

Request for information about staff and salaries in the Prime Minister's office

Legislation	Official Information Act 1982, s 9(2)(a)
Agency	Minister Responsible for Ministerial Services
Ombudsman	Sir Brian Elwood
Case number(s)	W41517
Date	September 1999

Request for detailed information about the number of persons in the Prime Minister's office and their salaries—information withheld to protect privacy of individuals—s 9(2)(a) applied to protect some of the information requested but public interest identified in release of worthwhile information about expenditure on personnel in PM's office—total expenditure released—s 9(1)

A reporter made a request to the Minister responsible for Ministerial Services for detailed information about:

1. the annual salaries, per person and in total, of the press secretaries, policy advisors, communications co-ordinators and private secretaries in the Prime Minister's Office;
2. the number of additional staff that had joined her office since she became Prime Minister; and
3. how current expenditure compared to the expenditure of her predecessor one year earlier.

The request was refused in reliance upon section 9(2)(a) of the OIA.

After examination of the information relevant to part 1 of the request, it was accepted that disclosure of the detailed information requested would infringe the privacy of the individuals concerned in terms of section 9(2)(a). However, in terms of section 9(1) of the OIA, consideration had to be given to whether there was any public interest in release of the

information which, in the particular circumstances of the case, outweighed the interest in withholding.

It was considered that there was a public interest in release of worthwhile information about expenditure on personnel in the Prime Minister's office given that the organisation and staffing of the Prime Minister's office is a matter of importance and is critical to the effectiveness of the Prime Minister in the discharge of her constitutional role. To meet the accountability requirements of this kind of expenditure while protecting the privacy of the individuals concerned, it was suggested that the total personnel expenditure within the office together with the number of staff involved should be released.

The Privacy Commissioner was consulted pursuant to section 29B of the OIA and confirmed that he agreed with the approach taken.

After considering the information relevant to parts 2 and 3 of the request, it appeared that it could be provided without prejudice to the interests protected by section 9(2)(a).

The Minister agreed to provide the requester with a statement detailing:

- the total expenditure on personnel within the Prime Minister's office and the total number of staff at the date of the request;
- the number of staff the Prime Minister had had while holding a previous portfolio as Minister of the Crown; and
- the number of relevant staff/advisors at the date of the request, their cost and a comparison with the cost of the same categories of staff employed by her predecessor a year earlier.

The requester was satisfied with the information provided and the complaint was resolved.

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