



Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

Our ref: FOI21/040; CM21/1705

7 April 2021

By email: foi+request-7095-591719da@righttoknow.org.au

Dear FQ

Freedom of Information Request FOI21/040 – Decision letter

The purpose of this letter is to give you a decision about your request for access to documents under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act) which you submitted to the Attorney-General's Department (the department).

Your request

On 8 March 2021, you requested access to:

A copy of any document that amounts to an authorisation or approval of AGD's policy to not disclose the names of junior public servants from documents the subject of FOI requests.

On 24 March 2021, the department acknowledged your request.

A decision in relation to your request is due on 7 April 2021.

My decision

I am an officer authorised under section 23(1) of the FOI Act to make decisions in relation to freedom of information requests made to the department.

In making my decision, I have taken the following into account:

- the terms of your request,
- advice provided to me by officers with responsibility for matters to which your request relates,
- the provisions of the FOI Act, and
- the Guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (the Guidelines).

Section 24A of the FOI Act relevantly provides that an agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document and the agency is satisfied that the document:

- is in the agency's possession but cannot be found, or
- does not exist.

When considering a decision to refuse access under section 24A of the FOI Act, the Guidelines relevantly provide at paragraph 3.89 that an agency or minister should take comprehensive steps to locate documents, having regard to:

- the subject matter of the documents,
- the current and past file management systems and the practice of destruction or removal of documents,

- the record management systems in place,
- the individuals within an agency or minister's office who may be able to assist with the location of documents, and
- the age of the documents.

To identify documents for your request, I arranged for staff likely to be able to identify documents to undertake comprehensive searches of the relevant departmental electronic holdings. In particular, a departmental staff member with responsibility for processing FOI requests interrogated the department's record management system using search terms which were developed with reference to the information provided in the scope of your request. Despite these efforts, no relevant documents were identified.

Having regard to the above, I am satisfied that reasonable steps to locate the documents to which you have sought access were undertaken. I am also satisfied that the documents do not exist within the department's records holdings. I have therefore decided to refuse access pursuant to section 24A of the FOI Act.

Additional information

As the officer responsible for the department's FOI casework area, I confirm that it is departmental policy not to release junior officers' names and contact details and that this practice is consistent with the FOI Act. I note that the department, in its acknowledgement correspondence to applicants, provides an opportunity for the person making an FOI request to seek these particular details, should they wish to do so. These details would then be considered, together with the other material in the documents, within scope of the request pursuant to the provisions of the FOI Act and the Guidelines. Whether the details are ultimately released would be a matter for the decision maker in each particular case, who may be required to consider whether disclosure of the information would be in the public interest.

Your review rights under the FOI Act are set out at **Attachment A** to this letter.

If you wish to discuss this decision, the FOI case officer for this matter is Euphrasia, who can be reached on (02) 6141 6666 or by email to foi@ag.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Antony Catt
Acting Assistant Secretary
Strategy and Governance Branch

Attachments

Attachment A: Review rights



Attachment A - FOI Review rights

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Attorney-General's Department (the department), you may apply for internal review or Information Commissioner review of the decision.

The department encourages applicants to consider seeking internal review as a first step as it may provide a more rapid resolution of your concerns.

Internal review

Under section 54 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act), applications for internal review must be made in writing within 30 days of the date of the decision letter, and be lodged in one of the following ways:

email: foi@ag.gov.au

post: Freedom of Information and Privacy Section
Strategy and Governance Branch
Attorney-General's Department
3-5 National Circuit BARTON ACT 2600

An officer of the department other than the officer who made the original decision will complete the internal review within 30 days of receipt of your request.

Providing reasons you believe internal review of the decision is necessary will facilitate the completion of the internal review.

Information Commissioner review

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

online: https://forms.business.gov.au/smartforms/servlet/SmartForm.html?formCode=ICR_10

email: foidr@oaic.gov.au

post: GPO Box 5218 Sydney NSW 2001

More information about Information Commissioner review is available on the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner website. Go to <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/reviews-and-complaints/information-commissioner-review/>.