



## Decision and Statement of reasons issued under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

Decision and reasons for decision of Natalie (Position Number 62211022), Senior Information Access Officer, Information Access Unit, Client Access and Rehabilitation Branch, Department of Veterans' Affairs

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**Applicant:** Mr Alan Ashmore

**Decision date:** 19 May 2023

**FOI reference number:** LEX 56618

**Sent by email:** foi+request-10067-c34ac13d@righttoknow.org.au

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Dear Mr Ashmore,

### **Freedom of Information Request: LEX 56618**

#### **Decision**

1. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (**Department**) has undertaken a reasonable search of its records and has identified one (1) document relevant to your request.
2. I have made a decision to grant full access to one (1) document.
3. The document created under section 17 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth)* (**FOI Act**) which I have decided to grant access to is set out in **Schedule 1**.

#### **Authority to make decision**

4. I, Natalie (Position Number 62211022), Senior Information Access Officer, Information Access Unit, Client Access and Rehabilitation Branch, am an officer authorised by the Secretary of the Department to make decisions about access to documents in the possession of the Department in accordance with section 23(1) of the FOI Act.

## Summary

5. On 15 March 2023, you made a request for access to documents in the possession of the Department. Your request sought access to:

*'...I am seeking the number of full time equivalent, (FTE), staff working in DVA's FOI Section as at 31 December 2020 and 31 December 2022.*

*I require the numbers to be broken up into the following categories, namely:*

*: Number of permanent DVA staff, and*

*: Number of contractors.*

*I further require the number of contractors to be broken up into their source, e.g. each external recruiting company and each external law firm...'*

6. On 16 March 2023, the Department acknowledged your request via email.
7. On 31 March 2023, the Department contacted you in relation to the scope of your request and as agreed the scope of the request was amended to:

*'...I am seeking the number of full time equivalent, (FTE), staff working in DVA's National Information Access Processing Team as at 31 December 2020 and DVA's Information Access Unit 31 December 2022.*

*I require the numbers to be broken up into the following categories, namely:*

*: Number of permanent DVA staff, and*

*: Number of contractors.*

*I further require the number of contractors to be broken up into their source, e.g. each external recruiting company and each external law firm...'*

8. As no extensions of time have been applied to process your request, a decision on your request was due by 14 April 2023.
9. In accordance with section 15AC of the FOI Act, the principal officer of the Department is taken to have made a decision personally refusing to give access to the documents on the last day of the initial decision period. Even where a decision has not been issued within the prescribed timeframe, the Department retains an obligation to process and finalise the FOI request. I would like to apologise for the delay in issuing this decision to you and any inconvenience it may have caused.
10. As a decision on your request was not made within the timeframe as prescribed in section 15(5)(b) of the FOI Act, Regulation 7(2) of the *Freedom of Information (Charges) Regulations 2019* prescribed that no charge is payable.

## Material taken into account

11. In accordance with section 26(1)(a) of the FOI Act, my findings on any material question of fact, the material on which those findings were based and the reasons for my decision to grant access to the document follow.
  
12. I have taken the following material into account in making my decision:
  - the terms of your request on 15 March 2023;
  
  - the types of information and documents that are in the Department's possession;
  
  - the content of the document that falls within the scope of your request;
  
  - the availability of information relevant to your request, including the practicality and time required in which the Department may create a document under section 17 of the FOI Act;
  
  - Sections 3, 11 and 11A of the FOI Act which give the Australian community a legally enforceable right to obtain access to information held by the Government of the Commonwealth. I also considered the following provision of the FOI Act relevant to my decision:
    - Section 15 Request for Access
    - Section 17 Requests involving use of computers etc (e.g. request for the Department to create a Document)
  
  - the Guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (**FOI Guidelines**);
  
13. A full extract of all FOI Act provisions used to make my decision are provided in **Schedule 2**.

## Reasons for decision

14. I have decided to **grant full access** to the document within the scope of your request.

## Creation of a document in response to your FOI Request (section 17)

15. In order to provide you access to all relevant information regarding your request, I have asked the relevant business area, the Workforce Reporting, to extract the relevant data and create a document in response to your request. This document is listed at **Schedule 1** and was created in accordance with section 17 of the FOI Act.

