

Charge for supply of information about Treaty claim over three year period

Legislation	Official Information Act 1982, s 15(1A)
Agency	Office of Treaty Settlements
Ombudsman	Beverley Wakem
Case number(s)	178468
Date	September 2009

No remission of charge in the public interest or due to hardship

The Office of Treaty Settlements (OTS) charged \$708 to meet a request for all correspondence, memoranda, faxes, emails, file notes, and notes of telephone calls relating to the Te Roroa claim over a three year period. The requester complained to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman noted that the information at issue was found in 50 files, and concluded the charge imposed reflected a significant under-estimation of the time that would be required to meet the request.

The Ombudsman accepted that the Te Roroa claim and its subsequent settlement raised matters of public interest. Disclosure of information relating to the settlement process would serve to increase the transparency of the process and promote accountability for the settlement that was reached. However, this did not mean that there was a public interest in making available, without charge, all correspondence, memoranda, faxes, emails, file notes and notes of telephone calls relating to the settlement over a three year period.

The request was so broadly framed it would likely capture many minor and trivial documents. Disclosure of this type of information would be unlikely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the settlement process.

The Ombudsman acknowledged the requester's contention that meeting the charge would cause him hardship. A requester's personal financial hardship is a matter that may be taken into account in assessing whether to impose a charge. However, lack of financial resources, by itself, does not provide sufficient reason to remit an otherwise reasonable charge. Some public

interest considerations favouring the disclosure of the information should also be apparent. Although there were public interest considerations favouring the disclosure of information relating to the settlement process in this case, the breadth of the information potentially covered by the request went beyond the information needed to meet the public interest considerations involved.

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