



10 October 2024

Oliver Smith

**BY EMAIL:** [foi+request-11467-163c9536@righttoknow.org.au](mailto:foi+request-11467-163c9536@righttoknow.org.au)

**In reply please quote:**

FOI Request: FA 24/05/01840

File Number: FA24/05/01840

Dear Oliver Smith

**Freedom of Information (FOI) request – Decision**

On 30 May 2024, 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:

*Original Scope 30/05*

*Under the FOI Act, I seek all documentation, notes, memos, correspondence etc produced in the preparation for the document entitled "Ministerial Direction on character related visa decision making - New Primary Consideration" with PDMS Ref. Number: MS22-002716 which can be found at: <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/foi/files/2024/fa-231100733-document-released.PDF>*

You revised the scope of your request and the final revised scope dated 18 June 2024 is as follows:

*"Documentation regarding the impact of Ministerial Direction 99 on the revocation of non-citizen visa holders who had been found guilty of the following criminal offences: 'murder', 'manslaughter with intent to murder' or 'grievous bodily harm with intent to murder'."*

**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
- advice from other Commonwealth Departments

### 4 Documents in scope of request

The Department has identified two documents as falling within the scope of your request. These documents were in the possession of the Department on 30 May 2024 when your request was received.

**Attachment A** is a schedule which describes the relevant documents and sets out my decision in relation to each of them.

### 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 two documents in part with exemptions/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 20 June 2024, 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 47C of the FOI Act – Deliberative Processes

Section 47C of the FOI Act provides that a document is conditionally exempt if its disclosure would disclose deliberative matter relating to the deliberative processes involved in the functions of the Department.

'*Deliberative matter*' includes opinion, advice or recommendation obtained, prepared or recorded, or consultation or deliberation that has taken place, in the deliberative processes of an agency.

'*Deliberative processes*' generally involves "*the process of weighing up or evaluating competing arguments or considerations*"<sup>1</sup> and the '*thinking processes –the process of reflection, for example, upon the wisdom and expediency of a proposal, a particular decision or a course of action.*'<sup>2</sup>

Document 2 contains advice, opinions and recommendations prepared or recorded in the course of, or for the purposes of, the deliberative processes involved in the functions of Department. I am satisfied that this deliberative matter relates to a process that was undertaken within government to consider whether and how to make or implement a decision, revise or prepare a policy, administer or review a program, or some similar activity.<sup>3</sup>

Disclosure of this deliberative information could reasonably be expected to inhibit full and frank advice from the Department to its Minister, and, as a result, full consideration by the Government on any potential future consideration of amendments to legislation. Disclosure of some deliberative information, on which a decision has not yet been taken, could also reasonably be expected to prejudice consultations with relevant stakeholders.

Section 47C(2) provides that "deliberative matter" does not include purely factual material am satisfied that the deliberative material is not purely factual in nature.

I am further satisfied that the factors set out in subsection (3) do not apply in this instance.

I have decided that the information is conditionally exempt under section 47C 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dreyfus and Secretary Attorney-General's Department (Freedom of information)* [2015] AATA 962 [18]

<sup>2</sup> *JE Waterford and Department of Treasury (No 2)* [1984] AATA 67

<sup>3</sup> *Dreyfus and Secretary Attorney-General's Department (Freedom of information)* [2015] AATA 962



### **6.3 Section 34 – Cabinet documents**

Section 34(1) of the FOI Act permits exemption of a document if both of the following are satisfied:

- (1) A document is an exempt document if:
  - (a) both of the following are satisfied:
    - (i) it has been submitted to the Cabinet for its consideration, or is or was proposed by a Minister to be so submitted;
    - (ii) it was brought into existence for the dominant purpose of submission for consideration by the Cabinet; or
  - (b) it is an official record of the Cabinet; or
  - (c) it was brought into existence for the dominant purpose of briefing a Minister on a document to which paragraph (a) applies; or
  - (d) it is a draft of a document to which paragraph (a), (b) or (c) applies.

Section 34(2) of the FOI Act exempts a document that is a copy or part of or an extract of a document that is itself exempt from disclosure under section 34(1) of the Act. Section 34(2) of the FOI Act exempts a document that is a copy or part of or an extract of a document that is itself exempt from disclosure under section 34(1) of the Act.

