DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

FOI reference: LEX [no.]

Due date: [1 week out] 2026

FOI DOCUMENT SEARCH REQUEST

STATUTORY TIMEFRAMES APPLY

On **[date] 2026**, DFAT received a request from **[Applicant name (affiliation)]**, under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) for access to:

(Request)

[Option 1] Document searches have **only** been tasked to the **[Post or Branch (acronym)]** .

[Option 2] **This** document search has been tasked to the **[Post or Branch (acronym)]** .

[Option 2] Document searches have separately been tasked to:

- **[Post or Branch (acronym)]** – remove dot points if only one other area is tasked with searches.
- **[Post or Branch (acronym)]** .

Please advise the FOI team **as soon as possible** if you are aware of any other areas of the department, in Canberra or overseas, which may hold documents relevant to this request.

FOI requests must be processed within **strict statutory timeframes** to manage legal and reputational risk for the Department. This is only the first step in the process (see FOI Business Rules) Time is best spent at subsequent stages, working through documents with the FOI team and consulting. Failure to consult and meet timelines leaves you, and the Department, exposed.

Action required

You are required to:

- Conduct all **reasonable searches** for documents relevant to the request and identify **sensitivities** (see Attachment A for Guidelines on searching for documents);
- Record the document **search results** in PARTS 1-3 below;
- Nominate an **Action Officer** (EL1 or EL2) to support the FOI decisionmaker and FOI team in processing this request in PART 4 below; and
- Provide **SES/HOM certification** of the document search results in PART 5 below (email confirmation will suffice) and send the completed search form and all relevant documents in PDF format to foi@dfat.gov.au.

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

HANDLING NOTE

Documents on ICN High

Please send documents on ICN High to the tasking FOI Officer's s 47E(d) email address and copy in the FOI Director s 22(1)(a)(ii)

s 47E(d)

When to contact the FOI Team

Please contact the FOI team as soon as possible if:

- you have any questions regarding the interpretation of the request (for example if the request is vague, ambiguous or poorly worded).
- on the face of the request (without undertaking searches), you consider there would be more than 500 documents in scope.
- after preliminary searches you identify documents consisting of more than 250 pages.
- you wish to discuss any sensitivities in the documents.
- you consider another branch, or post may reasonably hold documents.

We can request that the applicant amend the scope of their request

If the first three dot points above apply, we would be grateful if you would provide the FOI Team with suggestions on how the applicant may narrow the scope of their request, such that would still assist the applicant to identify the documents they are seeking access to, while also reducing the burden on the department in processing the request.

For example:

- limiting to a particular version of a document – for example the FM authorised version or final version.
- limiting the documents to a particular type of document – for example Question Time Briefs.
- reducing the period captured by the request – for example reducing to only documents created within a 3-month period.
- limiting correspondence by the parties to the correspondence – for example instead of all DFAT correspondence, limit to correspondence to/from the relevant section or branch.

HANDLING NOTE

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

OFFICIAL

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

PART 1: Searches

You should undertake a reasonable search on a flexible and common-sense interpretation of the terms of the request. What constitutes a reasonable search will depend on the circumstances of each request.

Have you searched in the following locations:

Electronic records including, but not limited to: ☐ YES ☐ N/A

- EDRMS (s 47E(d))
- Cables
- Emails (Group mailboxes and individual email addresses)
- Databases (e.g. PDMS, CIS, Talking Points database – specify databases searched below)
- Microsoft Teams
- shared computer drives
- WhatsApp, Signal or other Electronic Messaging Services not already captured in EDRMS

Hard copy records including, but not limited to: ☐YES ☐ N/A

- in filing cabinets and safes
- in DFAT archives (not National Archives of Australia)
- in desk drawers, bookshelves, and cupboards
- in personal folders, notebooks and diaries

Electronic and hard copy records held by contracted service providers: ☐ YES ☐ N/A

FOI team advised of other areas which may hold documents: ☐ YES ☐ N/A

Time required to complete searches (hours, including part hours e.g. 0.5):

Additional comments (e.g. details of searches conducted, key words)

PART 2: Search results

Did you locate any documents within the scope of the request? ☐YES ☐ NO

[Note – even if no relevant documents are identified, the FOI decision-maker requires evidence that reasonable searches have been undertaken.]

