



**Australian Government**

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

FOI Ref: 1402-F761  
File No: 14/5196

26 February 2014

Ms Evelyn Doyle  
Right to Know

Transmitted by email: [foi+request-517-5b343c6d@righttoknow.org.au](mailto:foi+request-517-5b343c6d@righttoknow.org.au)

Dear Ms Doyle

**Re: Freedom of Information (FOI) Request**

Thank you for your e-mail of 14 February 2014, seeking access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act) to:

*"A copy of all documents held in the following numbered files:*

*Food Trade and Quarantine Section:*

*13/593 and 13/594 TRADE - AGREEMENTS - Free Trade Agreements (FTA) - Negotiations - Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) - Text (2013)*

*and;*

*Industrials and Market Access Section:*

*13/1765 TRADE - AGREEMENTS - Free Trade Agreements (FTA) - Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Customs - Briefs (2013)"*

DFAT intends to refuse the request as currently framed, on the grounds that the work involved in processing it would substantially and unreasonably divert DFAT's resources from its other operations.

**Practical refusal reason**

Notice is hereby given under s 24AB(2) of the FOI Act of an intention to refuse to grant access to the documents sought. The practical refusal reason is that the work involved in

processing the request would substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of DFAT from its other operations.

I have considered how DFAT could proceed to process your request, and the time and resources that would be involved in doing so. I have been assisted in this task by estimates provided by members of staff in the Agriculture and Food Branch and the Goods and Investment Branch to determine an estimate of the probable resource demands posed by your FOI request.

It is clear from the searches conducted by those Divisions that a large number of documents (conservatively estimated at well over 722 pages) falls within the scope of your request and it is too large for processing.

### **Time required to process your request**

I have formed the view that over 70 hours of staff time would be required to process your request in its current form, and if DFAT were to process your request, the charges estimate would be in excess of \$1,500.

Processing this request would, in my view, be a substantial and unreasonable diversion of DFAT's resources within the meaning of s.24AA(1).

### **Consultation process**

I am the DFAT officer with whom you may consult if you wish to revise the request to a narrower scope such that it could in fact be processed. I may be contacted on (02) 6261 3056 and I am happy to provide you so far as is reasonably practicable with any information that I can to assist in amending your request under the FOI Act.

In accordance with s 24AB(2)(e), the consultation period during which you may consult with me to revise the scope of your request is 14 days after the day you are given this notice. Please note that if you do not take this opportunity to consult, in accordance with s 24AB(7)(a), your request will be taken to have been withdrawn under s 24AB(6).

In considering ways in which you could narrow the scope of your request, you may wish to clearly identify the subject matter in which you are interested (rather than an entire file). You may also wish to take into account that all parties to the TPP Agreement negotiations, including the Australian Government, have agreed in writing to protect the confidentiality of the draft text of the TPP Agreement and documents relating to the substance of the negotiations.

In refining the scope of your request you could consider narrowing the request to exclude negotiating documents and providing more specific information concerning the types of documents you seek access to. This will ensure that our searches focus only on the material that you are interested in.

In the meantime, negotiators are available to meet with stakeholders to discuss Australia's objectives in the negotiations and provide updates on progress. Many stakeholders have availed themselves of the opportunity to talk to negotiators about the TPP and make submissions on the opportunities and challenges facing Australia. The Department also publishes up-to-date material relevant to the TPP negotiations on our website:

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/fta/tpp>. Please contact [tpp@dfat.gov.au](mailto:tpp@dfat.gov.au) if you would like more information, or to arrange a meeting.

Please note that during this period of consultation, the statutory timeframe under section 15(5) of the FOI Act for the processing of your request is on hold (see section 24AB(8) for details).

I have attached a copy of sections 24, 24AA and 24AB of the FOI Act for your information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Indra McCormick', written in dark ink.

