



12 January 2018

In reply please quote:

FOI Request: FA 17/12/00761

File Number: ADF2017/135932

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information (FOI) request - Access Decision

On 19 December 2017, the former Department of Immigration and Border Protection received a request for access to documents under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act).

On 20 December 2017 the Home Affairs Portfolio, including the Department of Home Affairs, was formally established. The Department of Home Affairs includes the entirety of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, the Australian Border Force and the Office of Transport Security from within the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development. It also includes specific functions from the Attorney-General's Department, the Department of Social Services and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

As such a decision has now been made on your request by the Department of Home Affairs (the Department).

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:

- [1] *A non-redacted copy of the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) Programme Operational Procedures Manual (Version 5) April 2017;*
- [2] *Most recent version of the SRSS Programme Debt agreement;*
- [3] *Any additional documents that refer to or implement the SRSS cancellation policy as a result of transferring funds overseas*

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 relevant business areas
- the Department's guidance material on the FOI Act

4 Documents in scope of request

For part 1 of your request the Department has identified one document as falling within the scope of your request. This document was in the possession of the Department on 19 December 2017 when your request was received.

The Department has undertaken searches to identify any documents that would be relevant to Parts 2 and 3 of your request. After consulting with the relevant business area I am satisfied that no documents (electronic or hard copy) are in possession of the Department that fall within the scope of this part of your request. Under s.17(1) of the FOI Act, where a discrete document does not exist, the agency is to consider whether a document addressing the request could be produced through the use of a computer or other equipment that is ordinarily available to the agency for retrieving or collating stored information. Advice from the relevant business area is that the data sought for Parts 2 and 3 of your request are not readily producible from systems. I am therefore satisfied that this information does not exist in discrete documents and cannot be readily produced. Access to the information you have requested is therefore refused under s.24A(1) of the FOI Act.

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 one document in part with exemptions applied

5.1 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 6 November 2017, 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 therefore decided that parts of document marked 's22(1)(a)(ii)' would disclose information that could reasonably be regarded as irrelevant to your request, and have therefore prepared an edited copy of the document, with the irrelevant material deleted pursuant to section 22(1)(a)(ii) of the FOI Act.

The remainder of the document has been considered for release to you as it is relevant to your request.

6 Reasons for Decision

Detailed reasons for my decision are set out below.

6.1 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 the document 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.

I consider the Department's operations in respect to maintaining the integrity of the management of the SRSS program, would likely be adversely affected. The release of the material marked 's47E(d)' in the documents could, therefore, result in a negative impact on the effectiveness of SRSS Service Providers and the Department in maintaining the management of the SRSS Program.

In addition, 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.

Accordingly, I have decided that material within the document is 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 below.

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

As I have decided that parts of the document is 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 document would promote the objects of the FOI Act.
- I consider that the subject matter of the document does not, in itself, seem to have the character of public importance. The matter has a very limited scope and, in my view, would be of interest to a very narrow section of the public.
- I consider that no insights into public expenditure will be provided through examination of the document.
- I am satisfied that you do not require access to the document in order to access your own personal information.

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

- It is not in the public interest for the Department to publicly release any operational methods and procedures that would have a substantial adverse effect on the operations of the agency.
- It is not in the public interest to release operational or internal email addresses, as this could result in the operational areas not being able to perform their operational duties
- I consider the ability of SRSS Service Providers and the Department to maintain and manage the SRSS Program to be strongly in the public interest.

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 is not in the public interest and therefore exempt from disclosure under the FOI Act.

7 Legislation

A copy of the FOI Act is available at <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00251>.

8 Your Review Rights

Internal Review

If you disagree with this decision, you have the right to apply for an internal review by the Department of this decision. Any request for internal review must be provided to the Department within 30 days of you being notified of the decision. Where possible please attach reasons why you believe a review of the decision is necessary. The internal review will be carried out by an officer other than the original decision maker and the Department must make a review decision within 30 days.

Applications for review should be sent to:

By email to: foi.reviews@homeaffairs.gov.au
OR

By mail to:
Freedom of Information Section
Department of Immigration and Border Protection
PO Box 25
BELCONNEN ACT 2617

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 Fact Sheet 12 "Freedom of information – Your review rights", available online at <http://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/foi-reviews>.

9 Making a Complaint

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

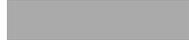
Your enquiries to the Australian Information Commissioner can be directed to:
Phone 1300 363 992 (local call charge)
Email enquiries@oaic.gov.au

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 Immigration and Border Protection 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.

(signed electronically)


FOI Officer | Freedom of Information Section
FOI, Privacy and Records Management Branch
Corporate Services Division
Department of Home Affairs