



1 March 2018

**In reply please quote:**

FOI Request: FA 18/01/00206

File Number: ADF2018/3588

Dear [REDACTED]

**Freedom of Information (FOI) request - Access Decision**

On 4 January 2018, 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:

*All inappropriate detention release decision reports completed by DIBP in 2016 and 2017.*

**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
- the Department's guidance material on the FOI Act

#### **4 Documents in scope of request**

The Department has identified four documents as falling within the scope of your request. These documents were in the possession of the Department on 4 January 2018 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 to release four documents in part with deletions.

#### **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 information on page 58 of the bundle 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.

This information consists of an operational email address used by this Department. This email address is not otherwise publicly available, and disclosure of this information could reasonably be expected to result in potential vexatious communication and public inquiries which this operational area is 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 this operational contact point. Given the operational focus of the business area, 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 this information 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 at paragraph 6.3 below.

##### **6.2 Section 47F of the FOI Act – Personal Privacy**

Section 47F of the FOI Act provides that a document is conditionally exempt if its disclosure under the FOI Act would involve the unreasonable disclosure of personal information of any person. 'Personal information' means information or an opinion about an identified individual, or an individual who is reasonably identifiable, whether the information or opinion is true or not, and whether the information or opinion is recorded in a material form or not (see s 4 of the FOI Act and s 6 of the *Privacy Act 1988*).

I consider that disclosure of the information marked 's47F' in the documents would disclose personal information relating to third parties. The information within the documents would reasonably identify a person and consists of the names, dates of birth, residential location, visa details and other identifying information of private individuals. Whilst some of this information, in isolation, may not explicitly identify the relevant individual, a person with some knowledge about these individuals' personal circumstances may be able to identify them through the accumulation of multiple pieces of information, of which this may make a part.

The FOI Act states that, when deciding whether the disclosure of the personal information would be 'unreasonable', I must have regard to four factors set out in s.47F(2) of the FOI Act. I have therefore considered each of these factors below:

- *the extent to which the information is well known;*
- *whether the person to whom the information relates is known to be (or to have been) associated with the matters dealt with in the document;*
- *the availability of the information from publicly available resources;*
- *any other matters that I consider relevant.*

The information relating to the third parties is not well known and would only be known to a limited group of people with a business need to know. As this information is only known to a limited group of people, the individuals concerned are not generally known to be associated with the matters discussed in the document. This information is not available from publicly accessible sources.

I am satisfied that the disclosure of the information within the documents would involve an unreasonable disclosure of personal information about a number of individuals.

### ***Section 27A – Consultation – documents affecting personal privacy***

Section 27A of the FOI Act provides that if a request is made to the Department for access to a document containing personal information, and the Department considers that that person may reasonably wish to make a contention that the document is conditionally exempt under section 47F, the Department must not decide to give access to the document until the individual (the 'person concerned') has been provided with a reasonable opportunity to make submissions to support an exemption contention.

This section only applies, however, if it is reasonably practical for the Department to conduct that consultation.

In the event that the Department were to consider providing the person concerned with the matters contained within these documents with an opportunity to provide exemption submissions, I regard it as impracticable to do so, due to the number of individuals involved, and the difficulty the Department will have in contacting a number of those individuals.

In this instance, I have formed a view that whilst the individuals concerned may wish to make exemption submissions regarding the protection of their personal privacy, I have decided that disclosure would constitute an unreasonable disclosure of their personal information. I am not therefore deciding to give access to their personal information, and as such there is no requirement for me to undertake any consultation with them (section 27A(3) refers).

I have decided that the information referred to above is conditionally exempt under section 47F 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.

### **6.3 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.
- I consider that the subject matter of the documents 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 documents.
- I am satisfied that you do not require access to the documents in order to access your own personal information.

Disclosure of all aspects of the documents would not provide a person with sufficient information to assess the rigour or efficiencies of internal decision making processes within the Department, promote scrutiny of government decision making or reveal the reasoning for a government decision. I consider these considerations as neutral.

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

- I consider that the disclosure of the part of the documents that is conditionally exempt under section 47E(d) of the FOI Act could reasonably be expected to prejudice operational functions of the Department. I do not consider that there is any public interest in disclosing a point of contact which is intended for operational purposes only. As outlined above the, Department has established channels of communication available for general members of the public. I am satisfied that it would be contrary to the public interest for an operationally active area to have to divert operational resources to manage enquiries from the general public. I consider that this factor weighs heavily against disclosure.
- The disclosure of the personal information which is conditionally exempt under **section 47F** of the FOI Act could reasonably be expected to prejudice the protection of those individuals' right to privacy. It is my view that it is firmly in the public interest to uphold the rights of individuals to their own privacy. I consider that this factor weighs heavily against disclosure.

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>. If you are unable to access the legislation through this website, please contact our office for a copy.

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

By mail to:  
Freedom of Information Section  
Department of Home Affairs  
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](mailto: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](mailto:foi@homeaffairs.gov.au).



**Authorised Decision Maker**  
**Department of Home Affairs**