



Statement

17 April 2020

Transparency and access to information in the context of a global pandemic

The Australian Information Access Commissioners join with their international counterparts in their clear call for transparency and the right to access information as governments, businesses and citizens deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following [statement](#) has been released by International Conference of Information Commissioners:

The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) brings unprecedented challenges for our society, both nationally and globally.

Public authorities must make significant decisions that affect public health, civil liberties and people's prosperity.

The public's right to access information about such decisions is vital.

As a global community, we recognise that resources may be diverted away from usual information rights work. Public organisations will rightly focus their resources on protecting public health, and we recognise our role in taking a pragmatic approach, for example around how quickly public bodies respond to requests.

But the importance of the right to access information remains.

Public bodies must also recognise the value of clear and transparent communication, and of good record-keeping, in what will be a much analysed period of history.

As an international network, the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) supports a flexible approach that takes into account the compelling public interest in the current health emergency, while safeguarding the values of the right to access information. We ask governments to support this vision.

We add our support and gratitude to those who are dedicated to tackling the current pandemic.

Members of the ICIC Governance Working Group <https://informationcommissioners.org/meet-the-executive-committee>

Co-signed by:

Elizabeth Tydd, Information Commissioner, New South Wales

Rachael Rangihaeata, Information Commissioner, Queensland

Angelene Falk, Australian Information Commissioner

Michael Manthorpe, Ombudsman, ACT

Sven Bluemmel, Information Commissioner, Victoria

Catherine Fletcher, Information Commissioner, Western Australia

Richard Connock, Ombudsman, Tasmania

Peter Shoyer, Information Commissioner, Northern Territory

Wayne Lines, Ombudsman, South Australia

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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.