



Access to Information

2009 - 10 Q4 Report



Background

This report is based on the actual information on the Teams Request Trackers, at the end of Quarter 4 2009-10. We only track complex requests, which are defined as:

1. requests which fall outside our normal course of business;
2. requests for information where we might refuse eg sensitive, confidential information or a repeat request;
3. requests for information related to the policy making process;
4. requests on which it may be necessary to consult with others either within Natural England or outside;
5. requests for large amounts of information or information which may be difficult to locate;
6. requests which seem unclear or too general to deal with, and where we will need to seek clarification from the applicant;
7. requests for information where a search is made, but none is found.

Requests and Applicants		
No of requests for information which have been logged on to the Natural England request trackers		67
% of requests identified as falling under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.		92%
% of requests identified as falling under the Freedom of Information Act 2000		8%
% of requests that were from private citizens		65%
% of requests that were from public bodies or others		15%
% of requests that were from businesses		12%
% of requests that were from media		5%
% of requests that were from academics		3%
Timeliness		
Requests completed within the 20 working day legal deadline		56
Requests completed within the extended deadline of 40 working days.		11
% completed within the deadlines		100%
Requests still ongoing but still within 20 working day legal deadlines		0
Requests still ongoing but still within extended 40 day legal deadlines		0
Requests completed beyond the legal deadline.		0
Requests completed beyond the extended deadline.		0
Requests with an extended deadline due to the complexity of the request or the need to consider the public interest		11
The timeliness for responding to requests:		
	0–5 working days	22%
	6–10 working days	14%
	11–15 working days	18%
	16–20 working days	31%
	>20 working days	15%
Provision of Information		Exemptions used
Requests which were granted in full	38	
Requests where all information was provided	34	
Requests where only part of the information was provided	28	• Personal data which

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> includes data about third parties • Information not held • Public safety • Internal Communications, • Course of Justice, • Environmental Protection • Reasonably accessible by other means, • Manifestly unreasonable
Requests which were refused in full	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request was too general • Vexatious
Requests which have been transferred to The National Archives	0	
Requests which have been transferred to another public body	0	
Requests we've been unable to complete as we do not hold the information	3	
Requests we've been unable to complete due to no further information being provided by the applicant for us to complete the request	0	
Requests outstanding at the end of the quarter, but within deadlines.	0	
Requests where we are waiting for further information before we can proceed	0	
Advice, Referrals and Appeals		
Requests where we have taken external legal advice	0	
Requests we have referred to the Department of Constitutional Affairs, Clearing House as the request could have potential to affect other public bodies.	0	
Requests we have referred to Defra, as the request could have potential to affect the wider Defra family.	0	
Requests where the applicant has requested an internal review	7	
Information Requested		
% of requests related to planning, coastal access or open access	24%	
% of requests related to SSSIs, SACs, species or habitat related.	28%	
% of requests related to Agri-environment schemes or other grant schemes	36%	
% of requests related to finance, wind power, EIAs or heritage management	12%	

Commentary

The number of requests received this quarter increased this quarter with 67 complex requests being recorded. This is an increase of 52% on the requests received during quarter 3 and an increase of 81% on requests received during quarter 4 in 2008/09.

This figure is indicative of the rise in requests during 2009/10 in which we received a total of 235 requests. This is a rise of 70% compared to the 138 requests received during in 2008/09.

Pleasingly during Q4 we have responded to 100% of these requests within the legal deadline. Of these 83% were completed within the 20 day limit and 17% needed to be extended due to the complex nature of the requests.

We responded to 22% of requests inside 5 working days and 14% within 10 working days.

RTRACK continues to operate successfully with no issues reported.

Complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office

At the start of the quarter we had three complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and we have not received any new complaints during this quarter.

Requests refused this quarter

We partially withheld information for twenty seven requests this quarter. This information was withheld for one or more of the following reasons;

- was for information that contained personal data which included data about third parties;
- was for information that could affect public safety;
- was for information that was classed to be internal communication;
- was for information that could have prejudice the course of justice
- was for information that by releasing could cause damage to the environment;
- was for information that was reasonably accessible by other means,
- was for information that would have been manifestly unreasonable to provide;
- was for information we did not hold.

We also refused two requests in full this quarter. This was because one request was formulated in too general a manner and the requester did not respond to our invitation to clarify or narrow down the request and for the other the request was deemed to be vexatious

We had three requests this quarter that we were unable to complete due to not holding any of the information requested which is a decrease from the ten we received in quarter 3.

Appeals decisions this quarter

We have received 7 requests for internal review this quarter.

Notable Requests

During this quarter over a third (38%) of our requests related to Agri-Environment schemes and other funding. We received a request from a journalist requesting any information held on any ['big cat' sightings](#) in England which generated another request from the media about exotic species sightings in Lancashire. We have also continued to receive requests relating to senior staff's salaries and expenses.

Some of the more unusual requests received this quarter were questions about who owns the coastline, where it is safe to eat crustaceans in Northumberland and hand picking of cockles and mussels.

During this quarter we have received the following separate requests on the same topic:

- four requests relating to the Heath Project in the South West region;
- two requests regarding Helford River;

- two requests relating to the definition of badger setts;
- two requests regarding urban Peregrine Falcons.

We have also continued to receive requests from the [What Do They Know](#) website.

A full list of complex requests received this quarter is available on Natural England's [disclosure log](#)

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