

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2014

Communications Portfolio

Special Broadcasting Service

Question No: 303

Program No. Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Freedom of Information

Senator Ludwig asked:

1. Can the Department please outline the process it under goes to access Freedom of Information requests?
2. Does the Department consult or inform the Minister when it receives Freedom of Information requests?
 - a. If so, when?
 - b. If so, how does this occur?
3. Does the Department consult or inform other Departments or Agencies when it receives Freedom of Information requests?
 - a. If so, which Departments or Agencies?
 - b. If so, when?
 - c. If so, how does this occur?
4. Does the Department consult or inform the Minister when or before it makes a decision on a Freedom of Information request?
 - a. If so, when?
 - b. If so, how does this occur?
5. Does the Department consult or inform other Departments or Agencies when or before it makes a decision on a Freedom of Information request?
 - a. If so, which Departments or Agencies?
 - b. If so, when?
 - c. If so, how does this occur?
6. What resources does the Department commit to its Freedom of Information team?
7. List the staffing resources by APS level assigned solely to Freedom of Information requests
8. List the staffing resources by APS level assigned indirectly to Freedom of Information requests
9. Does the Department ever second addition resources to processing Freedom of Information requests?
 - a. If so, please detail those resources by APS level
10. How many officers are currently designated decision makers under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 within the Department?
 - a. How does this differ to the number of officers designated as at 6 September 2013?
11. How many officers are currently designated decision makers under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 within the Minister's office?
 - a. How does this differ to the number of officers designated as at 6 September 2013?
12. Of the officers that are designated decision makers under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 within the Ministers office, how many are seconded officers from the Department?
13. What training does the Department provide to designated decision makers under the Freedom of Information Act who work within the Department?

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- a. Of the officers designated as decision makers within the Department, how many have received formal training?
 - b. Of the officers designated as decision makers within the Department, how many have received informal training?
 - c. How long after each officers appointment as a designated decision maker did they receive formal training?
 - d. What did the training involve?
 - e. How long was the training?
 - f. By whom was the training conducted?
14. What training does the Department provide to designated decision makers under the Freedom of Information Act who work within the Minister's office, excluding those officers on secondment from the Department?
- a. Of the officers designated as decision makers, how many have received formal training?
 - b. Of the officers designated as decision makers, how many have received informal training?
 - c. How long after each officers appointment as a designated decision maker did they receive formal training?
 - d. What did the training involve?
 - e. How long was the training?
 - f. By whom was the training conducted?
15. Since 7 September 2013, how many Freedom of Information requests been shown or alerted to the Minister or their office?
- a. List those notified request
 - b. How many instances were each of this requests brought to the office or the Minister's attention?
 - c. How many of these items resulted in a separate formal brief being provided to the Minister?
 - d. How many of these items resulted in a separate informal briefing (including by email) being provided to the Minister?
 - e. How many requests have resulted in multiple formal briefs being provided to the Minister or their office?
 - f. How many requests have resulted in multiple informal briefs (including by email) being provided to the Minister or their office?
16. Does the Department provide FOI PDFs for download on their website?
17. If not, what is the cost associated with staffing to require monitor email and collate and forward requested FOI documents?
18. How does the Department test it is complying with accessibility standards for its websites?
19. Does the Department comply with accessibility standards for all its websites?
20. What would be the effect on the accessibility rating of the Department's website if FOI PDFs were provided on the Department websites?
21. What accessibility testing of the website was done and what were the points of failure prior to this change in access for FOI documents?
22. Have the website accessibility standards been solely or partly responsible for not putting FOI PDF documents on the Department websites?

