

(1 August 2008 – to date)

[This is the **current** version and applies as from **1 August 2008**, i.e. the date of commencement of the Co-operative Banks Act 40 of 2007 – to date]

## **FINANCIAL SERVICES OMBUD SCHEMES ACT 37 OF 2004**

*(Gazette No. 27265, Notice No. 127, dated 9 February 2005. Commencement date: 1 April 2005 [Proc. R17, Gazette No. 27448, dated 1 April 2005].)*

**as amended by:**

*Co-operative Banks Act 40 of 2007 – Government Notice 217 in Government Gazette 30802, dated 22 February 2008. Commencement date: 1 August 2008 [Government Notice 818, Gazette No. 31292, dated 1 August 2008].*

It is hereby notified that the President has assented to the following Act, which is hereby published for general information:—

*(English text signed by the President)  
(Assented to 4 February 2005.)*

### **ACT**

**To provide for the recognition of financial services ombud schemes; to lay down minimum requirements for ombud schemes; to promote consumer education with regard to ombud schemes; to co-ordinate the activities of ombuds of recognised schemes with the activities of the Pension Funds Adjudicator and the Ombud for Financial Services Providers; to develop and promote best practices for complaint resolution; to empower the Ombud for Financial Services Providers to act as a statutory ombud in certain cases; and to provide for matters connected therewith.**

BE IT ENACTED by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, as follows: -

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. Definitions
2. Establishment of Financial Services Ombud Schemes Council
3. Composition of Council
4. Term of office of members of Council
5. Vacating of office by members of Council
6. Meetings and decisions of Council
7. Remuneration of members of Council

Prepared by:

In partnership with:

8. Functions of Council and registrar
9. Expenditure and service fees
10. Requirements for recognition of scheme
11. Application for recognition by scheme
12. Suspension, reinstatement or withdrawal of recognition
13. Jurisdiction
14. Authority of statutory ombud to entertain certain complaints
15. Prescription and saving of rights
16. Report of ombud
17. Declaration as financial institution
18. Prohibition and exemptions
19. Regulations
20. Short title and commencement

## 1. Definitions

In this Act, unless the context indicates otherwise -

**"Adjudicator"** means the Pension Funds Adjudicator appointed in terms of section 30C(1) of the Pension Funds Act, 1956 (Act No. 24 of 1956);

**"board"** means the Financial Services Board established by section 2 of the Financial Services Board Act;

**"client"** means a person who uses the services of a financial institution or a person who enters into a transaction with a financial institution in respect of a product of that institution, and includes the -

- (a) successor in title of such person; and
- (b) beneficiary of such service or product;

**"complaint"** means a complaint by a client relating to any agreement with, or a financial service or product of, a financial institution, and in which it is alleged that the client has suffered or is likely to suffer financial prejudice or damage as a result of the financial institution -

- (a) having contravened or failed to comply with a provision of any agreement or the law or of a code of conduct subscribed to by the financial institution;
- (b) having wilfully or negligently supplied, or failed to supply, a financial service or a product to the client;
- (c) having treated the client unreasonably or inequitably; or

- (d) having maladministered the implementation of an agreement with, or the supply of a financial service or a product to, the client;

**"Council"** means the Financial Services Ombud Schemes Council established by section 2;

**"financial institution"** means -

- (a) a bank as defined in section 1(1) of the Banks Act, 1990 (Act No. 94 of 1990) or a mutual bank as defined in section 1(1) of the Mutual Banks Act, 1993 (Act No. 124 of 1993), or a co-operative bank as defined in section 1 of the Co-operative Banks Act, 2007;

*(Paragraph (a) of the definition of "financial institution" substituted by section 90 of Act 40 of 2007)*

- (b) any financial institution contemplated in paragraph (a) of the definition of "financial institution" in section 1 of the Financial Services Board Act; or
- (c) any person declared to be a financial institution in terms of section 17;

