

**PM's department deems Gillard signature 'irrelevant'**  
**National Times**  
**July 17, 2012**  
**By Philip Dorling**

The Prime Minister's department has declared Julia Gillard's signature on official documents to be "irrelevant" in an effort to conceal information about her handling of sensitive briefings on WikiLeaks.

A senior executive in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet last week ruled that "the signatures of the Prime Minister and her staff are irrelevant matter" to be redacted from documents released to Fairfax Media under freedom-of-information legislation.

The surprising characterisation of the Prime Minister's annotations arises from embarrassment caused to Ms Gillard last May when an earlier freedom-of-information application by Fairfax revealed the Prime Minister took days to read secret and high-priority briefing papers about WikiLeaks.

Declassified copies of Ms Gillard's briefings in November and December 2010, the period when WikiLeaks began releasing thousands of leaked US diplomatic cables, showed the Prime Minister never signed any briefing papers as read on the day they were submitted.

Ms Gillard generally took between four and six days to read urgent briefings. Much of her paperwork appeared to have been delegated to her staff.

Ms Gillard took five days to read urgent advice from the Australian Federal Police on whether WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange had breached Australian law, after she had publicly said WikiLeaks' publication of US classified documents was illegal. The AFP later publicly announced no offence against Australian law had occurred.

The federal government has also moved to suppress the release of information about the extradition of Mr Assange to Sweden or the United States on the grounds disclosure of "assessments of legal processes in foreign jurisdictions" would harm Australia's foreign relations.

Questioned at a Senate estimates committee hearing, then national security adviser Duncan Lewis insisted Ms Gillard's handling of urgent briefing material was irrelevant to the work of her own department.

"We cannot say that the handling of these documents in the Prime Minister's office or by the Prime Minister had any impact whatsoever on the pace at which we were working in the department," Mr Lewis said.

Redactions in the latest FOI release of Ms Gillard's WikiLeaks briefings, made by Rupert Hollin, an assistant secretary in the Defence, Intelligence and Information Sharing division of the Prime Minister's department, specifically exclude information that reveals when Ms Gillard read official papers.

The government is adopting an increasingly restrictive approach to the release of information about WikiLeaks, especially the extent of its knowledge of the ongoing US espionage investigation directed against Mr Assange.

Copyright © 2012 Fairfax Media

Source: <http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/opinion/political-news/pms-department-deems-gillard-signature-irrelevant-20120717-227y6.html>