



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

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Department of Energy & Climate Change
3 Whitehall Place,
London SW1A 2AW
www.decc.gov.uk

Our ref: EIR 14/0063

6 February 2014

Dear **Redacted**

Re: Freedom of Information Request

Thank you for your email of 10 January 2014 in which you requested the following:

"I would like to make a Freedom of Information request regarding communications between Secretary of State Ed Davey (including his advisers and private office) and the Chancellor George Osborne (including his advisers and private office).

Specifically, I am interested in the details of any meetings, phone calls, emails or letters between and within the two groups which discuss shale gas, hydraulic fracturing or the extraction of unconventional gas. I am interested in such communications between 1st January 2013 and today, 10th January 2014.

I would like each email, phone call or meeting logged with a time stamp and indicating, where possible, who were the parties involved. I would also like to see any notes that were attached to these exchanges, either to set up the meeting or conversation or to discuss the matters arising (including any minutes that were taken).

In the case of emails and letters, I would like to see the text of the messages.

I would like to conduct all communication via this email address. Please let me know if there is any other information that you will need in order to carry out this Freedom of Information request.

I would also like to remind you that electronic information which has been deleted but remains in a trash can/recycle bin is still subject to a Freedom of Information request,



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and that it is not permitted for content to be more permanently deleted unless it conforms with the standard records management policy of the department.”

We have considered your request in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) as the information you have sought disclosure of does, in our view, fall within the definition of ‘environmental information’ as stated in the EIRs.

I can confirm that DECC holds information within scope of your request. This information is withheld in accordance with the exception in Regulation 12(4)(e) and Regulation 13(1) of the EIRs.

These exceptions are subject to the public interest test. The key public interest considerations we have taken into account are set out below. In considering the public interest we have applied a presumption in favour of disclosure as required by regulation 12(2) of the EIRs.

Regulation 12(4)(e) provides an exception to the disclosure of internal communications. Emails between staff, including emails between staff in central government departments, which we hold within the scope of this request take the form of internal communications and therefore exception 12(4)(e) applies to all of them.

We appreciate that there is a public interest in disclosing internal communications, as this enables the public to assess the quality of policy formulation, advice and guidance, and provides transparency in the decision making process making Government more accountable.

However, releasing internal communications would inhibit the ability of officials to provide Ministers and senior officials with free and frank advice and keep free and frank records of discussions between officials if there was a possibility that this advice could be disclosed at a later date. This would have a detrimental effect on the briefing process, leading civil servants to be less candid in their views. It would also affect policy development, as it would prove difficult in taking account of the views expressed by others if records were not kept. Given the live nature of the communications within the scope of the request, such outcomes would be likely to prejudice the conduct of public affairs, as this could result in less well-informed Ministers and senior officials.

Having considered the public interest, the Department has taken the decision to withhold the information requested.



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Regulations 12(3) and 13(1) excepts information to the extent that the information requested includes personal data of which the applicant is not the data subject. Regulation 13(1) provides an absolute exception for personal data which then falls to be dealt with under the Data Protection Act 1998. Personal data of third parties can only be disclosed in accordance with the data protection principles. In particular, the first data protection principle requires that disclosure must be fair and lawful and must comply with one of the conditions in Schedule 2 of the Data Protection Act. We do not think that it is fair to release the names of junior members of staff or third parties and do not think that any of the relevant conditions apply.

The Department does not hold any other information such as letters, records of phone calls or meetings within the scope of your request.

Appeals procedure

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within 40 working days of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to the Information Rights Unit (foi@decc.gsi.gov.uk).

Information Rights Unit (DECC Shared Service)
Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Please remember to 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.

Yours sincerely

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