



Access to Information

2007 - 08 Q4 Report



Background

This report is based on the actual information on the Teams Request Trackers, at the end of Quarter 4 2007-08. 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		38
% of requests identified as falling under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.		84%
% of requests identified as falling under the Freedom of Information Act 2000		14%
% of requests identified as falling under the Data Protection Act 1998		2%
% of requests that were from private citizens		64%
% of requests that were from business		22%
% of requests that were from Academics, NGOs, and pressure groups.		14%
Timeliness		
Requests completed within the 20 working day legal deadline		32
Requests completed within the extended deadline of 40 working days.		3
% completed within the deadlines		97%
Requests completed beyond the legal deadline.		1
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		3
The timeliness for responding to requests:		
	0–5 working days	16%
	6–10 working days	18%
	11–15 working days	24%
	16–20 working days	26%
	>20 working days	11%
Provision of Information		Exemptions used
Requests which were granted in full	25	
Requests where only part of the information was provided	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Information • Information not held

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Comms • Legal Professional Privilege
Requests which were refused in full	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prejudice a criminal investigation
Requests which have been transferred to The National Archives	0	
Requests which have been transferred to another public body	1	
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.	2	
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		3
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		3
Information Requested		
% of requests related to SSSIs, species or habitat related.		48%
% of requests related Agri-Environment Schemes		16%
% of requests related to NNR Management		9%
% of requests related to Corporate Governance		6%
% other types of requests, estates, planning development and open access		21%

Commentary

The number of requests received this quarter was almost double the previous quarter. I believe this increase was due to higher awareness amongst Information Management Officers (IMOs) on what should be tracked, as a result of the training events run in Q3.

It is pleasing to see that just over 30% of requests were dealt with inside 2 weeks.

One request was over the deadline for providing a response:
23 days - Request not acted on until too late (West Midlands Region)

The majority of the information requested relates to species, protected site management, agri-environment schemes and planning applications.

RTRACK continues to operate successfully with no issues reported.

Complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office

At the start of the quarter we had 6 complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). During the quarter we had 4 cases closed after informal resolution in our favour. Unfortunately,

we pick up another related to a large number of requests made by one individual and their understanding that we hadn't released the information they had requested. The ICO has asked us to complete an internal review, before they will initiate an investigation. This review is underway.

Requests refused this quarter

We refused in full for one request this quarter as the release of the information could harm an ongoing criminal investigation. We partially withheld information for 10 other requests. This information was either personal information about third parties, internal communication; the release of which would harm the internal decision making process and legally privileged information.

Appeals decisions this quarter

There were four requests for internal review this quarter, one is mentioned above and the other three are related to our decision to terminate a Countryside Stewardship Agreement and its subsequent reinstatement on Appeal. All the appeals are continuing and within deadlines.

Notably Requests

A request for the amount spent on bottled water by Natural England from Vesting Day on 1 October 2006 to the end of the 2006-07 financial year, which was £10,584.72 including VAT.

A full list of complex requests received this quarter is available on Natural England's disclosure log <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/foi/disclosure-log.htm>

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