**"Financial Services Board Act"** means the Financial Services Board Act, 1990 (Act No. 97 of 1990);

**"Minister"** means the Minister of Finance;

**"ombud"** means a person who is empowered in terms of a scheme to resolve a complaint;

**"Ombud for Financial Services Providers"** means the Ombud for Financial Services Providers appointed in terms of section 21(1)(a) of the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act, 2002 (Act No. 37 of 2002), and includes a deputy ombud appointed in terms of section 21(1)(b) of that Act;

**"participant"**, in relation to a scheme, means a financial institution that takes part in the scheme or its funding and that submits to the authority of the relevant ombud;

**"person"** includes a trust;

**"prescribed"** means prescribed by regulation;

**"recognised scheme"** means a scheme that has been granted recognition in terms of section 11;

**"registrar"** means the executive officer appointed as such in terms of section 13(1)(a) of the Financial Services Board Act;

**"regulation"** means a regulation made in terms of section 19;

**"scheme"**, notwithstanding any other law, means any scheme or arrangement established by or for a financial institution, or a group of financial institutions, in order to resolve a client's complaint by an ombud -

- (a) and includes any arrangement in terms of which resolution of the complaint is to be effected by mediation, conciliation, recommendation, determination or arbitration;
- (b) but does not include any internal complaint resolution arrangement established by a financial institution either with or without any affiliate or subsidiary of the institution, nor the activities of the Ombud for Financial Services Providers, the Adjudicator and statutory ombud;

**"statutory ombud"** means the Ombud for Financial Services Providers, acting in the capacity contemplated in section 14;

**"this Act"** includes -

- (a) any regulation; and
- (b) any determination, decision, requirement or condition made, determined or imposed, and any notice published, by the Minister.

## **2. Establishment of Financial Services Ombud Schemes Council**

- (1) There is hereby established a council to be known as the Financial Services Ombud Schemes Council.
- (2) The Council is an independent body having the powers and duties, and performing the functions, as set out in this Act.
- (3) The Council is directly accountable to the Minister.

## **3. Composition of Council**

- (1) The Council consists of a chairperson, a deputy chairperson and at least three, but not more than five, other members appointed by the Minister after consultation with the board.
- (2)
  - (a) A member shall be appointed with due regard to -
    - (i) the person's knowledge, experience and expertise with reference to the matters for which the Council has been established;

(ii) the demographic and gender profile of the South African population.

(b) No member may be actually engaged in the -

(i) business of a financial institution; or

(ii) provision of a financial service or product of a financial institution to a client.

(3) The registrar is a member of the Council by virtue of the office of the registrar, without voting power.

#### **4. Term of office of members of Council**

(1) Members of the Council hold office for three years or such shorter period as the Minister may determine at the time of their appointment.

(2) A member whose term of office has expired is eligible for reappointment.

#### **5. Vacating of office by members of Council**

(1) A member of the Council must vacate office -

(a) on resigning as a member;

(b) if the member is discharged by the Minister on the grounds of misconduct or incapacity and such member is afforded a reasonable opportunity to be heard;

(c) if the member becomes an unrehabilitated insolvent;

(d) if the member has at any time been convicted (whether in the Republic or elsewhere) of theft, fraud, forgery or uttering a forged document, perjury, an offence under the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004 (Act No. 12 of 2004), or any offence involving dishonesty for which the member has been sentenced to a period of imprisonment without the option of a fine or to a fine exceeding the prescribed amount;

(e) if the member has been absent for more than two consecutive meetings of the Council without leave of the chairperson presiding at the meeting; or

(f) if the member becomes subject to a disqualification referred to in section 3(2)(b).

(2) A member referred to in subsection (1)(f) must inform the Minister of the member's disqualification in terms of section 3(2)(b) and the Minister must appoint within a reasonable period of time a person under section 3(1) to act in the place of such member for the unexpired period of term of office.

