

Question on Notice
No. 973
Asked on 6 June 2006

DR DOUGLAS asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

With reference to Freedom of Information (FOI) applications received by agencies within his portfolio, including the ministerial office for 2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05 and current financial year to date—

- (1) What are the total numbers of personal and non-personal FOI applications received (reported separately)?
- (2) What was the total of fees and charges levied in respect of personal and non-personal applications (reported separately)?
- (3) In respect of non-personal FOI applications, how many applicants have sought internal and/or external review of decisions regarding the levying of time-based charges (reported separately)?

ANSWER:

FOI Applications To Health Portfolio Bodies
(including the Office of the Minister for Health, Queensland Health and other Health Portfolio Agencies)

Year	Application Type	Total numbers of applications received	Total amount of fees and charges collected	Total number of internal review of decisions regarding the levying of time based charges	Total number of external review of decisions regarding the levying of time based charges
2002-03	Personal applications	1,339	-	-	-
	Non-personal applications	653	\$22,723.70	1	1
2003-04	Personal applications	1,261	-	-	-
	Non-personal applications	804	\$23,835.51	1	1
2004-05	Personal applications	1,476	-	-	-
	Non-personal applications	1,170	\$44,867.80	0	0
2005-06 (Year to March 2006)*	Personal applications	1,155	-	-	-
	Non-personal applications	873	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*

** Statistical information regarding FOI is not recorded centrally (either within Queensland Health or the health portfolio as a whole) and is only collated once a year for reporting purposes in accordance with s.108 of the FOI Act. Accordingly, 2005-06 FOI data for the health portfolio will only be available in September 2006 (at the earliest). However, numbers of applications lodged are routinely collected within Queensland Health and so are available for the financial year up until March 2006 (figures for health portfolio agencies have also been included).*

With the exception of the information concerning internal and external reviews and data for the current financial year, all of the above information was collated from the relevant FOI Annual Reports tabled in Parliament each year by the Attorney-General (also freely available on the Department of Justice and Attorney-General website).

Media and Opposition FOI Applications

FOI applications by the media or Opposition to Queensland Health are generally handled by the Administrative Law Team (ALT), Legal Unit, Corporate Office. The ALT is responsible for processing FOI applications concerning documents held by Corporate Office as well as statewide services.

The 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 years have seen a significant increase in the number/proportion of FOI applications by the media and Opposition, as illustrated in the table below:

Date Range	Total Number of applications received*	Number of applications received from the media*	Number of applications received from Opposition*	Total and Percentage of Media/Opposition Applications
1 July 2002–30 June 2003	127	6	11	17 (13%)
1 July 2003–30 June 2004	109	8	4	12 (11%)
1 July 2004–30 June 2005	142	12	23	35 (24%)
1 July 2005–19 June 2006	118	3	31	34 (28%)

**These figures are for FOI applications processed in Corporate Office, Queensland Health only.*

It should be noted the above figures do not necessarily reflect the workload required to process applications. Some applications lodged by the Opposition and media:

- Are poorly scoped and result in additional work or time spent simply identifying or locating relevant documents;
- Involve a very high number of documents (for example, one current FOI application by the Opposition involves approximately 500,000 documents in its present form), or concern complex issues that are time consuming to resolve; and
- Concern documents that may be held in some or all of the health service districts – the searches alone for these applications are a significant impost on resources, even though they may only locate a relatively small number of documents.

Delays in finalising some applications by the Opposition and media have occurred for a variety of reasons (including the above), but are primarily due to the heavy FOI workload of the department for the past eighteen months, which is unprecedented. While FOI decision-makers endeavour to meet the demands placed on them within existing resources, it is inevitable that delays will occur.