

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

**Question No:** 183  
**Hearing:** Additional Estimates  
**Outcome:** Corporate  
**Programme:** Policy and Communications Division  
**Topic:** Portfolio wide – Freedom of Information accessibility  
**Hansard Page:** N/A  
**Question Date:** 7 March 2014  
**Question Type:** Written

**Senator Ludwig asked:**

1. 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?
2. What efforts have been made to make FOI PDFs accessible to members of the public who have disabilities?
3. Has advice from the information commissioner been sought regarding providing FOI requests available by email request only?
4. Has any disability advice group or consultant been contacted regarding making the FOI requests accessible to people with disabilities?
5. Is this compatible with the information commissioner's 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)"
6. 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'"?
7. Is not providing the FOI PDFs on the website a means of avoiding not conforming to the WCAG 2.0 or other guidelines?

**Answer:**

**Department of the Environment (the Department)**

1. The Department does not provide FOI responses on the website. With regard to FOI documents in particular, provision of these documents online as PDF files would create additional accessibility concerns as the PDF format is not yet considered an independently accessible format.
2. In accordance with the Australian Government Web Accessibility National Transition Strategy, the Department has established procedures and policies to assess existing online content for compliance against WCAG 2.0 and put in place strategies to increase compliance levels by December 2014.
3. No. The Department complies with all information commissioner guidelines.
4. In accordance with the Australian Government Web Accessibility National Transition Strategy, the Department has established procedures and policies to assess existing online content for compliance against WCAG 2.0 and put in place strategies to increase compliance levels by December 2014.
5. The Department complies with all information commissioner guidelines.
6. The Department complies with all information commissioner guidelines.
7. No.

### **Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau)**

1. The Bureau already publishes FOI documents online.
2. As per section 14.63 of the FOI Guidelines, the Bureau's FOI Disclosure Log specifically advises that where documents are required in alternative formats to contact the FOI Coordinator.
3. The Bureau already publishes FOI documents online.
4. No, although the Bureau has engaged disability advice groups in the past to provide advice on the accessibility of its website more generally.
5. As per section 14.63 of the FOI Guidelines, the Bureau's FOI Disclosure Log specifically advises that where documents are required in alternative formats to contact the FOI Coordinator.
6. The Bureau already publishes FOI documents online.
7. The Bureau already publishes FOI documents online.

### **Clean Energy Regulator**

1. If it were reasonably practicable for the agency to provide a PDF copy of the document on the Freedom of Information (FOI) Disclosure Log, the agency would provide the PDF document online rather than providing a link to a website where the PDF copy could be accessed. The volume and file size of the documents published to date has meant that it has not been possible to provide either the PDF copy or a link to where the document may be found.
2. If it is reasonably practicable for the agency to publish FOI PDFs on its website, the documents will be made accessible where possible. If anyone needs assistance, they can contact our Contact Centre to request an alternative version of the document in a format that might meet their accessibility needs more appropriately.
3. No.
4. No consultation has occurred specifically regarding FOI PDFs. However, the agency's Content Publishing Team has undertaken comprehensive training in accessibility standards with Vision Australia.
5. Yes, but it has not been reasonably practicable to publish any FOI PDFs to date.
6. It is open to the agency to publish on its website details of how the information may be obtained, instead of making the information available for downloading from the website or publishing on the website a link to another website from which the information can be downloaded: see paragraph 8D(3)(c) of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.
7. No. The WCAG 2.0 or other guidelines were not the reason that PDF copies were not published online. Other practical considerations determined the outcome.

### **Climate Change Authority**

1. Yes in some instances.
2. FOI PDFs are made available to members of the public upon request. Reasonable adjustments to documents can be made upon request and on a case-by-case basis.
3. No.
4. No.
5. The Climate Change Authority complies with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Version 2).
6. The Climate Change Authority has a small number of disclosable documents and requests for documents. All disclosable documents are provided upon request in a prompt manner.

7. No. Advice came from the Department of Industry legal team under a shared services agreement. It was advised that the provision of PDFs on the website was not a legal obligation and could prove problematic in some instances for people with visual impairment. The Climate Change Authority decided not to provide PDF versions of disclosed documents but provide them free to anyone who requests them and in a version most appropriate for the applicant.

#### **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)**

1. No.
2. An accessible FOI disclosure log is available on the GBRMPA website. People wanting access to material released under FOI can contact the agency. These requests, along with the accessibility requirements, are dealt with on a case by case basis.
3. No.
4. No. We have engaged consultants to train staff in making all documents and PDFs accessible for online publishing, but not specifically for FOI documents. We have sought advice from a disability web content expert in relation to general website accessibility.
5. No.
6. The GBRMPA complies with its obligations under s11C of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.
7. No, the GBRMPA complies with its obligations under s11C of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

#### **Murray-Darling Basin Authority (the Authority)**

1. – 2. The Authority's approach to provide details on how FOI information can be obtained is in line with Part 14 of the FOI Guidelines issued by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.
3. No. The Authority follows the FOI Guidelines as published by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.
4. No.
5. – 6. The Authority publishes documents released under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* as required under section 11C(3) by publishing on the website how the information may be obtained.
7. No.

#### **National Water Commission (the Commission)**

1. The Commission has not received a FOI request since the revised FOI requirements have come into force.
2. Not applicable.
3. No.
4. No.
5. – 7. Not applicable.

#### **Sydney Harbour Federation Trust (SHFT)**

1. – 7. The SHFT does not provide FOI PDFs on its website. The Department of the Environment monitors the Trust's website and as such, the SHFT response would be in line with the Department's response.