## **6. Meetings and decisions of Council**

- (1) The Council must meet at least twice in any financial year, or such sufficient number of times so as to arrange for the performance of its functions and must regulate its meetings in accordance with the rules and procedures to be established by the Council within six months after the appointment of the first members to the Council.
- (2)
  - (a) The chairperson or the deputy chairperson presides at meetings of the Council, but if both are absent from a meeting the members present must elect another member to act as chairperson of that meeting.
  - (b) At least half the appointed members form a quorum.
- (3) The decisions of the Council are valid if taken by a simple majority of members in office at the relevant time, and in the event of an equality of votes on any matter the chairperson presiding at the meeting in question shall have a casting vote in addition to the chairperson's deliberative vote.

## **7. Remuneration of members of Council**

A member of the Council who is not in the full-time employment of the State or the board is paid the remuneration and allowances approved by the Minister, after consultation with the board, as well as all the expenditure incurred in the performance of the functions of the Council.

## **8. Functions of Council and registrar**

- (1) The Council must -
  - (a) consider and grant or refuse an application for the recognition of a scheme;
  - (b) monitor compliance with this Act by a recognised scheme;
  - (c) promote co-operation and co-ordination of the activities of an ombud of a recognised scheme, the Adjudicator, the Ombud for Financial Services Providers and the statutory ombud, including in relation to informing and educating clients with regard to available resolution forums;
  - (d) after consultation with the relevant ombud, develop and promote best practices for complaint resolution by the recognised scheme in question;
  - (e) ensure that the independence and impartiality of an ombud is not affected when the Council performs its functions; and

- (f) perform such other functions as the Minister, after consultation with the board, may direct in order to achieve the objects of this Act.
- (2) The Council may -
- (a) issue guidelines to inform clients of the jurisdiction of different ombuds and of the procedures for the submission of a complaint; and
  - (b) if necessary, require an independent assessment on the compliance with this Act by any recognised scheme and may recover the cost from the scheme.
- (3) The registrar must assist the Council in performing its functions and implementing its decisions in addition to performing the administrative work of the Council.
- (4) The Council must each year submit to the Minister, and provide a copy to the board, a report on its affairs and functions during the preceding year ended on 31 December.

## **9. Expenditure and service fees**

- (1) The expenditure connected with the functions of the Council is paid out of the funds of the board, and the approval of the board is required for all expenditure proposed to be incurred, or actually incurred, by the Council.
- (2) The board may charge a service fee in accordance with the prescribed tariff in respect of any service rendered by the Council to a scheme or participant.

## **10. Requirements for recognition of scheme**

- (1) In order to qualify for recognition in terms of section 11, a scheme must comply with the following requirements:
  - (a) A majority of financial institutions, based on asset value, gross income or client base (as the Council may determine in general or in a particular instance), in a particular category of financial institutions must participate in the scheme;
  - (b) a body that is not controlled by participants in the scheme and to which the ombud is accountable must -
    - (i) appoint the ombud, settle the remuneration and monitor the performance and independence of the ombud; and

- (ii) monitor the continued compliance by the scheme with its constitution, the provisions of the scheme and this Act and report any non-compliance to the Council;
  - (c) the scheme must provide for minimum requirements relating to qualifications, competence, knowledge and experience with which the ombud must comply;
  - (d) the scheme must have sufficient human, financial and operational resources, funded by the participants in the scheme, to enable the ombud to function efficiently and timeously;
  - (e) the proposed procedures of the scheme must enable the ombud -
    - (i) to resolve a complaint through mediation, conciliation, recommendation or determination;
    - (ii) to act independently in resolving a complaint or in making a determination;
    - (iii) to follow informal, fair and cost-effective procedures;
    - (iv) where appropriate, to apply principles of equity in resolving a complaint;
    - (v) to report to the registrar and to a body representative of the relevant category of financial institutions on matters which may be of interest to them;
  - (f) provision must be made for the effective enforcement of determinations of the ombud;
  - (g) provision must be made to ensure that the questions, concerns and complaints of consumers are treated equitably and consistently in a timely, efficient and courteous manner;
  - (h) the scheme must provide for ways in which it will co-operate with the Council's functions of promoting the education of clients and co-ordinating the activities contemplated in section 8(1)(c); and
  - (i) any other requirements that may be prescribed and that are not in conflict with the objects of this Act.
- (2) Nothing contained in subsection (1) precludes a scheme from providing that its participants are bound by other provisions set out in the scheme and that are not in conflict with the provisions of this Act.

## 11. Application for recognition by scheme

- (1) A scheme must submit its application for recognition in the prescribed manner and form to the Council together with the supporting documentation and information determined by the board and a non-refundable prescribed fee.



- (2) A properly authorised representative of the body referred to in section 10(1)(b) or of the participants concerned may appear before the Council in order to submit the scheme's application for recognition and to present its case in support of such recognition.
- (3) The Registrar of Securities Services established under the Securities Services Act, 2004, must, in respect of any dispute resolution scheme submitted by a self-regulatory organisation under that Act -
  - (a) facilitate, by forwarding the rules of that scheme to the Council, the recognition process described in subsection (1), excluding the non-refundable prescribed fee;
  - (b) prior to approving a dispute resolution scheme included in the rules of a self-regulatory organisation submitted in terms of that Act, confirm with the Council that any such dispute resolution scheme included in such rules meets requirements materially equivalent to those of section 10 of this Act; and
  - (c) facilitate the ongoing compliance by the self-regulatory organisation with the requirements of this Act.
- (4) The Council must, after consideration of an application -
  - (a) if satisfied that the scheme complies with the requirements of this Act, grant the application; or
  - (b) if not so satisfied, refuse to grant the application and furnish the scheme with reasons for such refusal.
- (5) At any time after a scheme has been recognised in terms of subsection (4)(a) and after affording the relevant scheme an opportunity to be heard, the Council may impose on such scheme any requirement contemplated in section 10(1)(i) prescribed after the date of recognition of the scheme.
- (6) No change to -
  - (a) the constitution of a recognised scheme;
  - (b) the provisions under which a recognised scheme operates; and
  - (c) the terms of reference of a recognised scheme's ombud,is valid unless approved by the Council.
- (7) If an application has been granted, the Council must issue a certificate of recognition in the prescribed manner to the relevant scheme and the registrar must publish the recognition by notice in the *Gazette*.

## 12. Suspension, reinstatement or withdrawal of recognition

- (1) The Council may at any time suspend or withdraw recognition -
  - (a) on application by the scheme;
  - (b) if the scheme has ceased to function; or
  - (c) if the scheme no longer complies with any provision of this Act.
- (2) The Council may reinstate the recognition of a suspended scheme if the reason for the suspension no longer exists.
- (3) The registrar must in the prescribed manner publish a notice of suspension, reinstatement or withdrawal of recognition in the *Gazette*.
- (4) A suspension or withdrawal of recognition for the reasons contemplated in paragraphs (b) and (c) of subsection (1) -
  - (a) may only be made after the scheme in question has been afforded a reasonable opportunity to be heard; and
  - (b) is subject to an appeal by the scheme in question to the board of appeal established by section 26(1) of the Financial Services Board Act.
- (5) For the purposes of an appeal contemplated in subsection (4)(b) the provisions of section 26 of the Financial Services Board Act apply with the necessary changes.

## 13. Jurisdiction

- (1) The ombuds referred to in this Act have the following jurisdiction:
  - (a) The Adjudicator and the Ombud for Financial Services Providers have jurisdiction as set out in their respective enabling Acts;
  - (b) an ombud of a recognised scheme has the jurisdiction provided by the procedures under which such scheme operates and the terms of reference of such ombud; and
  - (c) the statutory ombud has jurisdiction in respect of matters not within the jurisdiction of the ombuds referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b).

