

17 May 2021

Ginger Meany

By email: foi+request-7256-d5646a25@righttoknow.org.au

Dear Ginger Meany

Freedom of Information request — Notification of Decision

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 April 2021, in which you requested access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) to documents held by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with a decision on your request.

Scope of your request

You have requested access to documents about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Specifically, you requested access to:

“...information about the amounts paid to expert witnesses engaged by the NDIA for the purpose of assessment of participants, preparation of reports and attendance at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal from 2018 to December 2020.”

Decision on access to documents

I am authorised to make decisions under the FOI Act. My decision on your request and the reasons for my decision are set out below.

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.

In reaching my decision, I took into account:

- your correspondence outlining the particulars of your request;
- the FOI Act;
- the FOI Guidelines;
- relevant case law and decisions concerning the operation of the FOI Act; and
- consultation with relevant officers of the NDIA.

Reasons for decisions

Refuse a request for access (section 24A)

Section 24A of the FOI Act provides that an agency 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 cannot be found or does not exist.

We have conducted searches of the NDIA's documents management systems and made enquiries with NDIA staff. These enquiries have revealed that the NDIA is not in possession of documents matching the scope of your request. This is because the NDIA's reporting

systems do not have data at the level of granularity required to answer your request for information.

In processing your request I have considered if it would be reasonable to create a document containing the information you have requested as outlined in section 17 of the FOI Act. I have concluded that it is not reasonably practicable to do so.

I have consulted with relevant business areas and determined that compiling information would constitute an unreasonable diversion of resources. Data related to a summary of payments made to expert witnesses is not held within a single repository. Significant manual work would have to be undertaken to investigate cases within the time period to determine whether expert witnesses were engaged and then collate payment data. As such, I am satisfied the obligation to create a document under section 17(1) does not apply to your request.

I am satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to locate the documents you have requested and that the documents do not exist. I have therefore decided to refuse access to your request in accordance with section 24A(1)(b)(ii) of the FOI Act.

Rights of review

Your rights to seek a review of my decision, or lodge a complaint, are set out at **Attachment A**.

Should you have any enquiries concerning this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at foi@ndis.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Ausilia Woodhead
Assistant Director
Parliamentary, Ministerial & FOI Branch
Government Division

Your review rights

Internal Review

The FOI Act gives you the right to apply for an internal review of this decision. The review will be conducted by a different person to the person who made the original decision.

If you wish to seek an internal review of the decision, you must apply for the review, in writing, within 30 days of receipt of this letter.

No particular form is required for an application for internal review, but to assist the review process, you should clearly outline your grounds for review (that is, the reasons why you disagree with the decision). Applications for internal review can be lodged by email to foi@ndis.gov.au or sent by post to:

Freedom of Information Section
Parliamentary, Ministerial & FOI Branch
Government Division
National Disability Insurance Agency
GPO Box 700
Canberra ACT 2601

Review by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

The FOI Act also gives you the right to apply to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) to seek a review of this decision.

If you wish to have the decision reviewed by the OAIC, you may apply for the review, in writing, or by using the online merits review form available on the OAIC's website at www.oaic.gov.au, within 60 days of receipt of this letter.

Applications for review can be lodged with the OAIC in the following ways:

Online: www.oaic.gov.au
Post: GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001
Email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au
Phone: 1300 363 992 (local call charge)

Complaints to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner or the Commonwealth Ombudsman

You may complain to either the Commonwealth Ombudsman or the OAIC about actions taken by the NDIA in relation to your request. The Ombudsman will consult with the OAIC before investigating a complaint about the handling of an FOI request.

Your complaint to the OAIC can be directed to the contact details identified above. Your complaint to the Ombudsman can be directed to:

Phone: 1300 362 072 (local call charge)
Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

Your complaint should be in writing and should set out the grounds on which it is considered that the actions taken in relation to the request should be investigated Division.