



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade

Our Ref: Fol/Req/2019/354

06 January, 2020

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I refer to the request which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

- *Current rates of Foreign Service Allowances payable to Irish citizens (Grade EO and HEO only) whilst in Australia and New Zealand*

Specifically with regard to the following:

- *Cost of Living Allowance (COLA)*
- *Local Post Allowance (LPA)*
- *Current Rent Ceilings for each grade and location*

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade comprises headquarters in Dublin and diplomatic missions abroad. Missions abroad undertake a wide range of functions in pursuit of Ireland's foreign policy interests, including advancing Government policies, in particular with the EU and the UN, and providing frontline consular services to Irish citizens overseas. They also support the promotion of Irish culture and enhanced visibility for Ireland abroad, including via our diaspora and community networks. Missions work to advance Ireland's trade, tourism, education and investment objectives, including through the organisation of Ministerial-led Trade missions and the Saint Patrick's Day programme of promotional visits and events, both of which allow for the development of contacts and influence with business and political leaders. These and other promotional activities help to advance Ireland's values and extend our influence and global visibility.

In Australia and New Zealand, Ireland's Missions work closely with Irish State Agencies, such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, and Tourism Ireland, located in both countries to maximise opportunities for Irish business interests by:

- Supporting Irish companies who want to access the Australian and New Zealand markets;
- Providing general advice on doing business locally and, through our network of contacts, pursue opportunities that will benefit Ireland;
- Working to secure market access for Irish products in key sectors;
- Promoting Ireland as a location for tourism and for investment.

Foreign Service Allowances

In common with other diplomatic services, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides Foreign Service Allowances for HQ officers posted abroad to serve the State in an official capacity for defined periods. The purpose of Foreign Service Allowances is to defray the additional costs to officers and their families of moving and living abroad. Foreign Service Allowances are based on independently sourced data provided by Employment Conditions Abroad (ECA), an independent company that provides similar services to other governments, non-government organisations and multi-national companies. Foreign Service Allowances are regularly reviewed to take account of fluctuations in key economic indicators.

Components of the Foreign Service Allowance system include:

- Cost of Living Allowance (COLA), which is designed to estimate and defray costs associated with a higher cost of living at the post abroad. The Department uses the services of an independent firm to provide cost of living indices for the various locations required. COLA only becomes payable at posts with a higher cost of living index than Dublin.
- Local Post Allowance (LPA), which addresses some of the additional indirect costs arising from the representational role of officers. This allowance, which varies according to marital status and grade, is payable at all locations abroad.

I am refusing your request for current rates of Foreign Service Allowances payable to Irish citizens (Grade EO and HEO only) whilst in Australia and New Zealand under Section 37 (1) - i.e. *"a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request, if in the opinion of the head, access to the record concerned would involve the disclosure of personal information"*.

In view of the small number of Irish posted officers serving in Australia and New Zealand, and as officers' family circumstances are, amongst other factors, taken into consideration in the calculation of allowances, I deem that the release of such material would include personal information and could jeopardise the right to privacy.

I am also refusing your request for current rates of Foreign Service Allowances payable to Irish citizens (Grade EO and HEO only) whilst in Australia and New Zealand under Section 36 (1) (b) – i.e. *"a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if the record contains financial, commercial, scientific or technical or other information whose disclosure could reasonably be expected to result in a material financial loss or gain to the person to whom the information relates, or could prejudice the competitive position of that person in the conduct of his or her profession or business or otherwise in his or her occupation"*.

Releasing this data would breach commercial confidentiality of ECA data and could compromise ECA's position in this specialist market.

Current Rent Reimbursement Ceilings

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides officers who serve the State abroad with an individual rent reimbursement ceiling to enable them to rent suitable accommodation at post where required.

Rent reimbursement ceilings are not set according to grade but are specific to individual personal and family circumstances and contemporary market rental values. Data on contemporary market rental values is provided by Employment Conditions Abroad (ECA), an independent company that provides similar services to other governments, non-government organisations and multi-national companies.

I am refusing your request in respect of current rent ceilings for each grade and location under Section 37 (1) - i.e. *"a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request, if in the opinion of the head, access to the record concerned would involve the disclosure of personal information*".

In view of the small number of Irish posted officers serving in Australia and New Zealand, and as officers' family circumstances are, amongst other factors, taken into consideration in the calculation of rent reimbursement ceilings, I deem that the release of such material would include personal information and could jeopardise the right to privacy.

I am also refusing your request for current rates of rent ceilings for each grade and location under Section 36 (1) (b) – i.e. *"a head shall refuse to grant an FOI request if the record contains financial, commercial, scientific or technical or other information whose disclosure could reasonably be expected to result in a material financial loss or gain to the person to whom the information relates, or could prejudice the competitive position of that person in the conduct of his or her profession or business or otherwise in his or her occupation"*

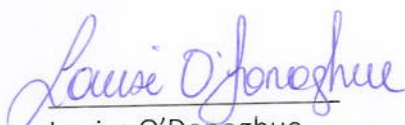
Releasing this data would breach commercial confidentiality of ECA data and could compromise ECA's position in this specialist market.

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely,


Louise O'Donoghue