



16 September 2019

In reply please quote:

FOI Request: FA 19/01/01232

File Number: ADF2019/4037

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information (FOI) request - Access Decision

On 29 January 2019, 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 containing information about the decision to alert Thai authorities and/or Interpol about the refugee football player Hakeem al-Araibi and his plan to travel to Thailand in November 2018. Specifically:

- 1) *Any correspondence between Department of Home Affairs and AFP representatives about Hakeem al-Araibi*
- 2) *Any documents and/or information about what checks were done to ascertain whether Hakeem al-Araibi was a refugee before Thai authorities or Interpol were alerted about any red notice*
- 3) *Any correspondence between DFAT and the Department of Home Affairs, excluding any officers at post, relating to Hakeem al-Araibi from November last year*
- 4) *Any correspondence between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Home Affairs relating to Hakeem al-Araibi from November last year and*
- 5) *Whole of Government Talking Points.*

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 undertaken reasonable searches in relation to the documents you have requested access to.

The Department has identified nine documents as falling within the scope of your request. These documents were in the possession of the Department on 29 January 2019 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.

In relation to part 4 of your request, I am satisfied that the searches conducted were extremely thorough and all reasonable steps have been taken to locate any document relevant to your request.

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 nine documents in part with 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 30 January 2019, 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.

The documents contain operational email addresses used by this Department and its partner agencies. 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. Each agency has established channels of communication for members of the public, and I consider there is no

public interest in disclosing these operational contact details. I regard this information to be irrelevant to your request as it does not relate specifically to the subject matter of the request.

Additional information throughout the documents has also been identified as not being relevant to the specifics of your request, and I have again formed the view that this information is irrelevant to your request.

As such, 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 33 of the FOI Act – Documents affecting National Security, Defence or International Relations

Section 33(a)(iii) of the FOI Act permits exemption of a document if disclosure of the document would, or could reasonably be expected to cause damage to the international relations of the Commonwealth.

The phrase 'international relations' has been interpreted as meaning the ability of the Australian Government to maintain good working relations with other governments and international organisations and to protect the flow of confidential information between them. The expectation of damage to international relations must be reasonable in all the circumstances, having regard to the nature of the information; the circumstances in which it was communicated; and the nature and extent of the relationship. There must be real and substantial grounds for the conclusion that are supported by evidence.

I consider that the release of the information marked 's33(a)(iii)' in the documents would, or could reasonably be expected to cause damage to the Australian Government's international relations.

I have decided that this information is exempt from disclosure under section 33(a)(iii) of the FOI Act.

6.3 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, either through names, positions or descriptions of their role or employment circumstance.

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 relevant 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.

In making my decision, I have had regard to the extent to which the personal information of Mr al-Araibi is within the public domain. I have also considered the Department's ongoing obligations to Mr al-Araibi under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

I am satisfied that the disclosure of the personal information within the documents marked 's47F' would involve an unreasonable disclosure of personal information about a number of individuals.

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.

6.4 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.
- I consider that the subject matter of the documents does not 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.

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

- 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.
- The Department is committed to complying with its obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988*, which sets out standards and obligations that regulate how the Department must handle and manage personal information. It is firmly in the public interest that the Department uphold the rights of individuals to their own privacy and meets its obligations under the Privacy Act. I consider that non-compliance with the Department's statutory obligations concerning the protection of personal information would be contrary to the public interest and that this factor weighs strongly 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 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

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 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 <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/foi-review-process>.

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 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.



**Authorised Decision Maker
Department of Home Affairs**

ATTACHMENT A

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

FOI request: FA 19/01/01232

File Number: ADF2019/4037

No.	Date of document	No. of pages	Description	Decision on release	
				Release in part	
1.	28/11/2018 10:01	2	Email from Department of Home Affairs to AFP	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 33(a)(iii) 47F
2.	02/12/2018 08:02	9	Email from AFP to Department of Home Affairs	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47F
3.	03/12/2018 08:24	2	Email from AFP to Department of Home Affairs	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 47F
4.	07/12/2018 13:57	7	Email from AFP to Department of Home Affairs	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii)
5.	10/12/2018 12:09	3	Email from Department of Home Affairs to AFP	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii)
6.	10/12/2018 16:43	3	Email from AFP to Department of Home Affairs including attachment - 2018 – Alaraibi Chronology to input to DHA	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 33(a)(iii) 47F
7.	10/12/2018	2	ALARAIBI Chronology – DRAFT	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii) 33(a)(iii) 47F
8.	11/12/2018 09:15	2	Internal Department of Home Affairs email, email chain from AFP to Department of Home Affairs	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii)
9.	13/02/2019 0850	6	Whole of Government Talking Points	Release in part	22(1)(a)(ii)