



Decision to grant an extension of time under s 15AB of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

Agency	Department of Veterans' Affairs
FOI applicant	Mr Alan Ashmore
Date of decision	20 November 2023
OAIC reference number	RQ23/05640
Agency reference number	61891

Decision

1. I refer to the application made by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (the Department) under s 15AB(1) of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) (FOI Act) for an extension of time to process Mr Alan Ashmore's (the FOI applicant) request of 17 October 2023 (the FOI request).
2. As a delegate of the Information Commissioner, I am authorised to make decisions on extension of time applications under s 15AB(2) of the FOI Act.
3. Under s 15AB(2) of the FOI Act, I have decided to extend the processing period by 29 days to 15 December 2023. My reasons are outlined below.

Background

4. On 17 October 2023, the FOI applicant made an FOI request to the Department. The FOI decision was due to be provided to the FOI applicant on 16 November 2023.
5. On 16 November 2023, the Department applied to the Information Commissioner for further time to process the FOI applicant's request under s 15AB(1) on the basis that the processing period is insufficient to adequately deal with the FOI request, because it is complex and voluminous. A copy of the department's reasons is included at **Attachment A**.

Reasons for decision

6. Subsection 15AB(2) of the FOI Act requires that I consider whether the application is justified on the basis that the processing period referred to in s 15(5)(b) is insufficient for dealing with the request, on the basis that the request is complex or voluminous.
7. In granting this extension of time under s 15AB(2), I have considered the following factors:
 - Guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under s 93A of the FOI Act, to which I must have regard, in particular [3.150] – [3.155]
 - the Department’s reasons for seeking an extension
 - whether an agreement to extend the processing period under s 15AA of the FOI Act has first been attempted or obtained by the Department
 - the work already undertaken, and still required, to finalise the request.
8. On the information before the OAIC, I am satisfied that an extension to the processing period until **15 December 2023** is justified, for the following reasons:
 - Based on the Department’s submissions, I am satisfied that the request is complex based on challenges involved in the search and retrieval of any relevant documents.
 - Based on the Department’s submissions that the FOI applicant’s request captures approximately 395 documents, I am satisfied the request is also voluminous in nature.
9. The Department must provide the FOI applicant with a decision by **15 December 2023**.
10. If the Department has not provided the FOI applicant a decision by **15 December 2023** the FOI applicant may seek review by the Information Commissioner of the Department’s deemed access refusal decision of **15 December 2023**. Further information on applying for IC review is available on the OAIC website. Any application for IC review would need to be made within 60 days of the Department’s decision or deemed decision. It also remains open to the Department to apply for a further extension of time from the Information Commissioner if considered appropriate.
11. This extension of time matter is now closed. Your review rights are set out below.

12. If you would like to discuss this matter, please contact our office by email at FOIDR@oaic.gov.au, quoting reference number RQ23/05640.



Hannah Holswilder
Director
Freedom of Information Branch
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

20 November 2023

Attachment A

The agency's reasons for requesting an extension of time, as included in the extension of time request form.

Please provide a timeline setting out the work already completed in order to process this request. Where an extension of time has previously been granted, describe the work that was undertaken during that extended period. *

17/10/2023 - Request received
20/10/2023 - Assigned to officer
24/10/2023 - Search minutes (SM) sent to business area (BA)
03/11/2023 - Response from BA requesting more time to finalise SM
07/11/2023 - BA requesting more time due to staff sick
10/11/2023 - BA advising of completion of sampling within the SM as the request is voluminous
13/11/2023 - Further clarification from BA to Frankie as to how to complete SM and sampling
14/11/2023 - Request reassigned to another officer. Email sent to applicant requesting 15aa. Emailed BA to complete SM and sampling asap
16/11/2023 - Information received from BA. No response was received from applicant regarding 15aa. 15ab requested.

What work is required to finalise the request? *

Correlate data received from business area. Send documents and decision letter to QA. Finalise request and notify applicant

Why is the request considered complex or voluminous? *

The scope of the request is quite broad and the line area has identified that involves multiple parties and business areas. The line area has indicated that they have spent at least 20 hours to locate and retrieve all of the documents that fall into the scope of the request. The line area and the case officer will need additional time to process these files so that all the sensitivities can be addressed.

The documents are spanning seven positional and individual staff mailboxes as well as two computer shared drives. Even though the date range of the scope is around six months,

The line area has identified 395 documents that are potentially in scope and it would take them approximately an additional 39.5 hours to review them.

Do other agencies or parties have an interest in the request? *

There may be third party consultation required for University of South Australia, University of Adelaide and Phoenix Australia.

Please describe the measures that would be taken to ensure a decision is made within the period of the requested extension and to keep the applicant informed of the progress of the request *

The Department will use this additional time to process the documents that are in scope of the request and also consult with the line areas and third parties regarding all sensitivities.

Review rights

If you disagree with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner's (OAIC) decision you can apply to the Federal Court of Australia or the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia for a review of a decision of the Information Commissioner, if you think that a decision by the Information Commissioner to grant an extension of time is not legally correct. You can make this application under the *Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977*.

The Court will not review the merits of your case, but it may refer the matter back to the Information Commissioner for further consideration if it finds the decision was wrong in law or the Information Commissioner's powers were not exercised properly.

An application for review must be made to the Court within 28 days of the OAIC sending the decision to you. You may wish to seek legal advice as the process can involve fees and costs. Please contact the Federal Court registry in your state or territory for more information, or visit the Federal Court website at <http://www.fedcourt.gov.au/>.

Further information

Further information about how applications to extend the timeframe to process an FOI request are handled by the OAIC can be found published on our website:

For FOI applicants: [How to make an FOI request: Extensions of time](#)

For agencies and ministers: [Guidance and advice: Extension of time for processing requests](#)

The OAIC has the power to investigate complaints about an agency's actions under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act). This is a separate process from asking for an Information Commissioner review following a decision made under the FOI Act. Complaints usually focus on how an agency has handled your FOI request or complied with other obligations under the FOI Act, rather than the decision itself.

In some cases, the Information Commissioner's investigation of a complaint may lead to the agency addressing the issues that you have complained about. In other cases, the Information Commissioner may make suggestions or recommendations that the agency should implement. The Information Commissioner can only make non-binding recommendations as a result of a complaint. You and the agency will be notified of the outcome of the investigation.

FOI complaints to the OAIC must be made in writing. Our preference is for you to use the [online FOI complaint form](#) if at all possible.

Further information about how to make a complaint can be found published on our website: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/your-freedom-of-information-rights/freedom-of-information-complaints/make-an-foi-complaint>.

Making a complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman

If you believe you have been treated unfairly by the OAIC, you can make a complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). The Ombudsman's services are free. The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the administrative actions of Australian Government agencies to see if you have been treated unfairly.

If the Ombudsman finds your complaint is justified, the Ombudsman can recommend that the OAIC reconsider or change its action or decision or take any other action that the Ombudsman considers is appropriate. You can contact the Ombudsman's office for more information on 1300 362 072 or visit the Commonwealth Ombudsman's website at <http://www.ombudsman.gov.au> .