



4 October 2023

Our reference: LEX 75777

Brutus
Right to Know

By email: foi+request-10656-613b3b31@righttoknow.org.au

Dear Sir / Madam,

Decision on your Freedom of Information Request

I refer to your request, received by Services Australia (the Agency) on 4 September 2023 for access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the **FOI Act**) to the following documents:

Despite an express object of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth) requiring that “disclosures by public officials are properly investigated and dealt with” (Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth), s 6(d)), under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth), I request access to any and all documents in the possession of Services Australia providing that it is permissible for an inadequate public interest disclosure investigation to remain unremedied by officials in the agency to which an internal disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth) was allocated for investigation.

My decision

I have decided to refuse your request for access under section 24A of the FOI Act on the basis that all reasonable steps have been taken to locate the documents you have requested and I am satisfied that they do not exist.

Please see [Attachment A](#) for the reasons for my decision.

You can ask for a review of our decision

If you disagree with any part of the decision you can ask for a review. There are two ways you can do this. You can ask for an internal review from within the Agency, or an external review by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. You do not have to pay for a review of the decision. See **Attachment B** for more information about how to request a review.

Further assistance

If you have any questions related to your request please email freedomofinformation@servicesaustralia.gov.au.

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013* is publicly available on the Federal Register of Legislation, as is the explanatory memorandum (EM) related to the Public Interest Disclosure

Bill. You may find section 26(2A) of that Act and 'Subdivision D — External disclosures: inadequate investigations and responses to investigations' of the EM, of interest.

Yours sincerely

Alexander
Authorised FOI Decision Maker
Freedom of Information Team
FOI and Ombudsman Branch | Legal Services Division
Services Australia



Attachment A

REASONS FOR DECISION

What you requested

Despite an express object of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth) requiring that “disclosures by public officials are properly investigated and dealt with” (Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth), s 6(d)), under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth), I request access to any and all documents in the possession of Services Australia providing that it is permissible for an inadequate public interest disclosure investigation to remain unremedied by officials in the agency to which an internal disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (Cth) was allocated for investigation.

What I took into account

In reaching my decision I took into account:

- your request dated 4 September 2023
- consultations with Agency officers about:
 - the nature of the documents
 - the Agency's operating environment and functions
- guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (the Guidelines), and
- the FOI Act.

Reasons for my decisions

I am authorised to make decisions under section 23(1) of the FOI Act.

Section 24A of the FOI Act

Section 24A of the FOI Act provides that:

- (1) An agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:
 - (a) all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and
 - (b) the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:
 - (i) is in the agency's or Minister's possession but cannot be found; or
 - (ii) does not exist.

The People Solutions Branch (the Branch) is the business area of the Agency responsible for the actioning and coordination of Public Interest Disclosures (PID). I am satisfied that this is the area of the Agency responsible for the search and retrieval of the types of documents you have requested.

The Branch completed comprehensive searches of their computer shared drive folders, positional email mailbox and the relevant PID intranet pages. The Branch did not locate any documents which specifically state or address ‘that it is permissible for an inadequate public interest disclosure investigation to remain unremedied’.

On the basis of these searches, I am satisfied that in accordance with section 24A of the FOI Act:

1. all reasonable steps have been taken to find the documents, and
2. the documents do not exist.

Supplementary information

Further information in relation to Public Interest Disclosures is available on the Services Australia website here: [Public Interest Disclosures - Services Australia](#)

A copy of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013* is available here: [Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 \(legislation.gov.au\)](#)



Attachment B

INFORMATION ON RIGHTS OF REVIEW

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982

Asking for a full explanation of a freedom of information (FOI) decision

Before you ask for a formal review of a FOI decision, you can contact us to discuss your request. We will explain the decision to you. This gives you a chance to correct misunderstandings.

Asking for a formal review of a FOI decision

If you still believe a decision is incorrect, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act)* gives you the right to apply for a review of the decision. Under sections 54 and 54L of the FOI Act, you can apply for a review of an FOI decision by:

1. an Internal Review Officer in Services Australia; and/or
2. the Australian Information Commissioner.

Applying for an internal review by an Internal Review Officer

If you apply for internal review, a different decision maker to the Services Australia delegate who made the original decision will carry out the review. The Internal Review Officer will consider all aspects of the original decision and decide whether it should change. An application for internal review must be:

- made in writing
- made within 30 days of receiving this letter
- sent to the address at the top of the first page of this letter.

Note: You do not need to fill in a form. However, it is a good idea to set out any relevant submissions you would like the Internal Review Officer to further consider, and your reasons for disagreeing with the decision.

Applying for external review by the Australian Information Commissioner

If you do not agree with the original decision or the internal review decision, you can ask the Australian Information Commissioner to review the decision.

If you do not receive a decision from an Internal Review Officer in Services Australia within 30 days of applying, you can ask the Australian Information Commissioner for a review of the original FOI decision.

You will have 60 days to apply in writing for a review by the Australian Information Commissioner.

You can **lodge your application:**

Online: www.oaic.gov.au

Post: Australian Information Commissioner
GPO Box 5218
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au

Note: The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner generally prefers FOI applicants to seek internal review before applying for external review by the Australian Information Commissioner.

Important:

- If you are applying online, the application form the 'Merits Review Form' is available at **www.oaic.gov.au**.
- If you have one, you should include with your application a copy of the Services Australia decision on your FOI request
- Include your contact details
- Set out your reasons for objecting to Services Australia's decision.

Complaints to the Australian Information Commissioner and Commonwealth Ombudsman

Australian Information Commissioner

You may complain to the Australian Information Commissioner concerning action taken by an Agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the FOI Act, There is no fee for making a complaint. A complaint to the Australian Information Commissioner must be made in writing. The Australian Information Commissioner's contact details are:

Telephone: 1300 363 992
Website: www.oaic.gov.au

Commonwealth Ombudsman

You may also complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman concerning action taken by an Agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the FOI Act. There is no fee for making a complaint. A complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman may be made in person, by telephone or in writing. The Commonwealth Ombudsman's contact details are:

Phone: 1300 362 072
Website: www.ombudsman.gov.au

The Commonwealth Ombudsman generally prefers applicants to seek review before complaining about a decision.