

NEWS RELEASE

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BC Ministry responsible for FOI has no idea how many employees work in FOI

Vancouver – The Ministry responsible for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act across the BC government claims it has no documents stating how many people in the government work on FOI requests.

In March 2008, the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association filed an FOI request with the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services asking for "the number of staff employed in managing and responding to FOI requests in the information and privacy offices of each ministry, for each year from the year 2000 to the present day."

The Ministry responded to the FOI request by supplying 10 pages of near-unintelligible emails sent between ministries on a single day in November 2007, containing staff figures for two ministries. There are 19 ministries in the BC government.

The response included a statement that these were the only records responsive to the request.

The Ministry's Service Plan for 2008-09 describes its role as follows:

"Citizens' Services provides corporate leadership and strategic direction for information management and information technology across government. It is responsible for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Personal Information Protection Act, the Document Disposal Act, and the Electronic Transactions Act and all policy, standards and directives that flow from them."

"It is inconceivable to us that the lead department responsible for FOI across the government has no idea how many people actually handle FOI requests," said FIPA Executive Director Darrell Evans. "You would naturally suspect they were hiding something – but maybe they really don't know what is going on with FOI, despite what their own Service Plan says."

This does not bode well for the government's plan, just announced, to centralize the processing of all FOI requests in a single agency within the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services (MLCS).

The centralization of FOI was part of government's response to a critical report from Information and Privacy Commissioner David Loukidelis. MLCS was identified as having the second worst performance in the entire BC government. (Only the Premier's office was slower to respond to access requests.)

The Commissioner's full report is available at [http://www.oipcbc.org/investigations/reports/F08-35580_Calendar_2008_Report_Card\(Feb_2009\).pdf](http://www.oipcbc.org/investigations/reports/F08-35580_Calendar_2008_Report_Card(Feb_2009).pdf)