1,578), direct sales scams (1,490), people duped into paying higher education costs (1,453), and apartment management problems (1,325).  
He said the centre received between 30 and 45 complaints daily, and said the figures had increased from 18,000 complaints in 2006 to 22,000 in 2007.  
There are just two full-time workers and a couple of part-timers, while chambering students from the Selangor Bar Council help out.  
Asked if the increase in complaints indicated that more people were being cheated, Muhammad Sha'ani said it showed that consumers are becoming more aware of their rights.  
"They realise that there are people who made complaints and got back their money so they too seek help."  
Despite cases of scams and cheats being highlighted frequently in the media, Muhammad Sha'ani said not everyone read about them.  
"It's unlikely that these stories are seen by all."  
At NCCC, the procedure in seeking redress is that it will first write to the company concerned and if it does not respond, the centre will advise the complainant to go to the Housing Tribunal (for housing problems) or the Consumer Claims Tribunal (for other complaints).  
These tribunals, he added, would usually convene in three to four weeks.  
Besides the tribunals, other channels that NCCC uses to help complainants are the Financial Mediation Bureau (for banking and insurance problems) and the Public Complaints Bureau (related to government issues).  
In creating awareness among the public, Muhammad Sha'ani said the NCCC took part in programmes organised by Fomca like talks and workshops.  
Currently, it is airing its own TV programme called Your Rights, a 13-episode show on Astro.  
"Generally, Malaysians lack awareness about their rights. We need to continuously educate consumers on their rights and tell them they have a right to complain."  
The NCCC is located at 1D, Bangunan SKPPK, Jalan SS9A/17, Petaling Jaya. They can be reached at 03-7877 9000 (Mon to Fri, 9am to 6pm) or via e-mail at [nccc@nccc.org.my](mailto:nccc@nccc.org.my).  
By LIM CHIA YING