



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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By email

Your ref: [REDACTED]
Our ref: RFI 5796
Date: 24 October 2013

[REDACTED]

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: RELATING TO PHONE CALLS BETWEEN OWEN PATERSON MP AND IRISH AGRICULTURE MINISTER SIMON COVENEY

Thank you for your request for information, about phone calls between Secretary of State Owen Paterson MP and Irish Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney from January 2013 to the present date, which we received on 9 September. As you know, we have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Following careful consideration, we have decided not to disclose some of this information.

Below is the information which can be disclosed:

- Dates of telephone calls between Owen Paterson MP and Irish Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney from January 2013 to the present date
- A brief summary of the call

11/02/2013 at 10.30 – handling of the horsemeat incident at a European level, update on the situation in the UK and Ireland

11/02/2013 at 16.00 – confirmation of arrangement and objectives for a Ministers /European Commission meeting on 13/02/2013

14/02/2013 at 17.30 – next steps at a European level following the meeting in Brussels with the European Commission and discussion with Europol

16/02/2013 at 18.50 – developments from across Europe

06/03/2013 at 11.45 – reporting and longer term policy response to horsemeat issues at an EU level and Irish controls for bovine TB

14/03/2013 at 18.00 – CAP negotiations in advance of Agriculture Council

21/06/2013 at 17.30 – CAP negotiations in advance of Agriculture Council



The remainder of the information requested is being withheld as it falls under the exemptions in sections 27 and 30 of the FOIA, which relate to international relations and investigations and proceedings conducted by public authorities respectively.

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 detail of exchanges between Secretary of State Owen Paterson MP and Irish Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney during the phone calls listed above. The effectiveness of information sharing between the UK and Ireland during the horsemeat incident is an issue which the public are interested in, as is information relating to the investigations into the source of the fraud.

On the other hand, there is a strong public interest in withholding the information because these were confidential discussions between the two Ministers and both would have understood them to be confidential to enable open and frank discussion. Disclosure could damage the good working relationship between the two states at Ministerial and official level, prejudicing the future supply and exchange of information between the two Governments which is necessary for the effective conduct of foreign policy in general, or in other policy areas where a mutual interest emerges. There is also a strong public interest in withholding information which relates to active criminal investigations as disclosure could prejudice the integrity of certain investigations, diminishing the chances of successful prosecution.

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

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, and in keeping with the government's Transparency Agenda, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you will now be published on www.gov.uk together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. Please note that this will not include your personal data.

I attach Annex A, which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you. I also attach Annex B 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

Georgina Collins

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Annex A

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Annex B

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) 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