Therefore, in consultation with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, I have decided that the information redacted and marked 's34(2)' is exempt from disclosure under section 34(2) of the FOI Act.

Section 34(3) exempts documents to the extent that disclosure would reveal a Cabinet deliberation or decision, unless the existence of the deliberation or decision has been officially disclosed. Deliberation has been interpreted as active debate in Parliament or its weighing up of alternatives, with a view to reaching a decision on a matter.

I find that the information in the document redacted and marked 's34(3)' is exempted under section 34(3) as it would, if disclosed, reveal deliberations of the Cabinet.

### **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 parts of document 2 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.
- The subject matter of the document may 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 conditionally exempt information under section 47C could reasonably be expected to prejudice the ability of the Department to manage future review processes, inquiries and investigations. I consider that the disclosure of this type of deliberative material may hinder the future cooperation or participation in those processes, and that there is a real public interest in this agency being able to undertake effective reviews, investigations and inquiries in the future. I consider that this would be contrary to the public interest and that this factor weighs strongly against disclosure.
- A Ministerial brief plays an important role in the relationship between a Department and its Minister. Its purpose is to provide frank and honest advice. It is inherently confidential between the Department and its Minister and the preparation of a Ministerial brief is essentially intended for the audience of that Minister alone. A precedent of public disclosure of advice given as a part of a Ministerial brief would result in:
  - concerns existing in the open and honest nature of advice being provided which may then hinder future deliberations and decision making processes for the Department and the Government as a whole and
  - future Ministerial Submissions being prepared with a different audience in mind, which would compromise the quality of the advice being prepared for the Minister.
- I consider that the public interest in protecting the process of the provision of free and honest confidential advice by a Department to its Minister has, on balance, more weight, than the public interest that might exist in disclosing the deliberative matter. Endangering the proper working relationship that a Department has with its Minister and its ability to provide its Minister with honest advice confidentially would be contrary to 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 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**

### ***Internal review***

You do not have the right to seek an internal review of this decision. This is because section 54E(b) of the FOI Act provides that, when an agency is deemed to have refused an FOI request under section 15AC of the FOI Act, the applicant does not have the right to seek an internal review of the deemed decision.

The Department was deemed to have refused your request under section 15AC of the FOI Act because it did not make this decision within the statutory timeframes for the request.

While the Department has now made a substantive decision on your request, section 15AC of the FOI Act continues to apply to your request, which means that any request you make for internal review will be invalid.

### ***Information Commissioner Review***

You can instead request the Australian Information Commissioner to review this decision. If you want to request an Information Commissioner review, you must make your request to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) within 60 days of being notified of this decision.

You can apply for an Information Commissioner review at: [Information Commissioner review application form on the OAIC website](#).

If you have already applied for an Information Commissioner review, there is no need to make a new review request. The OAIC will contact you shortly to give you an opportunity to advise whether you wish the review to continue, and to provide your reasons for continuing the review.

You can find more information about Information Commissioner reviews [on the OAIC website](#).

## 9 Making a complaint

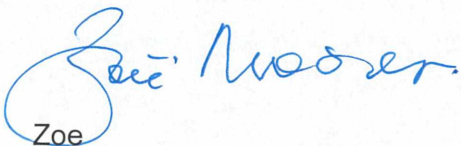
You may make a complaint to the Australian Information Commissioner if you have concerns about how the Department has handled your request under the FOI Act. This is a separate process to the process of requesting a review of the decision as indicated above.

You can make an FOI complaint to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) at: [FOI Complaint Form on the OAIC website](#).

## 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](mailto:foi@homeaffairs.gov.au).

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Zoe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "Z".

Zoe  
Position number 60001672  
Authorised Decision Maker  
Department of Home Affairs

ATTACHMENT A

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

FOI request: FA 24/05/01840

File Number: FA24/05/01840

No	No. of pages	Description	Decision on release	
1.	4	Copy of MD99 Desktop exercise	Exempt in part	s. 22(1)(a)(ii)
2.	4	MB22-001127 Background Brief on Ministerial Direction 99	Exempt in part	s.34(2); s. 34(3); s. 47C(1); s. 22(1)(a)(ii)