



Australian Government
Department of Health
Therapeutic Goods Administration

TRIM Ref: D19-6534415

Phillip Hayes
Email: foi+request-5958-a0110db5@righttoknow.org.au

Dear Mr Hayes

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST FOI 1432
Request Consultation Process

I refer to your request dated 29 November 2019 under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act) for access to the following documents:

"...Any and all scientific literature of safety studies for any vaccine currently on the Australian Immunisation Schedule having undergone a genuine double-blind placebo-controlled randomised clinical safety study as is required by every other medication prior to approval for public use in Australia."

Decision Maker

I am the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) officer authorised to make a decision on your request under the FOI Act:

Requirement to undertake a request consultation process

The TGA has now undertaken a preliminary search and retrieval for documents coming within the scope of your request. As a result, TGA officers have indicated that there are approximately 13,200 relevant pages for each vaccine that would have to be examined for relevance to your request. We note that, due to the age of some of the vaccines, many of these files are still in paper form and further, that these are likely to fall within the Open Access period as defined in the *Archives Act 1983*.

Under paragraph 24(1)(a) of the FOI Act, I as a decision maker must consult you if I am satisfied that a "practical refusal reason" exists in relation to your request. A practical refusal reason exists if the work involved in processing the request would substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of the TGA from its other operations.

A copy of the sections of the FOI Act that set out the consultation process (sections 24, 24AA and 24AB) is at **Attachment A**.

In deciding whether the processing of your request would involve a substantial and unreasonable diversion of resources such that a practical refusal reason exists, I am entitled under section 24AA(2) of the FOI Act to consider the resources that would have to be used in the following activities:

- identifying, locating and collating the documents;
- deciding whether to grant or refuse access to each document and/or to provide an edited copy which would include examining each document and consulting with any person (including those that I would be required to consult under the FOI Act);
- making a copy or edited copy of each document; and
- notifying any interim or final decision on the request (including to any third party consulted in the event that a decision is made to give access to the document).

In coming to a view that a practical refusal reason exists in relation to your request I have had regard to the following:

- the correspondence from you of 29 November 2019 including the terms of the FOI request;
- the response from you of 11 December 2019 declining our request to clarify the scope of your request (e.g. by providing a brand name of a particular vaccine; and/or identifying a relevant time period for your request; and/or seeking clinical evaluation reports and/or delegate overviews);
- the age of some of the vaccines; in order to identify the type or types of trials conducted, it would require manual searching of a large quantity of paper dossiers. Preliminary estimates from the relevant line areas of the TGA identified 11 offsite archive boxes, each containing at least 1,200 pages (i.e. an approximate total of 13,200 pages) for a single vaccine;
- the amount of time that would be required to examine all files to identify, in the first instance, the portions of the application dossiers which contain the most relevant documents (this work would require the attention of specialist officer or officers who have competing responsibilities);
- there are additional areas where searches have not been completed which are likely to have additional relevant documents and therefore the total number of relevant documents is likely to be higher than the estimate;
- the need to prepare a schedule detailing all relevant documents;
- the fact that each of those documents may contain business and/or personal information in relation to which consideration would need to be given about whether an exemption should be claimed and whether consultation with third parties is required and if so, preparation of schedules for the third party detailing all relevant documents;
- the assumption that a substantial number of those documents may be capable of being made available (even if in edited form with exempt material redacted), the time taken to appropriately edit each document and to make copies;
- the fact that any decision letter would need to list each document in an attachment setting out the outcome of the consideration of whether exemptions apply; and
- the need to prepare at least two third party decision letters and associated schedules, should any third parties object to the proposed release of their information.

Taking into account these matters, I have prepared an estimate of charges in relation to your request. For that purpose, I have:

- taken a conservative approach of attributing 1,320 pages, both electronic and hard copy;
- considered the time required to undertake the consultation process with the two (2) potential third parties;
- considered the time already taken to perform searches for potentially relevant documents and the additional time required to complete the remaining searches;

Based on my conclusion that the processing of your request could take approximately 103 hours, I consider your request to be an unreasonable diversion of the TGA's resources to process in its current form. Further, I estimate that the charges that may be imposed on you for processing your request (as calculated in accordance with the Schedule to the *Freedom of Information (Charges) Regulations 2019*), may, based on the estimated number of hours, exceed \$1,621.17.

Notification of request consultation process

I am notifying you of my intention to refuse to give access to the documents that come within the scope of your request.

I am satisfied that, because of the breadth of your request and the time required to identify potentially relevant documents, and the number of hours involved in considering exemptions and making a decision on the documents as set out above, your request would substantially and unreasonably divert staff in regulatory areas of the TGA who would be required to review and consider the documents and any submissions provided by third parties on the documents, from the performance of their day-to-day functions.

Before deciding to refuse access to documents, I am required under paragraph 24(1)(a) of the FOI Act to undertake a request consultation process in accordance with section 24AB of the FOI Act and provide you with the opportunity to refine the scope of your request.

Accordingly, you are now afforded fourteen calendar (14) days from your receipt of this letter in which to contact the TGA to discuss a revision of the scope of your request. If you wish to refine the scope of your request you may contact the FOI team on (02) 6289 4630 or at TGA.FOI@tga.gov.au.

Before the end of the 14-day consultation period, you must do one of the following:

- withdraw your request;
- make a revised request; or
- indicate that you do not wish to revise your request.

You may wish to consider the following suggestions to revise the scope of your FOI request (please note that these are suggestions only and do not guarantee the practical refusal reason/s will no longer exist):

- Confirming a vaccine of interest (by brand name)
- Identifying a relevant time period of interest (e.g. at the time of registration, or post-market for a particular year) and/or
- Seeking clinical evaluation reports and/or delegate overviews.

If you have not contacted the TGA within 14 days of receiving this letter to do one of the above or consulted the TGA to discuss revising its scope, your request is taken to have been withdrawn.

Please note that if you indicate that you do not wish to revise your request or revise your request in such a way that I am still of the view that processing it would substantially and unreasonably divert TGA resources from other operations, I may refuse your request under paragraph 24(1)(b) of the FOI Act.

Yours sincerely



Adrian Bootes
Assistant Secretary
Prescription Medicines Authorisation Branch
Therapeutic Goods Administration

13 December 2019