



Office of the Victorian  
Information Commissioner

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# Records management and freedom of information

Public Record Office Victoria and the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner issue a joint statement about the critical intersection between records management and freedom of information

The Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (**OVIC**) and Public Record Office Victoria (**PROV**) have developed this joint statement as a commitment to ongoing collaboration between OVIC and PROV. This collaboration is important because of the key link between good records management processes and effective public access to information.

The Victorian Public Sector holds critical information which is used to make decisions that affect all Victorians. Individuals therefore need to be able to access information about those decisions, and why they were made, in order to uphold their rights and to keep decision making entities accountable. Individuals also have a right to access information held about them by the government. We are committed to extending as far as possible the right of access to government-held information limited only by specific public interest and privacy exemptions.

This access cannot happen unless full, accurate and reliable records are created, properly managed and stored for their minimum retention period. Victorian public sector officers need to be able to locate and provide the necessary records to allow the freedom of information (FOI) process to operate effectively and facilitate broader access to information.

OVIC and PROV recommend that agencies:

- Develop clear and accessible information management policies and procedures
- Ensure staff across the organisation understand their obligations for accurate record keeping and naming conventions
- Ensure records are retained for the minimum required period in accordance with PROV Retention and Disposal Authorities and that permanent value records are identified and transferred to PROV.

- Ensure staff responsible for undertaking searches for documents have appropriate access to all systems and databases to allow for thorough and diligent searches to be undertaken. Staff should be aware of any records their public office has previously transferred to PROV, so that they can be included in the searches.

In 2023-24, Victorian agencies and Ministers received more total FOI requests than any other Australian jurisdiction, including the Commonwealth. The increase in volume of FOI requests in each financial year adversely affects an agency's ability to respond to those requests within statutory timeframes. PROV and OVIC are of the view that improving records management in agencies can help alleviate the increasing administrative burden associated with these requests.

In 2024, Monash University released the *Culture of implementing Freedom of Information in Australia* report, following a study that involved surveying and interviewing FOI practitioners, executives and Ministers to examine the culture of FOI in Australian jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup> The study found that ineffective records management processes in public sector agencies may reduce efficiency when those agencies process FOI requests.<sup>2</sup>

The report recommended greater collaboration between public record offices and FOI oversight bodies, such as PROV and OVIC, to strengthen agency knowledge around records management best practice and FOI efficiency. Another recommendation highlighted the critical role of adequate funding and resourcing for records management and FOI processes in promoting a culture of transparency.

PROV and OVIC look forward to deepening their collaboration through guidance and education to assist agencies in understanding the critical intersection of records management and public access to information. Developing this understanding will improve the timeliness of FOI decision making across the Victorian public sector and help alleviate agencies of the administrative burden related to public access to information.

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<sup>1</sup> The full report can be accessed here: <https://ovic.vic.gov.au/about-us/documents-and-publications-we-produce/research-and-reports/the-culture-of-implementing-freedom-of-information-in-australia/>

<sup>2</sup> Lidberg, et al., *The culture of implementing Freedom of Information in Australia*, p. 28-33.