Dear [Name],

I refer to your email of 19 July 2011, received in our office on 20 July 2011, in which you requested access, under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act), to:

"...the total flying hours for each of the unmanned aerial vehicles, or drone-type aircraft, operated by Australia in Afghanistan by year since the war started, along with summary documents detailing the inavailability of any drones during that period, and reports and briefs on drone operator staffing and fatigue issues between 1 January 2010 and 19 July 2011."

2. On receipt of your request our office agreed to undertake inquiries with the relevant action areas to assist you with clarifying and refining the scope of your request.

3. By email dated 13 October 2011, you agreed to revise the scope of your request to:

"Access to summary reports showing the total number of flying hours for Scan Eagle(s) being operated by Australia in Afghanistan since June 2007 [Item 1]; and summary reports showing the total number of flying hours for Heron(s) being operated by Australia in Afghanistan since 2009. " [Item 2]

4. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the decision relating to the documents that are the subject of your request.

Defending Australia and its National Interests
FOI decision makers

5. Colonel S.A. Stuart, Director Coordination – Army and Group Captain R.T. Chipman, Director, Air & Space Operations Centre, Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC) are the authorised decision makers, under the FOI Act, in relation to your request.

Item 1
Documents identified

6. Colonel Stuart identified one document, being an Excel spreadsheet produced from the Unmanned Aerial System Management Unit, as matching Item 1 of your request.

Decision

7. Colonel Stuart has decided to release the identified document intact.

Item 2
Documents identified

8. Group Captain Chipman identified two documents matching the scope of Item 2 of your request, being reports titled:

i. TG633.2 MEAO Air Component TECHCON Report 630/10; and

ii. TG633.2 MEAO Air Component TECHCON Report 317/11.

Material taken into account

9. In making his decision, Group Captain Chipman had regard to:

- the specific parameters of the request;
- the content of the documents in issue;
- relevant provisions in the FOI Act;
- the guidelines published by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner under section 93A of the FOI Act (the guidelines); and
- advice from Air Force Headquarters and Commander Task Group 633.2 whose duties relate to the matters referred to in the document.

Decision

10. Group Captain Chipman has decided to release the two identified documents with irrelevant material removed in accordance with subparagraph 22(1)(a)(ii) [access to edited copies with exempt or irrelevant matter deleted] of the FOI Act.

11. Group Captain Chipman found that the two identified documents contained information relating to other Task Group 633.2 operational activities, which he considered is reasonably regarded as irrelevant to the terms of your request.
12. Group Captain Chipman advised that while Australian personnel were supporting a Canadian Heron Detachment in 2009, Heron was not being operated by Australia prior to achieving Initial Operating Capability in January 2010.

13. Copies of relevant sections of the FOI Act are at Enclosure 1.

Payment of Charges

14. In our letter, dated 18 October 2011, the department estimated the cost associated with processing your request to be $[redacted]. You agreed to pay charges for the administration of your request and paid the preliminary assessment deposit of $[redacted] on 24 October 2011. Upon completion of your request, the actual amount for processing matched the preliminary assessment. Accordingly, you are required to pay $[redacted] in order to finalise your request.

15. Cheques or money orders should be made out to the ‘Receiver of Public Monies’ and forwarded to the address at the top of this letter. Credit card payments can be made by completing the form at Enclosure 2 and returning it to the FOI Directorate. The documents in the form approved for release will be dispatched on receipt of the outstanding charges.

Rights of review


Further advice

17. Should you have any questions in regard to this matter please contact me directly on (07) 3332 6359. Alternatively, the FOI team can be contacted on the details at the top of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Stinson
Assistant Director – Media Case Management
Freedom of Information

18 November 2011

Enclosures:
1. Relevant sections of the FOI Act
2. Credit Card form