



3 October 2024

Oliver Smith

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In reply please quote:

FOI Request: FA 24/09/00458

File Number: FA24/09/00458

Dear Oliver Smith

Freedom of Information (FOI) request – Decision

On 9 September 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:

Under the FOI Act, please provide a copy of the brief titled “Final closure of the S/c 408 Pandemic Event Visa” sent to the Minister for Immigration’s office on 22/01/2024 with the PDR number: MS24-000086.

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 (2) documents as falling within the scope of your request. These documents were in the possession of the Department on 9 September 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 falls within the scope of your request is as follows:

- Release one document in part
- Exempt one document in full from disclosure

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 9 September 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 document 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 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.

6.2 Section 34 – Cabinet Documents

Section 34(3) exempts a document 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.

A strong Cabinet system is fundamental to well-informed decision-making and policy development by the Government. Cabinet is a forum in which Ministers, while working towards a collective position, are able to discuss proposals, options and views with complete freedom. The maintenance of frank and collegiate discussion is dependent upon Cabinet deliberations being treated confidentially.

I have sought advice from a Commonwealth agency, and on the basis of this advice, I find that the material redacted and marked 's34(3)' in Document 1 contains information which, if disclosed, would reveal Cabinet deliberations and information that has not, to date, been officially disclosed.

Accordingly, I have decided that this information is exempt under section 34(3) of the FOI Act.

6.3 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*"¹ 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.*'²

Ministerial Submission MS24-000086 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 the Department, being the final closure of the Australian Government endorsed events (COVID-19 Pandemic event) subclass 408 Visa.

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.³

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. I 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.

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

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

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

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.

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 have the character of public importance and that there may be broad public interest in the documents.
- 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:

- A Ministerial Submission 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 Submission is essentially intended for the audience of that Minister alone. A precedent of public disclosure of advice given as a part of a Ministerial Submission 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

If you disagree with this decision, you have the right to apply for either an internal review or an Information Commissioner review of the decision.

Internal Review

If you want the Department to review this decision, you must make your internal review request within 30 days of being notified of this decision.

When making your internal review request, please provide the Department with the reasons why you consider this decision should be changed.

You can send your internal review request to:

Email: foi.reviews@homeaffairs.gov.au

Or

Postal mail:
Freedom of Information
Department of Home Affairs
GPO Box 241 MELBOURNE VIC 3001

The internal review will be carried out by an officer who is more senior than the original decision maker. The Department must make its decision on the review within 30 days of receiving your request for internal review.

Information Commissioner Review

If you want the Australian Information Commissioner to review this decision, 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 using the [Information Commissioner Review application form on the OAIC website](#).

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.

Yours sincerely



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Immigration Group
Department of Home Affairs
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ATTACHMENT A

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

FOI request: FA 24/09/00458

File Number: FA24/09/00458

No.	Date of document	No. of pages	Description	Decision on release	
1.	19 January 2024	5	MS24-000086 - Final closure of the Australian Government endorsed events (COVID-19 Pandemic event) subclass 408 Visa	Exempt in Full	s.22(1)(a)(ii) s.34(3) s.47(C)
1.1	16 January 2024	6	Attachment A – Talking Points - Final closure Pandemic Event visa	Exempt in Part	s.22(1)(a)(ii)