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Number of relevant documents (excluding exact duplicates). If document holdings are voluminous, please provide an estimated number of documents based on a representative sample and provide details below.

Number of relevant pages (a double-sided document equals two pages). If document holdings are voluminous, please provide an estimated number of pages based on a representative sample and provide details below.

Additional comments (e.g. interpretation of the scope of the FOI request, an explanation as to why no documents found):

PART 3: Sensitivities and consultation

Only complete PART 3 if documents within scope request were identified in PART 2.

The FOI team will rely upon your advice to prepare an initial document pack applying any relevant exemptions. You will be consulted on this and will have further opportunities to comment on line-by-line redactions.

Examples of sensitivities/harm might include:

- damage to international relations
- Cabinet documents
- Commonwealth-State relations
- deliberative processes
- personal privacy
- material obtained in confidence
- law enforcement/public safety
- operations of the department
- management of personnel
- business information/trade secrets

Are there **sensitivities**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Is **consultation** required with any third parties (including other agencies) ☐ YES ☐ NO

Please provide details of for each document in the **Schedule of document** on the following page. If the document holdings are voluminous, please provide a representative sample of at least 20 documents, and provide details of those documents in the schedule below.

OFFICIAL

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

Schedule of documents

Please return all relevant documents to the FOI team in **PDF format** (i.e. Word or email documents should be converted to PDF). Each document should be provided as a separate PDF numbered in accordance with the Schedule of document. If you provide a copy of the documents with the sensitivities marked-up, please also provide a clean copy of the documents.

Doc. No.	No. of pages	Doc. type and title	Sensitivities	Third party consultations
1	*5*	***Remove instructions and examples within this table when complete – including if 'nil documents'.*** *Type of document e.g. cable, email, QTB, MinSub, brief* *Title of document / Subject of email* *Note: each attachment should be separately captured, e.g. as a,b,c etc For example, 1 followed by 1a, 1b for attachments*	*Specific sensitivities in the document (if any). What harm could flow from release of the document?* *Which pages/paragraphs/parts of the document do the sensitivities apply to? You may also provide the FOI team with a copy of the documents with the sensitivities marked-up.* *If no sensitivities, 'Nil'.*	*Third parties who have an interest and may object to release of the document.* *If no consultations, 'Nil'.*
2	*3*	*CE123456: Cable reporting on a meeting with the Foreign Minister of X*	*Information in the cable was communicated in confidence by the interlocutor. Disclosure would damage international relations*	*Nil*
3	*4*	*Email to PM&C: Attaching Talking Points on High Profile Consular Case*	*Emails contain personal information and draft advice between departments.*	*PM&C; consular client and NOK*
4	*2*	*Attachment to Doc No. 4 – Media Talking Points*	*The Background contains personal information.*	*Consular client and NOK*
5				
6		*Add more rows as required.*		

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Part 4 – Action Officer

The Action Officer (EL1 or EL2) will support the decision-maker and FOI team in the processing of this request.

Name:
Position:
Extension/mobile:

PART 5 – Certification

I certify that I have undertaken, or caused to be undertaken, all reasonable searches for documents falling within the scope of this FOI request.

These search returns have been detailed above, including time taken to complete the searches.

Further, I certify that I have considered the documents falling within the scope of this FOI request, and the above correctly sets out the sensitivities included in these documents.

I understand that my line area is responsible for working with Media on any talking points that may be required once documents are released to the public.

I also understand that I may be required to appear and give evidence before the Australian Information Commissioner or the Administrative Review Tribunal in relation to the searches for documents undertaken and the sensitivities supporting any exemptions claimed by the department.