## Access to documents

16. The document released to you in accordance with the FOI Act is enclosed.

## Information Publication Scheme

17. The Information Publication Scheme requires the Department to publish information released in response to individual requests made under the FOI Act, except in specified circumstances.
18. I am of the view that details of your request should be made available on the Department's FOI Disclosure Log. As such, details of your request will be published on the Department's FOI Disclosure Log which can be accessed at <http://www.dva.gov.au/about-dva/freedom-information/foi-disclosure-log>. Please note that the Department does not publish details of FOI applicants, it only publishes details of the FOI request and the documents released in response to the request.

## Your rights of review

19. If you are dissatisfied with my decision you may apply for Information Commissioner Review of the decision through the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (**OAIC**). In accordance with section 54E(b) of the FOI Act, internal review is not available as the Department did not finalise your FOI request within the prescribed statutory timeframe.

## OAIC review

20. Under section 54L of the FOI Act, you may apply to the OAIC to review my decision. An application for review by OAIC must be made in writing within 60 days of the date of this letter, and be lodged in one of the following ways:

**Online:** [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au)

**Post:** Director of FOI Dispute Resolution  
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner  
GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001

**Facsimile:** (02) 9284 9666  
**Phone:** 1300 363 992  
**Email:** [FOIDR@oaic.gov.au](mailto:FOIDR@oaic.gov.au)

21. More information about your review rights under the FOI Act is available in Fact Sheet 12 published by the OAIC: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/reviews-and-complaints/information-commissioner-review/>

### Contact us

22. If you wish to discuss this decision, please do not hesitate to contact the Information Access Unit using the following details:

**Online:** <https://www.dva.gov.au/about-us/overview/reporting/freedom-information/access-information>  
**Post:** Information Access Unit  
Department of Veterans' Affairs  
GPO Box 9998, Brisbane QLD 4001  
**Phone:** 1800 838 372  
**Email:** [Information.Access@dva.gov.au](mailto:Information.Access@dva.gov.au)

Yours sincerely,

**Natalie (Position Number 62211022)**

Senior Information Access Officer  
Information Access Unit  
Client Access and Rehabilitation Branch  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

19 May 2023



## Schedule of documents

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**Applicant:** Mr Alan Ashmore

**Decision date:** 19 May 2023

**FOI reference number:** LEX 56618

Document reference	Date of document	Document description	Page number	Decision	FOI Act provision
1	19 May 2023	FTE – National Information Access Processing Team and Information Access Unit	1	Full Access	N/A



## Schedule of relevant provisions in the FOI Act

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### 3 Objects—general

- (1) The objects of this Act are to give the Australian community access to information held by the Government of the Commonwealth or the Government of Norfolk Island, by:
  - (a) requiring agencies to publish the information; and
  - (b) providing for a right of access to documents.
- (2) The Parliament intends, by these objects, to promote Australia's representative democracy by contributing towards the following:
  - (a) increasing public participation in Government processes, with a view to promoting better informed decision-making;
  - (b) increasing scrutiny, discussion, comment and review of the Government's activities.
- (3) The Parliament also intends, by these objects, to increase recognition that information held by the Government is to be managed for public purposes, and is a national resource.
- (4) The Parliament also intends that functions and powers given by this Act are to be performed and exercised, as far as possible, to facilitate and promote public access to information, promptly and at the lowest reasonable cost.

### 11 Right of access

- (1) Subject to this Act, every person has a legally enforceable right to obtain access in accordance with this Act to:
  - (a) a document of an agency, other than an exempt document; or
  - (b) an official document of a Minister, other than an exempt document.
- (2) Subject to this Act, a person's right of access is not affected by:
  - (a) any reasons the person gives for seeking access; or
  - (b) the agency's or Minister's belief as to what are his or her reasons for seeking access.

