

Organization and Implementation

The Director of the Access to Information and Privacy Protection Division (the ATIP Office) has been delegated full authority to exercise the powers of the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. The ATIP Office is responsible for the development, co-ordination and implementation of effective policies, guidelines and procedures to manage the Department's compliance with these Acts. All requests submitted to the Department within Canada or at Canadian missions abroad are replied to by the ATIP Office in Ottawa. The Director ATIP reports to the Director General of the Executive Services Bureau. In addition to the Director ATIP, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Minister for International Trade and the Director General of the Executive Services Bureau and are also designated with full powers, and all Heads of Mission are designated to act under Section 8(2)(m) of the Privacy Act.

The Canadian Government holds records and information received in confidence from foreign Governments. Other federal Government institutions are encouraged to solicit the assistance of the Department in determining the extent to which documents were obtained in confidence or the extent to which disclosure of information would be injurious to the conduct of international affairs. The ATIP Office is responsible for consultations with foreign Governments which are normally undertaken through Canadian posts abroad. Requests by foreign Governments regarding the declassification and disclosure of Canadian documents are also processed by the Office. The Department also collects, under various legislative authorities or otherwise, an appreciable amount of commercial information in confidence from companies operating abroad or dealing with foreign Governments. In the event of requests for such information, the Department, if it determines it has no substantive interest in the information, will undertake appropriate notification or consultation with interested parties before disclosing any records. The ATIP Office also has frequent occasion to convey personal information to federal investigative agencies.

In addition to the Director, the ATIP Office has a complement of four officers, two support staff and two consultants, all of whom are dedicated to Access, Privacy and related functions on a full-time basis. The mix of rotational foreign service and non-rotational specialist staff reflects an appropriate balance between broad ATIP experience and detailed knowledge of the policies and workings of a large and multifaceted Department.

Case Load

In the fiscal year 1997-98, the Department received 316 Access requests and 62 Privacy requests, for a total case load of 378 formal requests for information. In addition, the Office processed 260 consultations from other Government departments and 116 requests for personal information under Section 8(2)(e) of the Privacy Act. There were 76 informal requests. Included in these statistics are a number of requests for consultation with foreign Governments for release of information and requests from foreign Governments for the declassification of