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By email

Ref: 13/0372

17 April 2013

RE: FOI Request to DECC – Green growth narratives

Thank you for your email of 17 March 2013 in which you requested cross-government macroeconomic narratives on green growth, firstly from a domestic perspective, and secondly from an international perspective. You also requested correspondence concerning these documents between the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and other government departments regarding their preparation.

We have considered your request in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), rather than under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, as the information you sought disclosure of does, in our view, fall within the definition of 'environmental information' in regulation 2(1) of the EIRs.

I confirm that we do hold information which falls within the scope of your request. However, following careful consideration, it has been decided to withhold this information under regulation 12(4)(d) and (e) of the EIRs.

The relevant part of this regulation provides that "*...a public authority may refuse to disclose information to the extent that...*

(d) the request relates to material which is still in the course of completion, to unfinished documents or to incomplete data; or

(e) the request involves the disclosure of internal communications.

We consider that your request relates to material which is still in the course of completion (in that it forms part of the ongoing process of developing policy in this area)/unfinished documents and/or would involve the disclosure of internal communications.

In applying these exceptions, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure (applying, of course, a presumption in favour of disclosure as required by regulation 12(2) of the EIRs). There is a general public interest in favour of disclosure of information as greater transparency makes government more open and accountable. In addition, there is a general public interest in increased public access to environmental information to create greater awareness of environmental matters. We also acknowledge the more specific public interest in understanding the economic impact of government policies, particularly in relation to the environment.

However, the rationale behind the exceptions in regulation 12(4)(d) and (e) is that it is often in the public interest for public authorities to have a safe space within which to think through and develop policy.

In this case, the requested narratives and correspondence relate to a policy area that is currently live across government, and whose impacts will depend on the particular design and means of implementation which remain under development. The narratives cover evidence and positions on the topic of the green economy and were prepared as briefing papers internal to government. For the sake of completeness, there is currently no intention to seek the finalisation and full agreement of the documents.

Disclosure of the narratives, and related correspondence, would affect the 'safe space' needed to effectively develop the policy in this area. In particular, if the initial views expressed in the information requested were made public it would make it more difficult to make useful modifications and update this stance in the future and would make it more difficult and time consuming to bring the policy development process to a proper conclusion.

There may also be a 'chilling effect' if the information requested is released as those officials advising on this policy area (aspects of which remain under development) may be less frank and candid in giving their views and presenting information in this area in the future if there is a possibility that their on-going thinking may be made public. This is likely to have an adverse impact on the quality of decision making.

Having considered the public interest and the presumption in favour of disclosure in Regulation 12(2), we are satisfied that, on balance, the public interest favours maintaining the exceptions and withholding the information.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Under Regulation 11(2) of the EIRs a request for an internal review should be submitted no later than 40 working days after the date of this letter and should be addressed to the information rights unit at foi@decc.gsi.gov.uk.

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us at the above address.

Yours faithfully,

Chief Economist Directorate, DECC