- (2)
- (a) No ombud of a recognised scheme has jurisdiction to resolve a complaint or settle a matter in respect of which the Adjudicator or the Ombud for Financial Services Providers has jurisdiction in terms of a law, except in the case of any such complaint in respect of which the Adjudicator or the Ombud for Financial Services Providers has in terms of a law declined to resolve the complaint or settle the matter.
  - (b) If an ombud of a recognised scheme, the Adjudicator, the Ombud for Financial Services Providers or the statutory ombud does not have jurisdiction in respect of a specific complaint submitted to him or her, that ombud, Adjudicator, Ombud for Financial Services Providers or statutory ombud must submit such complaint without undue delay to the office which does have jurisdiction and must advise the client accordingly.
- (3)
- (a) In the case of uncertainty in respect of whom the complaint should be referred to, the relevant ombud, Adjudicator, Ombud for Financial Services Providers or statutory ombud involved in the uncertainty, must consult in order to determine who should deal with the complaint.
  - (b) Failing agreement under paragraph (a), the matter will be referred to the statutory ombud to determine who may exercise jurisdiction in respect of the complaint, and the statutory ombud shall advise the client accordingly.

#### **14. Authority of statutory ombud to entertain certain complaints**

- (1) Subject to sections 13 and 19, the statutory ombud may deal with complaints against a financial institution in the circumstances and on the basis set out in subsections (2), (3) and (4).
- (2) The statutory ombud must deal with a complaint against a financial institution if -
  - (a) the financial institution does not participate in a recognised scheme;
  - (b) the recognition of a scheme in which the financial institution participates is suspended or withdrawn in terms of section 12(1); or
  - (c) the financial institution participates in a recognised scheme, but the ombud concerned lacks jurisdiction in terms of the relevant scheme while the statutory ombud has jurisdiction to entertain such complaint.
- (3) The statutory ombud must deal with complaints contemplated in subsection (2) in the manner and in accordance with the procedures, applied with the necessary consequential changes, provided for in Part I of Chapter VI of the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act, 2002 (Act No. 37 of 2002).

- (4) The statutory ombud who deals with a complaint in terms of this section may determine an amount payable by the financial institution in question in order to cover the costs of dealing with the complaint in accordance with guidelines set by the board, after consultation with the Council, and published by notice in the *Gazette*.
- (5) The determination of an amount in terms of subsection (4) has the effect of a civil judgment given by a court in favour of the board for a liquid debt and any amount recovered becomes part of the funds of the board.

## **15. Prescription and saving of rights**

- (1) Official receipt of a complaint by an ombud or the statutory ombud suspends any applicable time barring terms, whether in terms of an agreement or any law, or the running of prescription in terms of the Prescription Act, 1969 (Act No. 68 of 1969), for the period from such receipt until the complaint has either been withdrawn by the complainant concerned or determined by any such ombud.
- (2) No provision of this Act must be construed as affecting any right of a client or other affected person to seek appropriate legal redress by virtue of common or statutory law, before or after the consideration of a complaint by an ombud or the statutory ombud.

## **16. Report of ombud**

- (1) A recognised scheme must -
  - (a) within six months after the end of every financial year of the scheme, submit to the Council, in the form and with the content required by the Council, a report on the affairs and functions of the office of the ombud during the financial year in question;
  - (b) at the request of the Council at any time furnish the Council within a reasonable time with such information or report regarding the operation of the scheme and other matters relating to the scheme as may be necessary to ensure compliance by the scheme with the provisions of this Act.
- (2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), a self-regulatory organisation contemplated in section 11(3) must submit to the Registrar of Securities Services an annual report on the affairs and functions of its scheme approved in terms of section 11(3).
- (3) The Council must at the request of the board or the Minister, and may of its own accord, submit reports and information received from an ombud to the board or Minister, as the case may be, with such comment or recommendation as the Council deems necessary.

