



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry**

Ref: LEX- 32836

Nosey Rosey  
Right to Know

Via email: [foi+request-12594-ff22f85e@righttoknow.org.au](mailto:foi+request-12594-ff22f85e@righttoknow.org.au)

Dear Nosey Rosey

### **Decision on your Freedom of Information request**

I refer to your request, received by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (**department**) on 14 December 2024 for access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) (**FOI Act**) to the following documents:

I seek access to any and all documents, records, data, and supporting material held by [Name of Agency] concerning the sharing of personal information originating from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) over the last ten years. This includes any data transfers from or to the DVA, whether they were one-off exchanges or ongoing, systematic transfers of DVA client information, including personal, medical, financial, or service-related details concerning veterans or their dependents.

I am interested in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of what DVA client information, DAFF has received or accessed and for what purposes. Specifically, I request:

All records of data sharing arrangements between DVA and DAFF, including but not limited to memoranda of understanding, service-level agreements, emails, letters, meeting minutes, file transfer logs, internal reports, and instructions that outline what data was shared, when it was shared, and the format or system used for the transfer.

Any policies, procedures, guidelines, or frameworks that govern how DAFF requests, obtains, stores, handles, or uses DVA client information. This includes documents that detail the criteria for approving access to such data, any consent or authorization processes, security controls, and retention or destruction policies.

Copies of any ethics committee approvals, privacy impact assessments, internal review board decisions, or other documents that reflect deliberations or authorizations for obtaining DVA client information. This includes records that show the agency considered the ethical, legal, or privacy implications of receiving or using DVA client data.

Documents that outline the intended uses or practical applications of the DVA client data, such as project proposals, business cases, internal strategy papers, or briefings that explain why DAFF sought access to this information, how it was intended to be integrated into the agency's operations, and any expected outcomes or benefits.

A representative sample (in a suitably de-identified or redacted form) of the data or data fields received, so long as providing this sample does not breach any exemption under

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the FOI Act. The purpose is to understand the nature and granularity of the information shared, without disclosing identifiable personal details.'

On 17 December 2024 and 30 December 2024, you provided clarifications regarding your request (as set out in **Attachment A**). I considered these clarifications when making my decision.

### My decision

I have decided to refuse your request for access to documents 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.

Please see **Attachment A** for the reasons for my decision.

### You can ask for a review of my decision

If you wish to seek an internal review, you must apply to the department within **30 days** after the day you are notified of this decision. An application for internal review must be made in writing by post to the FOI Officer or email to [foi@aff.gov.au](mailto:foi@aff.gov.au).

Alternatively, you may apply directly to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (**OAIC**) to review my decision. An application for review by the Information Commissioner must be made in writing within **60 days** after the day you are notified of this decision. You may apply for an OAIC review through the following [link](#). You can also make a [complaint](#) to the Information Commissioner if you have concerns about how the department handled your request.

You can find information about requesting a review, making a complaint, and other information about FOI on the OAIC website [www.oaic.gov.au](http://www.oaic.gov.au) or phone the OAIC on 1300 363 992.

### Further assistance

If you have any questions, please email [foi@aff.gov.au](mailto:foi@aff.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



Mark Sawade  
First Assistant Secretary  
Digital Business Division  
10 January 2025

## REASONS FOR DECISION

### What you have requested

On 14 December 2024 you made a request under the FOI Act for the following documents:

'I seek access to any and all documents, records, data, and supporting material held by [Name of Agency] concerning the sharing of personal information originating from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) over the last ten years. This includes any data transfers from or to the DVA, whether they were one-off exchanges or ongoing, systematic transfers of DVA client information, including personal, medical, financial, or service-related details concerning veterans or their dependents.

I am interested in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of what DVA client information, DAFF has received or accessed and for what purposes. Specifically, I request:

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Any policies, procedures, guidelines, or frameworks that govern how DAFF requests, obtains, stores, handles, or uses DVA client information. This includes documents that detail the criteria for approving access to such data, any consent or authorization processes, security controls, and retention or destruction policies.

Copies of any ethics committee approvals, privacy impact assessments, internal review board decisions, or other documents that reflect deliberations or authorizations for obtaining DVA client information. This includes records that show the agency considered the ethical, legal, or privacy implications of receiving or using DVA client data.