_____ _____

Signature of SES or HOM
or clearance email attached

Print name

Date: _____

OFFICIAL

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

Attachment A

Guidelines on searching for documents

Scope of your document search

- Focus your searches on identifying **only the documents specified in the request** – do not conduct generic searches for all documents relating to the topic in general.
- The FOI Act applies to all documents, regardless of their classification or sensitivity. Sensitive information may be protected from release by the application of exemptions in accordance with the FOI Act.
- Only documents created up to the date DFAT received the FOI request are within the scope of the request (see covering search request for this date). Do not create any documents in response to the FOI request without consulting the FOI team.
- Contact the FOI team if the scope of the request is unclear or if you are uncertain whether certain documents are within the scope of the request. We are able to clarify the scope with the applicant if necessary and can provide guidance to assist business areas to interpret the request consistently.
- The FOI request only covers documents held by DFAT. Do not forward any information regarding this request outside DFAT.

Document searches

- You should undertake a reasonable search on a flexible and common-sense interpretation of the terms of the request. **What constitutes a reasonable search will depend on the circumstances of each request** and will be influenced by the normal business practices in the department. At a minimum, you should take comprehensive steps to locate documents, having regard to:
  - the subject matter of the documents
  - the current and past file management systems
  - the individuals and business areas who may be able to assist
  - the age of the documents.
- If you are aware of relevant documents, but they have been destroyed in accordance with a Departmental Administrative Functions Disposal Authority, or lost, please provide a brief explanation to that effect.
- The definition of 'document' under the FOI Act includes all paper and electronic records. In addition to obvious examples, it includes handwritten notes, post-it notes, photographs, and sound or video recordings. It also includes including electronic messages such as SMS, WhatsApp, Signal, Viber, and Telegram (see Guidance Note – Capturing and Retaining Electronic Message for further details).
- On occasion, searching for documents in response to an FOI request could be an unreasonable diversion of resources. This could be the case, for example, where the scope of a request captures an inordinate amount of material because it is too broad and/or covers too long a timeframe. If you consider that searching for documents appears unreasonable, please contact the FOI team as soon as possible to discuss approaches to handling the request.

s 47(1)(b) – this page, together with the following pages (9-30) are exempt and have been removed

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982

INSTRUMENT OF AUTHORISATION

I, CRAIG MACLACHLAN, Acting Secretary and Principal Officer of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Department) within the meaning of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the Act), HEREBY:

a. REVOKE the instrument of authorisation dated 7 June 2021; and

b. APPROVE, under section 23(1) of the Act, the following arrangements:

   i. each officer from time to time performing duties at a classification specified in Part 2 of Schedule 1 to this instrument is authorised to make decisions under the Act as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 1; and

   ii. each officer from time to time performing duties at a classification specified in Part 2 of Schedule 2 to this instrument is authorised to make decisions under the Act as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 2.

Dated 11 January 2023

Craig Maclachlan
A/g Secretary and Principal Officer
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

SCHEDULE 1

PART 1 – POWERS

To make any decision in respect of a request made to the Department under the Act.

PART 2 – CLASSIFICATIONS

- Senior Executive Service Band 3;
- Senior Executive Service Band 2;
- Senior Executive Service Band 1 in the Australian Passport Office; and
- Senior Executive Service Band 1 with responsibility for the section within the Department administering the Act.

DFAT FOI – RELEASED UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982 - LEX 13911

SCHEDULE 2

PART 1 – POWERS

To make any decision in respect of a request made to the Department under the Act, except decisions under Part VI of the Act in relation to applications for internal review.

PART 2 – CLASSIFICATIONS

- Senior Executive Service Band 3;
- Senior Executive Service Band 2;
- Senior Executive Service Band 1;
- Directors in the Australia Passport Office; and
- Directors with responsibility for the section within the Department administering the Act.