



16 September 2022

Ms Regina Jefferies
BY EMAIL: foi+request-9117-ad8a8286@righttoknow.org.au

In reply please quote:

FOI Request: FA 22/07/00531
File Number: OBJ2022/18685

Dear Ms Jefferies

Freedom of Information (FOI) request – Access Decision

On 12 July 2022, the Department of Home Affairs (the Department) received a request for access to documents under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act).

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with a decision on your request for access under the FOI Act.

1 Scope of request

You have requested access to the following documents:

I respectfully request any current, or previous versions, of the Border Measures On-boarding guide (ADD2021/567855) under FOI.

2 Authority to make decision

I am an officer authorised under section 23 of the FOI Act to make decisions in respect of requests to access documents or to amend or annotate records.

3 Relevant material

In reaching my decision I referred to the following:

- the terms of your request
- the documents relevant to the request
- the FOI Act
- Guidelines published by the Office of the Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (the FOI Guidelines)
- advice from departmental officers with responsibility for matters relating to the documents to which you sought access

4 Documents in scope of request

The Department has identified eight documents as falling within the scope of your request. These documents were in the possession of the Department on 12 July 2022 when your request was received.

5 Decision

The decision in relation to the documents in the possession of the Department which fall within the scope of your request is as follows:

- Release eight documents in part with deletions

6 Reasons for Decision

Detailed reasons for my decision are set out below.

Where the schedule of documents indicates an exemption claim has been applied to a document or part of document, my findings of fact and reasons for deciding that the exemption provision applies to that information are set out below.

6.1 Section 22 of the FOI Act – irrelevant to request

Section 22 of the FOI Act provides that if giving access to a document would disclose information that would reasonably be regarded as irrelevant to the request, it is possible for the Department to prepare an edited copy of the document, modified by deletions, ensuring that the edited copy would not disclose any information that would reasonably be regarded as irrelevant to the request.

On 13 July 2022 the Department advised you that its policy is to exclude the personal details of officers not in the Senior Executive Service (SES), as well as the mobile and work telephone numbers of SES staff, contained in documents that fall within scope of an FOI request.

I have decided that parts of documents marked ‘s22(1)(a)(ii)’ would disclose information that could reasonably be regarded as irrelevant to your request. I have prepared an edited copy of the documents, with the irrelevant material deleted pursuant to section 22(1)(a)(ii) of the FOI Act.

The remainder of the documents have been considered for release to you as they are relevant to your request.

6.2 Section 22 of the FOI Act – deletion of exempt material

I have decided to prepare an edited copy of the documents. The grounds upon which the edited copies of these documents have been prepared are set out in the Schedule of Documents.

6.3 Section 47E of the FOI Act – Operations of Agencies

Section 47E(d) of the FOI Act provides that documents are conditionally exempt if disclosure would, or could reasonably be expected to, have a substantial adverse effect on the proper and efficient conduct of the operations of an agency.

I consider that the disclosure of the parts of documents marked 's47E(d)' would, or could reasonably be expected to, have a substantial adverse effect on the proper and efficient conduct of the operations of the Department.

Managing the security and integrity of Australia's borders is integral to the operations of the Department. Any prejudice to the effectiveness of the operational methods and procedures used in undertaking that role would result in a substantial adverse effect on the operations of the Department.

Any disclosure resulting in the prejudice of the effectiveness of the Department's operational methods and procedures would result in the need for this Department, and potentially its law enforcement partners, to change those methods and/or procedures to avoid jeopardising their future effectiveness.

Some information marked 's47E(d)' consists of references to certain systems that record and manage sensitive information used by the Department in its border management operations. Disclosing this information could reasonably be expected to provide insights into the systems' scope and capacities, enabling parties with an interest in subverting and evading the Department's lawful and proper operations to do so. Disclosure of this operational information could reasonably be expected to compromise the effectiveness of these operations.

Some information marked 's47E(d)' consists of operational email addresses used by this Department. These email addresses are not otherwise publicly available, and disclosure of this information could reasonably be expected to result in potential vexatious communication and public inquiries which these operational areas are not resourced to manage. The Department has established channels of communication for members of the public into the Department, and I consider there is no public interest in disclosing these operational contact details. Given the operational focus of those business areas, such a diversion of the resources of that business area could reasonably be expected to have a substantial adverse effect on the proper and efficient conduct of the operations of this Department and its partner agencies.

I have decided that parts of the documents are conditionally exempt under section 47E(d) of the FOI Act. Access to a conditionally exempt document must generally be given unless it would be contrary to the public interest to do so. I have turned my mind to whether disclosure of the information would be contrary to the public interest, and have included my reasoning in that regard at paragraph 6.4 below.

6.4 The public interest – section 11A of the FOI Act

As I have decided that parts of the documents are conditionally exempt, I am now required to consider whether access to the conditionally exempt information would be contrary to the public interest (section 11A of the FOI Act).

