



Introduction

The last Strategic Plan for the Office of the Freedom of Information Commissioner (**OFOIC**) was established in 2014. Since then, there have been many changes; and it is anticipated that there are more to come. This new Strategic Plan will, in what will be a period of significant change, guide the Office through the next two years. Beyond that, it will need to be revised to align with the new environment the Office will potentially find itself in. Until then, the Plan will drive our decision making at all levels through the Office. We will regularly monitor our performance and our progress towards the priorities identified in this plan. The Plan reflects our commitment to working with applicants, agencies and our stakeholders, understanding their expectations and prioritising our activities accordingly.

Who we are

The Victorian *Freedom of Information Act 1982* makes provision for the role, function and powers of FOI Commissioner. Michael Ison is the current Acting FOI Commissioner.

The FOI Commissioner is independent and reports directly to Parliament. The Office currently employs 25 staff members (as of August 2016), providing skills and expertise across a range of disciplines. The staff assisting the FOI Commissioner are employed under Part 3 of the *Public Administration Act 2004* to enable the FOI Commissioner to perform his functions and exercise his powers under the FOI Act. Established to enhance openness and transparency in government in Victoria, the OFOIC is a key part of the Government's integrity reform program.

What we do

The FOI Act provides the Commissioner with the following functions and powers:

- to promote understanding and acceptance by agencies of the Act and its object;
- to conduct reviews of decisions by agencies on requests under the Act;
- to receive and handle complaints in accordance with Part VIA of the Act;
- to provide advice, education and guidance to agencies in relation to compliance with any professional standards;
- to monitor compliance by agencies with those professional standards;
- to provide advice, education and guidance to agencies and the public in relation to the Commissioner's functions;
- in accordance with Division 3 of Part VII of the Act, to report on the operation of the Act;
- at the request of the Minister, to provide advice to the Minister in relation to the operation and administration of the Act; and
- any other functions conferred on the Commissioner by or under the Act or any other Act.

Strategic Environment

The strategic direction of the Office has been shaped by the aims and intentions of Government. These were initially reflected in the legislation of 2012 that created the Office. This legislation was amended in 2014 to provide more decision-making resources and to clarify some of the processes of the Office.

At the time of writing this strategic plan, the Office has outstanding reviews and complaints. In addition, our education output is limited and focused on awareness raising.

In May 2016 the Government through the Special Minister of State announced the Government's intention to merge our Office with the Office of the Commissioner for Privacy and Data Protection to create the new Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (**OVIC**). The Minister also announced an intention to undertake a detailed review of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. The *Freedom of Information Amendment (Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner) Bill 2016* was introduced into Parliament in June 2016 to give effect to the Government's intention. The Bill proposes a 1 July 2017 commencement date for the new Office.

At the time of writing, the Bill has not yet passed or been debated by either House of Parliament. The Bill proposes significant changes to the FOI process in Victoria and to the powers of OVIC in relation to FOI. Those powers include the power to compel the production of documents, to order specific searches for documents, to conduct own motion investigations, to prosecute breaches of the Act which will carry criminal penalties and to publish FOI guidelines that will be binding upon agencies.

The strategic priorities of the FOI Commissioner prior to the creation of OVIC include to:

- address as many outstanding reviews and complaints as possible;
- complete fresh reviews in as timely a manner as possible;
- resolve fresh complaints as early as possible;
- provide appropriate FOI training opportunities for FOI Officers;
- provide greater guidance on the FOI process, including our review and complaint processes, for the public and agencies;
- improve the detail and transparency of our reporting;
- actively use our own data to inform our strategic decision making;
- develop and support staff through coaching and training;
- share our own data with stakeholders with a view to the ongoing improvement of the administration of FOI in Victoria; and
- prepare the Office for a smooth transition to OVIC.

These priorities will have to be achieved in a tight fiscal environment and changing legislative landscape.

This Plan must be read in conjunction with the Business Plan, which lists a program of activities to assist in meeting our objectives.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	Conduct reviews of agency decisions and handle complaints	Provide advice, education and guidance	Develop and support our people	Maintain good corporate governance
OBJECTIVE	We will fulfil all aspects of our core operational functions under the Act to conduct reviews and handle complaints	We will provide advice, education and guidance to agencies and the public in relation to our functions, building on key partnerships and networks	We will provide professional development opportunities and support to all staff members to meet business requirements while proactively enhancing diversity in the workplace	We will maintain robust policies and procedures, find better ways to work, report as required on our activities and have oversight of all our core functions
KEY PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolution of reviews and complaints are timely Precedent knowledge and Office expertise is continually increased Proactive disclosure of information is promoted Reviews are conducted with minimal formality and technicality, with informal resolution encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints from applicants to the Accountability and Oversight Committee are minimal FOI Officers are provided with comprehensive / OFOIC endorsed training Stakeholders are satisfied with the quality and quantity of advice and education provided Agency co-operation and compliance is high (FOI Act / Prof. Standards) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Office is seen as an Employer of Choice with a culture that reflects our values Effective workforce and talent management strategies ensure staff have the skills and expertise to meet current and future needs Change Management processes meet staff expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High public confidence in the Office's contribution to the Government's integrity regime Governance policies, structures & processes are in place and active in managing Office strategies and risk Financial and non-financial resources are appropriately managed Technology & information management support the achievement of the Office objectives

2016-18 Challenges

- ▶ The Government's commitment to create the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner
- ▶ Budget constraints and uncertainty for future resourcing
- ▶ Keeping up with use of online technologies and advanced systems
- ▶ Engaging and anticipating applicant and stakeholder expectations/needs
- ▶ Retaining and attracting skilled, experienced staff for service delivery

Realising our Vision, Purpose and Values ...

Our Vision and Purpose reflect the intent that underpins the establishment of the Office and the objectives of the FOI Act. Our Values guide us to be consistent in our decision-making, deliver our services in the context of natural justice, be unbiased and honest in our decisions and communication, follow fair processes and legal precedents, provide sufficient information as to how a decision was reached, provide value for money in the use of our available resources, keep stakeholders appropriately informed on case progress, show flexibility and adaptability in the use of our team, not favour any stakeholder to the detriment of others, act with impartiality in all matters, and treat each case on its merits.