



FOI CHEAT SHEET – FIONA HUDSON, HERALD SUN FOI EDITOR

- Lodge with local, state or commonwealth authorities. You can also try overseas (US/UK etc)
 - Victoria charges \$27.90 to lodge
 - Commonwealth is free to lodge
 - See the templates previously sent out
- FOI is painful – try every other way of getting the documents you’re seeking first.
- You can FOI many agencies, departments, ministers’ offices etc – there are a few exceptions
- Under the FOI Act you have the right to request “documents.” Documents can mean anything from an extract of a database, to photographs to emails, to reports etc. Think laterally!
- Target a specific document, rather than go on a fishing expedition
- The FOI Act is your friend. When agencies refer to it – you can read up on what they’re talking about here for the commonwealth:
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/foia1982222/
- Be polite and courteous to FOI officers
- Don’t be put off when you receive a practical refusal or any other refusal or a huge bill– it’s a roadblock – get prepared to negotiate!
- You can negotiate the scope – and FOI officers are obliged under the various acts to assist you in the process, so you can ask them how to reduce the cost or what documents you might exclude to reduce the amount of content found etc
- In some cases you can request the fees are reduced or waived under a public interest argument. Make your case! You can also request documents electronically to avoid photocopy charges
- If they ultimately tell you there are no documents within scope – consider whether this is a story in and of itself
- If one agency doesn’t have the document you want – try another agency or office involved
- Think in advance – FOI will take at least 45 days, probably longer. What is coming up later this year that you can FOI now?
- When you’re starting out – check the disclosure logs of different agencies to see what other journalists are requesting (and use the documents there if there’s anything good for a story!) Also consider submitting requests to smaller agencies, you might find them easier to deal with