

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2014 - 2015, 2/3 June 2014

Ref No: SQ14-000702

OUTCOME: 0 - Whole of Portfolio

Topic: Freedom of Information - Machinery of Government

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Ludwig, Joe

Question:

(Follow up with reference to SQ14-000329, Additional Estimates 2014)

1. Could you please detail the changes to the machinery of government that led to the reduction in number of authorised decision makers?
2. Has there been an increase in average wait times for responses to freedom of information requests since these changes in the machinery of government? If yes, please detail.
3. Has there been a decrease in the average number of freedom of information requests that are authorised for processing since these changes in the machinery of government? If yes, please detail.
4. How is consistency coordinated between the 663 officers authorised to make decisions?
 - a) Please provide a copy of any guidelines or other documents that are used to ensure consistency.

Answer:

1. Responsibility for aged care programs and the administration of the *Aged Care Act 1997* was transferred to the Department of Social Services. Responsibility for some elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health was transferred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
2. The Department of Health does not maintain statistical records which would enable it to ascertain whether average processing times have increased or decreased since the machinery of government changes commenced.
3. The average number of requests received per day in the period from the commencement of the machinery of government changes on 18 September 2013 to 30 June 2014 was greater than the daily average for the entire 2012-2013 year.

4. Each FOI decision-maker is required to make a merits-based decision whether to grant access to documents in accordance with the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act). Legal and General Counsel provides both legal advice and administrative processing assistance to decision-makers to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Act. Decision-makers are directed, as necessary, to the guidelines made by the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act.