## 17. Declaration as financial institution

- (1) The Minister may, by notice in the *Gazette* and after consultation with the board and the Council, declare any person as a financial institution.
- (2)
  - (a) Any person who has not been declared a financial institution and who wishes to be so declared may apply in writing to the board through the registrar for such declaration.
  - (b) An application contemplated in paragraph (a) must contain substantiating reasons for such application.
  - (c) The board must submit any application received by it together with its recommendation and that of the Council to the Minister for final decision.

## 18. Prohibition and exemptions

- (1) Notwithstanding any other law, no financial institution may -
  - (a) participate in a scheme; or
  - (b) require or invite any client to submit a complaint in terms of any such scheme,unless the scheme is a recognised scheme or the financial institution is exempted from compliance in terms of subsection (4).
- (2) Any participation, requirement or invitation in contravention of subsection (1) is null and void.
- (3) Despite subsection (1), any scheme existing and in operation immediately before this section came into operation may continue in accordance with the provisions of that scheme until the expiry of a period of 18 months from the date on which this section came into operation.
- (4)
  - (a) The Minister may, after consultation with the board and the Council, exempt any financial institution or category of financial institutions by notice in the *Gazette* from any provision of this Act relating to the resolution of a complaint by an ombud, if -
    - (i) the resolution of a complaint against the financial institution or category of financial institutions by an ombud is already partially or wholly regulated by any other law; or
    - (ii) the granting of the exemption will not conflict with the public interest, prejudice the interests of clients or frustrate the achievement of the objects of this Act.

- (b) The Minister -
- (i) having regard to the factors mentioned in paragraph (a), may attach to any exemption so granted reasonable requirements or impose reasonable conditions with which the financial institution or category of financial institutions must comply either before or after the effective date of the exemption in the manner and during the period specified by the Minister; and
  - (ii) must determine the period for which the exemption will be valid.
- (c) Subject to paragraph (d), a conditional exemption lapses whenever the financial institution or a financial institution in the category in question contravenes or fails to comply with any such requirement or condition.
- (d) The Minister may on application condone any such contravention or failure and determine reasonable requirements or conditions with which the financial institution must comply on or after resumption of the exemption as if such requirements or conditions had been attached or imposed on the first granting of the exemption.
- (5)
- (a) No financial institution may use a name or description in respect of any internal complaint resolution arrangement referred to in paragraph (b) of the definition of "scheme" in section 1, which represents or constitutes a "scheme" as so defined, unless the financial institution -
    - (i) has been authorised by the Council to do so; and
    - (ii) complies with the conditions determined by the Council.
  - (b) A financial institution that contravenes any provision of paragraph (a) is guilty of an offence and on conviction liable to a fine not exceeding the prescribed amount.
  - (c) Financial institutions not in compliance with this section, must be compliant within 18 months from the date fixed by the President in terms of section 20.

## 19. Regulations

The Minister may, after consultation with the board and the Council and by notice in the *Gazette*, make regulations regarding -

- (a) the proceedings of the statutory ombud;

- (b) the limitations on the jurisdiction of the statutory ombud, having regard to -
  - (i) the factual or legal complexity of any complaint dealt with by the statutory ombud;
  - (ii) the nature of the client whose complaint is dealt with by the statutory ombud;
  - (iii) the maximum amount involved in the dispute between the client and the financial institution; and
  - (iv) the legal relationship between the client whose complaint is to be dealt with and the financial institution;
- (c) any matter which in terms of this Act is required or permitted to be prescribed; and
- (d) any other matter which it is necessary to prescribe in order to achieve the objects of this Act.

## 20. Short title and commencement

This Act is called the Financial Services Ombud Schemes Act, 2004, and comes into operation on a date fixed by the President by proclamation in the *Gazette*.