



Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023–2024

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: MR ANDREW BRADDOCK MLA

Addressed to: MS RACHEL STEPHEN- SMITH MLA, MINISTER FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE

In relation to: QTON 43 – CANBERRA DAY DOCUMENT RELEASE

Hearing: 17 February 2025

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 35

Transcript provided: 24 February 2025

Answer Due: 3 March 2025

Ms Danielle Wickman, Executive Branch Manager, Territory Records Office & Physical Records Operations, Policy & Cabinet Division, CMTEDD took on notice the following question:

Mr Braddock: Thank you. I have got a question about the Territory Records Act. In a recent question on notice, I found out that it takes on average 321 days from the date of a request to the date the information has been received. So I would like to understand why this lengthy timeframe is required and what steps have been made to decrease that timeframe.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Dani can answer that question.

Ms Wickman: Danielle Wickman, Executive Branch Manager and Director of Territory Records. I have read and I understand the privileges statement. So Mr Braddock, you referred to a period of time that requests take to process. Is that correct?

Mr Braddock: In response to a question on notice. So the average time from the date of a request to the date the applicant receives the requested document is currently 321 days.

Ms Wickman: I am afraid I am not aware of that statistic. It is not a question that we were involved in responding to. So I might have to take that on notice to understand a bit more.

MS RACHEL STEPHEN-SMITH MLA, MINISTER FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

- The *Territory Records Act 2002* provides for administrative records of the ACT Government to be made publicly available after 20 years. It also requires the publication each Canberra Day of lists of Accessible Executive Documents that are 10 years old. Applicants can request access to the Executive documents identified on those lists.
- Executive documents requested for release are then subject to a public interest assessment, as required by the *Territory Records Act 2002*, before any material can be published.

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- There is no legislated timeframe for the release of executive documents.
- Previously, between 2018 to 2021, an average of 24 accessible executive documents (around six per cent of newly available documents) were requested each year.
- However, since 2022, all newly accessible executive documents (1,315 in total) have been requested. In addition, 134 documents from previous years going back to self-Government in 1989 have been requested.
- Of the 1,449 documents requests, 804 (56 per cent) release decisions and associated executive documents have been released and published online.
- More executive documents have been released in the last three years than in the previous 10 years combined, but the large volume of documents requested in the last few years means there is now a backlog of documents that are being reviewed and released.
- There are a range of reasons why a decision to release material may still be under consideration. This varies from document to document but may include:
 - the volume and complexity of the material; and
 - any necessary engagement with third parties which may impact the release of certain information, such as consideration of personal privacy and, in some cases, safety.
- Access to records more than 20 years old that are not Executive documents is managed on behalf of ACT Government agencies by the Territory Records Office's ArchivesACT service.
- There is no statutory timeframe for providing access to these records.
- Processes for accessing historical records can take longer than those for more contemporary records, such as through Freedom of Information applications. They generally involve the interrogation of a range of databases and retrieval of hard copy records from secondary or remote storage.
- Records that are more than 20 years old can still be subject to access restrictions, such as to protect personal privacy or public safety.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration

Signature:



Date:

3/3/25

By the Minister for the Public Service, Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA