



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Overseas Territories Directorate
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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0836-14

Thank you for your request for information which we received on 22 August 2014. In your request you asked:

“On July 8, the following parliamentary question was published, which confirmed flight logs from 2002 were subject to water damage:

Diego Garcia

Mr Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government Department or Office keeps a list of flights which passed through Diego Garcia from January 2002 to January 2009. [203500]

Mark Simmonds: Records on flight departures and arrivals on Diego Garcia are held by the British Indian Ocean Territory immigration authorities. Daily occurrence logs, which record the flights landing and taking off, cover the period since 2003. Though there are some limited records from 2002, I understand they are incomplete due to water damage.

On July 15, in response to a question from Tory MP David Davis, it was later reported by the Foreign Office that the records subject to water damage had dried out and the files were being moved.

In connection with this incident, I'd like to ask:

How many files were initially damaged by water and have subsequently dried out?

What date was it discovered the files had been damaged by water?

When was the Foreign Office first notified of the damage to the files?

How long did it take to dry the files out? Any information available on how they were dried out?

When was the fuller inspection carried out by BIOT (British Indian Ocean Territory) immigration officials? Who initiated the fuller inspection (BIOT officials or Foreign Office)?

Where will the records now be stored after they are transferred from the airport?

Were any reports compiled by the FO or BIOT officials on the incident? If so, would it be possible to see the reports?”

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does hold information falling within the terms of your request.

1 *How many files were initially damaged by water and have subsequently dried out?*

We don't hold a record of the number of files initially affected by water but, once dried out, only 5 immigration cards remained damaged beyond legibility. Immigration cards are completed by travellers passing through immigration controls, much as at many airports around the world, and no flight records were lost.

2 *What date was it discovered the files had been damaged by water?
When was the Foreign Office first notified of the damage to the files?*

The damage to the files was discovered by BIOT Administration officials, and immediately reported to the FCO on 3 July 2014.

3 *How long did it take to dry the files out? Any information available on how they were dried out?
When was the fuller inspection carried out by BIOT (British Indian Ocean Territory) immigration officials? Who initiated the fuller inspection (BIOT officials or Foreign Office)?*

The fuller inspection, requested by the Commissioner for BIOT started on 21 July 2014, at which point the files had been dried out. We do not hold a record of the process for drying the files.

4 *Where will the records now be stored after they are transferred from the airport?*

Records relating to flights in/out of Diego Garcia are now retained in a secure store on Diego Garcia. Historic records covering the period to end of 2013 were recalled to BIOT Administration offices in London for their permanent digitisation, and to allow officials to assess their suitability for publication, as the responsible Minister informed Parliament on 21 July 2014.

The information you have requested under your question, "*Were any reports compiled by the FO or BIOT officials on the incident? If so, would it be possible to see the reports?*" has been withheld under Section 36 (2) (b) (i) and (ii) and (c) as its disclosure would be likely to inhibit the free and frank provision of advice or the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of policy deliberation.

Exemptions under Section 36 are subject to a public interest test where we must assess the important public interest in disclosure of information versus the powerful public interest in ensuring that there is a space within which Ministers and officials are able to discuss policy options and delivery, freely and frankly. This is a qualified exemption, and here it was the opinion of a qualified person in this case a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister that on balance the disclosure of this information was not in the public interest.

Yours sincerely,

Assistant Administrator BIOT
Overseas Territories Directorate



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