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23. How does the Department facilitate anonymous access to the FOI disclosure files?
24. How many times were the last 20 FOI requests PDFs which were made available on the website downloaded? How often have the FOI requests only available by email request been sent?
25. How long does it take to requests for disclosed FOI files to be processed? What was the average turn around from request to sending of files in the last 3 months?
26. What was the content of communications with other Departments about the website accessibility standards and FOI PDFs?
27. Where did advice concerning the website accessibility certification and provision of PDFs come from and what was the content of that advice?
28. Does the Department consider that not providing direct download of PDFs is more accessible for people with disabilities and the general public than providing the links?
29. What efforts have been made to make FOI PDFs accessible to members of the public who have disabilities?
30. Has advice from the information commissioner been sought regarding providing FOI requests available by email request only?
31. Has any disability advice group or consultant been contacted regarding making the FOI requests accessible to people with disabilities?
32. Is this compatible with the information commissioners guidelines- specifically that “published information should be accessible — in particular, it should comply with an Agency’s obligation to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Version 2)“
33. How does email PDF provision meet the information commissioner’s requirement that “13.124 Information that forms part of the IPS must be published ‘to members of the public generally’”?
34. Is not providing the FOI PDFs on the website a means of avoiding not conforming to the WCAG 2.0 or other guidelines?
35. Does the Department have a separate email address or inbox for receiving and responding to FOI requests?
 - a. If so, list each email account
 - b. List the officers who can assess and reply from those separate accounts, broken down by staffing classification level
36. Do FOI officers ever receive or respond to applicants from their individual email account as opposed to from a central account?
 - a. If so, how does the officer distinguish between communication related to their task as a decision maker and their primary work task?
 - b. How do FOI decision makers that receive emails related to FOI decisions in their normal work capacity distinguish these emails from FOI decision emails?

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Answer:

1. Freedom of Information requests are made to the FOI Contact Officer via post or email. Information on how to submit an FOI request is available on the SBS website. SBS has a dedicated email address for FOI requests: foi@sbs.com.au.
2. SBS consults third parties where relevant, as required under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. SBS consults with other agencies where it would be relevant to assist the process, as referred to in the guideline on processing requests for access issued by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.
3. Refer to (2).
4. Refer to (2).
5. Refer to (2).
6. SBS has one FOI Contact Officer and four FOI Decision Makers (including the principal officer).
7. Not applicable. No SBS staff are assigned solely to Freedom of Information requests.
8. One FOI Contact Officer – SBS Band 6. Four FOI Decision Makers – SBS Executive Contract. SBS is not an Australian Public Service Agency and employees are not employed under the Public Service Act 1999.
9. No.
10. Three.
 - a. No change.
11. Not applicable.
 - a. Not applicable.
12. Not applicable.
13. Due to the low number of FOI requests, SBS provides informal training to decision makers on a case-by-case basis.
 - a. Nil.
 - b. Four.
 - c–f. Not applicable.
14. Not applicable.
15. Nil.
 - a–f. Not applicable.
16. SBS provides documents for download as required under the Information Publication Scheme. Documents made available on SBS's Disclosure Log website are generally provided in PDF format.
17. Not applicable.
18. SBS refers to guidance issued by the Government. SBS indicates on its Disclosure Log website that there may be documents that are not available in HTML format. Users who are unable to read the format provided are requested to contact the FOI Contact Officer. The website states that SBS will try to meet all reasonable requests for the relevant document/s to be provided in an alternative format. SBS will do so in a timely manner and at the lowest reasonable cost.
19. SBS is not subject to the Web Accessibility National Transition Strategy, which is not compulsory for Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997 bodies.
20. Not applicable.
21. Not applicable.

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22. Not applicable.
23. Users can access documents anonymously via the SBS website (refer to the SBS Privacy Policy on the SBS website). In cases where the documents are available on request, an anonymous request can be made to SBS.
24. Nil. Not applicable.
25. Not applicable. SBS has not received any requests in the last 3 months.
26. SBS was advised in an email circular from the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner in 2011 about the Information Publication Scheme (IPS) and Disclosure Log requirements on accessibility. SBS has not received any further advice.
27. Not applicable. SBS has not received any advice on this matter.
28. Not applicable. SBS has not received any advice on this matter.
29. SBS indicates on its Disclosure Log website that users who are unable to read the format provided are requested to contact the FOI Contact Officer. The website states that SBS will try to meet all reasonable requests for the relevant document/s to be provided in an alternative format. SBS will do so in a timely manner and at the lowest reasonable cost.
30. No.
31. No.
32. Not applicable. SBS has not received any advice on this matter.
33. Not applicable. SBS has not received any advice on this matter.
34. Not applicable. SBS has not received any advice on this matter.
35. Yes.
 - a. foi@sbs.com.au.
 - b. FOI Contact Officer, SBS Band 6. SBS is not an Australian Public Service Agency and employees are not employed under the Public Service Act 1999.
36. Yes.
 - a. The officer signs off as FOI Contact Officer.
 - b. Emails are distinguished through subject headings.