A part of a document which is conditionally exempt must also meet the public interest test in section 11A(5) before an exemption may be claimed in respect of that part.

In summary, the test is whether access to the conditionally exempt part of the document would be, on balance, contrary to the public interest.

In applying this test, I have noted the objects of the FOI Act and the importance of the other factors listed in section 11B(3) of the FOI Act, being whether access to the document would do any of the following:

- (a) *promote the objects of this Act (including all the matters set out in sections 3 and 3A)*
- (b) *inform debate on a matter of public importance*
- (c) *promote effective oversight of public expenditure*
- (d) *allow a person to access his or her own personal information.*

Having regard to the above I am satisfied that:

- Access to the documents would promote the objects of the FOI Act.
- The subject matter of the documents does not seem to have a general characteristic of public importance. The matter has a limited scope and, in my view, would be of interest to a very narrow section of the public.
- No insights into public expenditure will be provided through examination of the documents.
- You do not require access to the documents in order to access your own personal information.

I have also considered the following factors that weigh against the release of the conditionally exempt information in the documents:

- Disclosure of the parts of the documents that are conditionally exempt under section 47E(d) of the FOI Act could reasonably be expected to prejudice the Department's lawful and proper functions, including law enforcement functions, and as a result the Department's ability to manage and protect Australia's borders. I consider there to be a strong public interest in ensuring that the ability of the Department to conduct its lawful and proper functions is not compromised or prejudiced in any way. I consider that this would be contrary to the public interest and that this factor weighs strongly against disclosure.
- Disclosure of the operational email addresses which are conditionally exempt under section 47E(d) of the FOI Act would have a substantial adverse effect on the ability of the relevant operational areas to conduct their business as usual. The Department has established avenues in place for members of the public to contact when they have queries, complaints or comments. I consider that there is a strong public interest in ensuring public feedback is filtered through these available channels so that operational areas within the Department are able to carry out their functions in an effective manner. I consider that this would be contrary to the public interest and that this factor weighs strongly against disclosure of the exempt information.

I have also had regard to section 11B(4) which sets out the factors which are irrelevant to my decision, which are:

- a) *access to the document could result in embarrassment to the Commonwealth Government, or cause a loss of confidence in the Commonwealth Government*
- b) *access to the document could result in any person misinterpreting or misunderstanding the document*
- c) *the author of the document was (or is) of high seniority in the agency to which the request for access to the document was made*
- d) *access to the document could result in confusion or unnecessary debate.*

I have not taken into account any of those factors in this decision.

Upon balancing all of the above relevant public interest considerations, I have concluded that the disclosure of the conditionally exempt information in the documents would be contrary to the public interest and it is therefore exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act.

7 Legislation

A copy of the FOI Act is available at <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A02562>. If you are unable to access the legislation through this website, please contact our office for a copy.

8 Your Review Rights

Review by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

You may apply directly to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) for a review of this decision. You must apply in writing within 60 days of this notice. For further information about review rights and how to submit a request for a review to the OAIC, please see <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/reviews-and-complaints/information-commissioner-review/>.

9 Making a Complaint

You may complain to the Australian Information Commissioner about action taken by the Department in relation to your request.

Your enquiries to the Australian Information Commissioner can be directed to:

Phone 1300 363 992 (local call charge)
Email enquiries@oaic.gov.au

There is no particular form required to make a complaint to the Australian Information Commissioner. The request should be in writing and should set out the grounds on which it is considered that the action taken in relation to the request should be investigated and identify the Department of Home Affairs as the relevant agency.

10 Contacting the FOI Section

Should you wish to discuss this decision, please do not hesitate to contact the FOI Section at foi@homeaffairs.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

[*Signed electronically*]

Guy
Position no. 60103474
Authorised Decision Maker
Department of Home Affairs

ATTACHMENT A

**SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS
REQUEST UNDER FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982**

FOI request: FA 22/07/00531

File Number: OBJ2022/18685

No.	Date of document	No. of pages	Description	Decision on release	
1.	February 2021	10	COVID-19 Border Measures Branch - On-Boarding Guide – February 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
2.	February 2021	10	COVID-19 Border Measures Branch - On-Boarding Guide - February 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
3.	February 2021	10	COVID-19 Border Measures Branch - On-Boarding Guide - February 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
4.	March 2021	10	COVID-19 Border Measures Branch - On-Boarding Guide – March 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
5.	August 2021	11	COVID-19 Border Measures Operations - On-Boarding Guide – August 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
6.	September 2021	12	Travel Exemptions - On-Boarding Guide – September 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
7.	September 2021	12	Travel Exemptions - On-Boarding Guide – September 2021	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)
8.	May 2022	12	Travel Exemptions - On-Boarding Guide – May 2022	Exempt in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47E(d)