

ACT rates inquiry

STORY

FOI request informs ACT rates inquiry

No explanation for 305% increase in land valuation

An applicant in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Ms Karen Paxton, sought access to documents supporting a 305% increase in her property's valuation, and therefore her rates bill.

Ms Paxton also sought access to valuations on other similar properties, which she believed had not increased. The ACT's Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) refused access to the information on grounds it was prohibited by a secrecy provision of a law. The applicant then sought a review of that decision by the ACT Ombudsman.

In both the access application and the review, the applicant wanted to understand the rationale for the increased valuation.

The review considered that the information refused by CMTEDD, while within scope, did not explain the rationale for the increased property value.

Therefore, the issue was whether CMTEDD had taken reasonable steps to identify all government information within scope - that is, information that would explain the decision for the increase in the value of the property.

'But, after six months of research including freedom of information requests and going to the ACT Ombudsman, she told the inquiry she still had no answer from the territory's revenue office as to why the valuation was increased.'

The Canberra Times, 28 Feb 2019

The decision concluded that CMTEDD had taken reasonable steps to identify all relevant government information, but that no such relevant information existed.

Ms Paxton used this decision to support an objection to the rates, and her argument that there was no documented rationale for the valuation of her property.

Inquiry into Commercial Rates

On 29 November 2018, the Legislative Assembly for the ACT resolved that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts would inquire into commercial rates in Canberra.

Ms Paxton's experience was one of the cases examined by the Committee.

In April this year, the Committee tabled its report, making 25 recommendations for reforming the system, including significant changes to the law.

One of the principle recommendations of the inquiry report was to establish a taskforce to review the commercial rating system to improve transparency, increase certainty for owners and consider economic effects, liaising widely with stakeholders and the community.

The Government now has four months to respond to the Committee's report.



ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL RATES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Report 6



Office of the Information Commissioner
Queensland

07 3234 7373 | 1800 642 753
www.oic.qld.gov.au