### 11A Access to documents on request

#### *Scope*

- (1) This section applies if:
  - (a) a request is made by a person, in accordance with subsection 15(2), to an agency or Minister for access to:
    - (i) a document of the agency; or
    - (ii) an official document of the Minister; and
  - (b) any charge that, under the regulations, is required to be paid before access is given has been paid.
- (2) This section applies subject to this Act.  
Note: Other provisions of this Act are relevant to decisions about access to documents, for example the following:
  - (a) section 12 (documents otherwise available);
  - (b) section 13 (documents in national institutions);
  - (c) section 15A (personnel records);
  - (d) section 22 (access to edited copies with exempt or irrelevant matter deleted).

*Mandatory access—general rule*

- (3) The agency or Minister must give the person access to the document in accordance with this Act, subject to this section.

*Exemptions and conditional exemptions*

- (4) The agency or Minister is not required by this Act to give the person access to the document at a particular time if, at that time, the document is an exempt document.

Note: Access may be given to an exempt document apart from under this Act, whether or not in response to a request (see section 3A (objects—information or documents otherwise accessible)).

- (5) The agency or Minister must give the person access to the document if it is conditionally exempt at a particular time unless (in the circumstances) access to the document at that time would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest.

Note 1: Division 3 of Part IV provides for when a document is conditionally exempt.

Note 2: A conditionally exempt document is an exempt document if access to the document would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest (see section 31B (exempt documents for the purposes of Part IV)).

Note 3: Section 11B deals with when it is contrary to the public interest to give a person access to the document.

- (6) Despite subsection (5), the agency or Minister is not required to give access to the document at a particular time if, at that time, the document is both:
- (a) a conditionally exempt document; and
  - (b) an exempt document:
    - (i) under Division 2 of Part IV (exemptions); or
    - (ii) within the meaning of paragraph (b) or (c) of the definition of exempt document in subsection 4(1).

**15 Requests for access (as related to the requirements for requests)**

*Persons may request access*

- (1) Subject to section 15A, a person who wishes to obtain access to a document of an agency or an official document of a Minister may request access to the document.

*Requirements for request*

- (2) The request must:
- (a) be in writing; and
  - (aa) state that the request is an application for the purposes of this Act; and
  - (b) provide such information concerning the document as is reasonably necessary to enable a responsible officer of the agency, or the Minister, to identify it; and
  - (c) give details of how notices under this Act may be sent to the applicant (for example, by providing an electronic address to which notices may be sent by electronic communication).
- (2A) The request must be sent to the agency or Minister. The request may be sent in any of the following ways:
- (a) delivery to an officer of the agency, or a member of the staff of the Minister, at the address of any central or regional office of the agency or Minister specified in a current telephone directory;
  - (b) postage by pre-paid post to an address mentioned in paragraph (a);
  - (c) sending by electronic communication to an electronic address specified by the agency or Minister.

**17 Requests involving use of computers etc**

- (1) Where:
- (a) a request (including a request in relation to which a practical refusal reason exists) is made in accordance with the requirements of subsection 15(2) to an agency;



- (b) It appears from the request that the desire of the applicant is for information that is not available in discrete form in written documents of the agency; and
- (ba) it does not appear from the request that the applicant wishes to be provided with a computer tape or computer disk on which the information is recorded; and
- (c) the agency could produce a written document containing the information in discrete form by:
  - (i) the use of a computer or other equipment that is ordinarily available to the agency for retrieving or collating stored information; or
  - (ii) the making of a transcript from a sound recording held in the agency;

the agency shall deal with the request as if it were a request for access to a written document so produced and containing that information and, for that purpose, this Act applies as if the agency had such a document in its possession.

- (2) An agency is not required to comply with subsection (1) if compliance would substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of the agency from its other operations.

### **23 Decisions to be made by authorised persons**

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), a decision in respect of a request made to an agency may be made, on behalf of the agency, by the responsible Minister or the principal officer of the agency or, subject to the regulations, by an officer of the agency acting within the scope of authority exercisable by him or her in accordance with arrangements approved by the responsible Minister or the principal officer of the agency.
- (2) A decision in respect of a request made to a court, or made to a tribunal, authority or body that is specified in Schedule 1, may be made on behalf of that court, tribunal, authority or body by the principal officer of that court, tribunal, authority or body or, subject to the regulations, by an officer of that court, tribunal, authority or body acting within the scope of authority exercisable by him or her in accordance with arrangements approved by the principal officer of that court, tribunal, authority or body.