

Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman

Information Publication Scheme Agency Plan

Introduction

The office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman has prepared this Information Publication Scheme (IPS) agency plan in accordance with section 8(1) of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act). The office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman exists to safeguard the community in its dealings with government agencies, and to ensure that administrative action by Australian Government agencies is fair and accountable. The Ombudsman has three major statutory roles:

- *complaint investigation*: investigating and reviewing the administrative actions of Australian Government officials and agencies, upon receipt of complaints from members of the public, groups and organisations
- *own motion investigation*: investigating, on the initiative or 'own motion' of the Ombudsman, the administrative actions of Australian Government agencies—often arising from insights gained from handling individual complaints
- *compliance auditing*: inspecting the records of agencies such as the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Crime Commission, to ensure compliance with legislative requirements applying to selected law enforcement and regulatory agencies.

Purpose

The plan explains how the office is implementing and administering the IPS.

Objectives

The Ombudsman's objectives in relation to this plan are to:

- manage the IPS information holdings
- proactively identify and publish all information required to be published under s 8(2) of the FOI Act
- proactively identify and publish optional information (s 8(4) of the FOI Act)
- review and ensure on a regular basis that the information we publish under the IPS is accurate, up to date and complete
- ensure that the information published under the IPS is easily discoverable, understandable, machine-readable, re-usable and transformable
- ensure satisfactory conformance with the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Version 2)* (WCAG 2.0)
- measure the success of our IPS contribution.

Establishing and administering the office's IPS entry

- a) The Office's information holdings relevant to the IPS are managed by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman, Organisational Support Services, with guidance provided by the office's Information Management Committee.

- b) The office's IPS entry is being established and administered within the existing resources of the office.
- c) The initial work in establishing the IPS entry was undertaken by a working group with representatives from different functional areas of the office. The working group focused on identifying and, where necessary, updating all the information required to be published in accordance with s 8(2) of the FOI Act, and in establishing the information architecture.
- d) Consistent with the objectives of the FOI Act, the office will identify and publish all additional information which may be relevant to members of the public by 1 October 2011, in accordance with s 8(4).
- e) The Senior Assistant Ombudsman, Organisational Support Services, with guidance from the office's Information Management Committee, will establish a process to regularly review the information published under the IPS to ensure it is accurate, up to date and complete.
- f) The office has established an internal IPS Information Register to assist in identifying documents for publication, recording decisions made in relation to publication, and systematically reviewing the IPS information to ensure it is accurate, up to date and complete.
- g) The office will initially provide information in a PDF format and will explore options available to improve accessibility of information. Should we receive requests for information in other formats, we will apply charges consistent with the charges for processing requests made under the FOI Act (according to the Freedom of Information (Charges) Regulations 1982).

IPS information architecture

- a) The office will publish IPS information to the general public on the Commonwealth Ombudsman website. The other websites operated by the office under Commonwealth legislation (currently the Overseas Students Ombudsman and the Postal Industry Ombudsman websites) will contain links back to the IPS area of the Commonwealth Ombudsman website.
- b) The information will be published under headings consistent with the relevant sections of the FOI Act. More detail is provided in the following sections.
- c) The IPS entry will be notified by using the IPS icon (recommended by the Information Commissioner) to provide a direct link to relevant information.
- d) The Ombudsman's websites include a search function to assist in locating documents.
- e) At present the office does not intend to provide an alert service for changes or additions to our IPS entry.
- f) The office is exploring options to ensure our IPS entry will conform to WCAG 2.0 by 1 October 2011.
- g) The office will invite comments on our IPS entry and compliance by including a 'request for comments' section under our main IPS entry. Any comments will be considered by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman, Organisational Support Services, in the first instance, with the office's Information Management Committee to include an item on the IPS as a standing agenda item for its meetings.

Information required to be published under the IPS

- a) The office has identified, and is publishing, the following information by 1 May 2011:
 - i. this agency plan (required under s 8(2)(a) of the FOI Act)
 - ii. details of the structure of the organisation (s 8(2)(b))
 - iii. functions and decision-making powers (s 8(2)(c))
 - iv. statutory appointments (s 8(2)(d))
 - v. annual reports and other reports provided to Parliament as required by legislation—the latter reports include some inspections reports and immigration detention review reports (s 8(2)(e))
 - vi. information routinely provided to Parliament in response to requests and orders (s 8(2)(h))
 - vii. contact details for access to information or documents under the FOI Act (s 8(2)(i))
 - viii. operational information (s 8(2)(j)) including:
 - the Work Practice Manual which guides our decision making in relation to complaints made by members of the public
 - a range of other material relating to specific agencies which guide how we deal with specific types of complaints and questions of jurisdiction
- b) At present the office does not have the following types of information that is required to be published under the IPS:
 - i. arrangements to comment on policy proposals (s 8(2)(f))
 - ii. documents to which we routinely give FOI access (s 8(2)(g)).
- c) It should be noted that, in dealing with complaints, we routinely examine a wide range of legislation and information provided by agencies, such as policy and procedural manuals. Responsibility for publishing information generated by other agencies rests with the relevant agencies.

Other information to be published under the IPS

- a) Consistent with the objectives of the FOI Act, the office will identify and publish all additional information which may be relevant to members of the public by 1 October 2011, in accordance with s 8(4).

IPS compliance review

- a) The office will review this agency plan by 1 October 2011, taking into account any feedback from members of the public. Following this, the plan will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis.
- b) As noted above, the office will review its IPS entry on a regular basis. All agencies are required to review their compliance with the IPS, in conjunction with the Information Commissioner, by 1 May 2016. We will consult with the Information Commissioner about the specific timeframe for review of the office's compliance.
- c) By 1 October 2011, the office's Information Management Committee will explore options to measure the success of our IPS.