Documents that outline the intended uses or practical applications of the DVA client data, such as project proposals, business cases, internal strategy papers, or briefings that explain why DAFF sought access to this information, how it was intended to be integrated into the agency's operations, and any expected outcomes or benefits.

A representative sample (in a suitably de-identified or redacted form) of the data or data fields received, so long as providing this sample does not breach any exemption under the FOI Act. The purpose is to understand the nature and granularity of the information shared, without disclosing identifiable personal details.'

On 17 December 2024 the department notified you that we do not consider your email without further information being provided to be a valid request, as it did not identify the name of the agency. On the same day, you clarified that the request was directed to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry:

On 23 December 2024, the department wrote to you to advise the department had conducted preliminary searches relating to your request and the department's Enterprise Data Branch is not aware of any data sharing agreements with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and personal information from the Department of Veterans' Affairs is not included in the department's most recent Personal Information Holdings. As such, given the large period of time, and that from preliminary searches it appears that there may not be any documents in the scope of your request, the department asked you to provide further clarification around documents you

believe may be in the department's possession (for example, a particular program between the two agencies and/or a more specific timeframe).

On 30 December 2024 you provided the following clarification:

**'Clarification of Scope**

My request pertains to any systematic or broad data-sharing arrangements involving personal information originating from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) that may have occurred over the last ten years. Specifically:

**Programs or Contexts**

Please focus on any collaborative programs, projects, or initiatives between DAFF and DVA involving data sharing. For example, programs that support veterans in employment or agricultural initiatives.

**Relevant Documents**

Memoranda of understanding (MOUs), service-level agreements (SLAs), or other formal agreements relating to data sharing.

Policies, procedures, or guidelines outlining how DVA data is accessed, stored, or used by DAFF.

Privacy impact assessments, internal reviews, or documents discussing the legal or ethical considerations of handling DVA data.

Any reports or strategy documents explaining the purpose of DVA data use in DAFF operations.

**Exclusions**

I do not seek access to individual complaint files or other records that involve direct interactions with veterans unless they are part of a broader data-sharing arrangement or project.

**Specific Timeframe**

While my original request covers the last ten years, if this timeframe is too broad, I am willing to narrow it to the past five years (2019–2024).

**Follow-Up Based on Preliminary Searches**

While DAFF's preliminary searches indicate there are no known data-sharing agreements with DVA, I request that your searches include:

- Historical agreements or discontinued programs that may have involved data sharing with DVA.
- Any correspondence or records from DAFF's Enterprise Data Branch or other divisions discussing DVA-related data-sharing matters.

If no relevant documents exist, I would appreciate a formal decision stating this, as required under section 26 of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth).'

**What I took into account**

In reaching my decision, I took into account:

- your original request received by the department on 14 December 2024 and the subsequent correspondence on 17 December 2024 and 30 December 2024;

- information about:
  - the nature of the documents; and
  - the department's operating environment and functions;
- guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (**Guidelines**); and
- the FOI Act.

### **Reasons for my decision**

I am authorised to make decisions under section 23(1) of the FOI Act.

#### Section 24A of the FOI Act

Section 24A of the FOI Act provides that:

- (1) An agency or Minister may refuse a request for access to a document if:
  - (a) all reasonable steps have been taken to find the document; and
  - (b) the agency or Minister is satisfied that the document:
    - (i) is in the agency's or Minister's possession but cannot be found; or
    - (ii) does not exist.

Searches were undertaken by both the Digital Business Division and People Strategy & Safety Branch.

The Digital Business Division conducted searches both on receiving your original request and after receiving your clarification of 30 December 2024. This included extensive title word and document content searches in the department's record management systems including Content Manager. No documents in scope of the request were identified.

Searches were also undertaken by People Strategy & Safety Branch relating to the 'Programs and Contexts' aspect of your request. This Branch advised that around the year of 2019 the department had expressed interest in a Veterans Workforce Experience Program, however participation in the Program did not eventuate. The department did not enter into any contracts or MOU with DVA, or receive access to veteran information/personal details. As such, this branch also did not locate any documents.

On the basis of these searches, I am satisfied, in accordance with section 24A of the FOI Act, that all reasonable steps have been taken to find the documents and the documents do not exist.