



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

Your ref: 218/14
Our ref: RFI 6414
Date: 18 March 2014

Dear

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE PUBLICATION OF
“HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY IN THE UK: A REVIEW OF FOOD AID”.**

Thank you for your request for information about draft versions of the published report 'Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid', which we received on 21 February. 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 exemption at section 36 (2)(b) of the FOIA, which relates to the inhibition of the free and frank provision of advice and/or exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation.

Section 36 of the FOIA requires the reasonable opinion of a qualified person in order to grant the exemption. For Defra this means gaining Ministerial authorisation, which has been given in this instance.

In applying this exemption, 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 drafts of the published report. We understand that doing so may improve transparency about the way that Government procurement of research works in practice and the quality assurance required of evidence used.

On the other hand, there is a strong public interest in withholding the information. As outlined above, section 36 grants an exemption under the FOIA if disclosure would inhibit the free and frank provision of advice or the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation. This includes advice or views exchanged in the process of publishing research commissioned by Government to external research contractors. It is reasonable that all contractors commissioned to conduct research on behalf of Government are given a reasonable safe space within which to conduct their work,



formulate and debate opinions and also to discuss their evidence and findings with Government away from external scrutiny and/or media involvement. This safe space was afforded to the researchers for this project, and disclosure would undermine that process. The final report represents the result of their work and the conclusions of which they would like to be publicly associated with. The Government Social Research Code establishes clear expectations to ensure high quality social research and analysis for government that is rigorous, relevant and valued.

Consideration also needs to be given to the potential impact disclosure could have on the willingness of external contractors to conduct research in this or related areas. There is a risk that disclosure would discourage this from happening as it would undermine the process of research contractors providing advice to in confidence to and exchanging views with Government in a free and frank way.

Finally, we consider the substantive public interest in this case has been served by publishing a final report in agreement with the research contractors. This is consistent with the Government's transparency agenda for publishing commissioned research.

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 sincerely,

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) 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