



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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www.gov.uk/defra

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Your ref:**  
**Our ref:** RFI 6600  
**Date:** 18 June 2014

Dear [REDACTED]

## **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: HACKING INCIDENTS**

Thank you for your request for information about "how many incidents the department has recorded in which the security of its computer systems were breached or 'hacked' in any sense", which we received on 21 May. We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

The information you requested is being withheld as it falls under the exemptions in sections 24 and 31 of the FOIA, which relate to national security (s24) and law enforcement (s31).

In applying these exemptions we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure.

We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosure of information concerning the ability of our boundary defences to detect and block cyber attacks.

On the other hand, there is a strong public interest in withholding the information because, for the exemption under s24, it would not be in the interest of the UK's national security for Defra to provide details about attacks against our IT systems as this would enable individuals to deduce how successful the UK is in detecting these attacks. Confirming what information is held, particularly on the type of attack, would assist someone in testing the effectiveness of the UK's defences against such attacks.

As any attempt to hack into an IT system is a criminal offence, there is also a strong public interest in withholding the information because, for the exemption under s.31, a criminal could deduce if their attacks had been detected or not. For example, if a department responded detailing only a few attacks or only attacks of a certain type a criminal could deduce whether or not they had not been detected. This may enable them to continue their cyber attacks or may damage any attempt to identify them via law enforcement agencies

Therefore, we have concluded that in all the circumstances of the case, the information should be withheld.



I attach an annex giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me.

Yours

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## **Annex**

### **Complaints**

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Mike Kaye, Head of Information Standards, Area 4D, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: [requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk)) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF