



Office of the Information Commissioner

Freedom of information for Western Australia

MEDIA STATEMENT

26 July 2023

Celebrating 30 years of the Office of the Information Commissioner in Western Australia

In July, the Office of the Information Commissioner (**OIC**) celebrates 30 years of freedom of information (**FOI**) legislation in Western Australia. WA's first Information Commissioner was appointed on 1 July 1993 and subsequently established the OIC. The public's right to access documents held by WA State and local government commenced on 1 November 1993.

The passing of the *Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)* (**FOI Act**) in late 1992 allowed for the appointment of the inaugural Information Commissioner, Ms Bronwyn Keighley-Gerardy, who served as Information Commissioner for just over 10 years. The current Commissioner, Ms Catherine Fletcher, was appointed to the role for a five year term in July 2019, following 12 months as the Acting Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner is an independent officer who reports directly to Parliament.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that access to information is a human right. The establishment of the role of Information Commissioner and the right to government-held documents demonstrates the State's commitment to this important right. Access to information, which allows Western Australians to 'shine a light into dark corners', is crucial for government accountability and transparency, and in the prevention of corruption.

FOI allows citizens to access information that helps them to make key decisions in their own lives and at the polling booth. Enabling the public to be informed allows them to engage in meaningful debate, which in turn can help government make better decisions. FOI is integral to a responsible and responsive government and a healthy democracy.

The backbone of our FOI system are the FOI practitioners working in State and local government agencies across Western Australia. Since the commencement of the access provisions in the FOI Act in 1993, FOI practitioners have processed over 338,000 FOI access applications to 30 June 2022. The number of FOI access applications received and processed by State and local government has increased almost every year for the past 30 years. In the first 20 years of the FOI Act, approximately 170,000 FOI access applications were received across government, whilst in the past 9 years, 166,000 access applications have been received across government. We acknowledge the hard work of FOI practitioners who fulfil this essential right to government information.

To celebrate its 30-year anniversary, the OIC today held a morning tea for key dignitaries, OIC staff, and agency FOI coordinators. The Western Australian Attorney General, The Hon. John Quigley LLB JP MLA, addressed the event.

Comments attributed to The Hon. John Quigley LLB JP MLA:

I congratulate the Office of the Information Commissioner on 30 years of work to ensure that the rights of the public and the responsibilities of agencies under the FOI Act are understood and engaged with to the benefit of the WA community.

Comments attributed to Catherine Fletcher, Information Commissioner:

The right to access information under the FOI Act is integral to open, accountable and responsible government. I acknowledge the important work of FOI practitioners within agencies through the last 30 years who have worked to ensure that community members obtain appropriate access to government documents. This plays an important role in helping to achieve the legislative objects of the FOI Act: to enable greater public participation in our democracy and to make government more accountable to the people.

ENDS

For further information, please contact:

The Office of the Information Commissioner (WA) by email to info@oic.wa.gov.au or phone to 6551 7830.

About the Western Australian Information Commissioner

The Information Commissioner is an independent officer who reports directly to Parliament. The position is established by the *Freedom of Information Act 1992* (**the FOI Act**) and is supported by staff of the Office of the Information Commissioner (**the OIC**).

The main function of the Information Commissioner is to, in response to complaints by applicants, provide independent external review of decisions made by agencies on access applications and requests to amend personal information under the FOI Act.

The Information Commissioner's other responsibilities include:

- ensuring that agencies are aware of their responsibilities under the FOI Act;
- ensuring that members of the public are aware of the FOI Act and their rights;
- providing assistance to members of the public and agencies on matters relevant to the FOI Act; and
- recommending to Parliament legislative or administrative changes that could be made to help the objects of the FOI Act to be achieved.