

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 185
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Corporate
Programme: Policy and Communications Division
Topic: Portfolio wide - Freedom of Information email address
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 7 March 2014
Question Type: Written

Senator Ludwig asked:

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?

Answer:

Department of the Environment

No. The Department's process is that the FOI email address is used for all FOI emails.

- a) not applicable
- b) not applicable

Bureau of Meteorology

No, it is the Bureau's practice for all FOI related email correspondence with FOI applicants to be transacted by the FOI Coordinator (or in their absence by the Principal lawyer) via FOI@bom.gov.au.

- a) The FOI mailbox is separate from the one used for the FOI Coordinator's other duties.
- b) All FOI related email correspondence with applicants goes through the FOI Coordinator using the FOI@bom.gov.au email address.

Clean Energy Regulator

It is possible that on occasion an officer has used their personal work email account to reply to an email, but as a general rule, the agency's Freedom of Information (FOI) officers use the generic FOI email account to receive and respond to FOI-related emails.

- a) The agency's FOI Contact Officers are not decision-makers for the purposes of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act). However, if a personal work email account is used instead of the generic FOI account, the subject of the email should be clear from the subject line of the email.
- b) See answer to part a) above. Ordinarily, decisions made under the FOI Act are notified to the applicant by hard copy letter, signed by the decision-maker. The hard copy letter is usually sent to the applicant by ordinary post, but sometimes, a scanned copy of the letter may also be attached to an email from the generic FOI Contact Officer email account (or, less frequently, from the Contact Officers' personal work email account) so that the decision is notified to the applicant as soon as possible. The subject of the email will be clear from the subject line of the email.

Climate Change Authority

No.

- a) Not applicable.
- b) Emails that relate to FOI decisions are clearly marked and thus easily distinguishable from normal work task emails. All FOI requests come via the FOI inbox so they are easily identifiable.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

No, email requests for FOI access are received into a common email account, FOI@gbrmpa.gov.au.

National Water Commission

An FOI officer may respond to an applicant from their email account.

- a) the email would be distinguished by its subject heading and content
- b) the email would be distinguished by its subject heading and content.

Murray-Darling Basin Authority

No, the Authority does not receive or respond to applicants from individual email accounts as opposed to a central account.

Sydney Harbour Federation Trust

No.

- a) a) Not applicable
- b) b) Not applicable.