Indra McCormick  
Director  
Freedom of Information and Privacy Law Section

## Attachment A

### 24 Power to refuse request—diversion of resources etc.

- (1) If an agency or Minister is satisfied, when dealing with a request for a document, that a practical refusal reason exists in relation to the request (see section 24AA), the agency or Minister:
  - (a) must undertake a request consultation process (see section 24AB); and
  - (b) if, after the request consultation process, the agency or Minister is satisfied that the practical refusal reason still exists—the agency or Minister may refuse to give access to the document in accordance with the request.
- (2) For the purposes of this section, the agency or Minister may treat 2 or more requests as a single request if the agency or Minister is satisfied that:
  - (a) the requests relate to the same document or documents; or
  - (b) the requests relate to documents, the subject matter of which is substantially the same.

### 24AA When does a *practical refusal reason* exist?

- (1) For the purposes of section 24, a *practical refusal reason* exists in relation to a request for a document if either (or both) of the following applies:
  - (a) the work involved in processing the request:
    - (i) in the case of an agency—would substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of the agency from its other operations; or
    - (ii) in the case of a Minister—would substantially and unreasonably interfere with the performance of the Minister's functions;
  - (b) the request does not satisfy the requirement in paragraph 15(2)(b) (identification of documents).
- (2) Subject to subsection (3), but without limiting the matters to which the agency or Minister may have regard, in deciding whether a practical refusal reason exists, the agency or Minister must have regard to the resources that would have to be used for the following:
  - (a) identifying, locating or collating the documents within the filing system of the agency, or the office of the Minister;
  - (b) deciding whether to grant, refuse or defer access to a document to which the request relates, or to grant access to an edited copy of such a document, including resources that would have to be used for:
    - (i) examining the document; or
    - (ii) consulting with any person or body in relation to the request;
  - (c) making a copy, or an edited copy, of the document;
  - (d) notifying any interim or final decision on the request.
- (3) In deciding whether a practical refusal reason exists, an agency or Minister must not have regard to:
  - (a) any reasons that the applicant gives for requesting access; or
  - (b) the agency's or Minister's belief as to what the applicant's reasons are for requesting access; or
  - (c) any maximum amount, specified in the regulations, payable as a charge for processing a request of that kind.

## 24AB What is a *request consultation process*?

### *Scope*

- (1) This section sets out what is a *request consultation process* for the purposes of section 24.

### *Requirement to notify*

- (2) The agency or Minister must give the applicant a written notice stating the following:
  - (a) an intention to refuse access to a document in accordance with a request;
  - (b) the practical refusal reason;
  - (c) the name of an officer of the agency or member of staff of the Minister (the *contact person*) with whom the applicant may consult during a period;
  - (d) details of how the applicant may contact the contact person;
  - (e) that the period (the *consultation period*) during which the applicant may consult with the contact person is 14 days after the day the applicant is given the notice.

### *Assistance to revise request*

- (3) If the applicant contacts the contact person during the consultation period in accordance with the notice, the agency or Minister must take reasonable steps to assist the applicant to revise the request so that the practical refusal reason no longer exists.
- (4) For the purposes of subsection (3), *reasonable steps* includes the following:
  - (a) giving the applicant a reasonable opportunity to consult with the contact person;
  - (b) providing the applicant with any information that would assist the applicant to revise the request.

### *Extension of consultation period*

- (5) The contact person may, with the applicant's agreement, extend the consultation period by written notice to the applicant.

### *Outcome of request consultation process*

- (6) The applicant must, before the end of the consultation period, do one of the following, by written notice to the agency or Minister:
  - (a) withdraw the request;
  - (b) make a revised request;
  - (c) indicate that the applicant does not wish to revise the request.
- (7) The request is taken to have been withdrawn under subsection (6) at the end of the consultation period if:
  - (a) the applicant does not consult the contact person during the consultation period in accordance with the notice; or
  - (b) the applicant does not do one of the things mentioned in subsection (6) before the end of the consultation period.

### *Consultation period to be disregarded in calculating processing period*

- (8) The period starting on the day an applicant is given a notice under subsection (2) and ending on the day the applicant does one of the things mentioned in paragraph (6)(b) or (c) is to be disregarded in working out the 30 day period mentioned in paragraph 15(5)(b).

Note: Paragraph 15(5)(b) requires that an agency or Minister take all reasonable steps to notify an applicant of a decision on the applicant's request within 30 days after the request is made.

*No more than one request consultation process required*

- (9) To avoid doubt, this section only obliges the agency or Minister to undertake a request consultation process once for any particular request.