



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

T: [Redacted]  
helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk  
[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

[Name Redacted]

By email to: [Email address redacted]

Your ref:  
Our ref: RFI 6395  
Date: 13 March 2014

Dear [Name redacted]

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Communications between Defra and the  
Agricultural Biotechnology Council (ABC) on the Agri-Tech Strategy since 1<sup>st</sup>  
January 2012**

Thank you for your request for information:

- All communications (including letters, emails, phone/skype/conference calls) between Defra and the Agricultural Biotechnology Council (ABC); and
- all meetings (including agendas, minutes, lists of attendees and meeting papers) with the ABC

regarding the Agri-Tech Strategy, which we received on 13 February 2014.

We have considered your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The EIRs apply to requests for environmental information, which is a broad category of information defined in regulation 2 of the EIRs. Public authorities are required to handle requests for environmental information under the EIRs. They give similar access rights to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

I enclose a copy of the information which can be disclosed:

Two emails from ABC to Defra officials; extracts on the Agri-Tech Strategy from notes of two meetings between ABC and Defra; two emails between BIS.

We have decided that some information should be withheld under regulations 12(3) and 13(1) (third party personal data) of the EIRs, as the information constitutes personal data relating to third parties. The information contains opinions about the views of certain



named third parties. Regulations 12(3) and 13(1) of the EIRs provide that personal data relating to third parties is exempt information if disclosure would breach the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA).

We have also decided that some information should be withheld under Section 41 of the FOI, this is where disclosure would cause a breach of confidence. This exemption contains an inherent public interest test where the information should be withheld unless the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in maintaining the duty of confidence.

We consider that disclosure of this information is likely to breach the first data protection principle in Schedule 1 to the DPA, which relates to the fair and lawful processing of personal data, in two ways. First, disclosure would not constitute 'fair' processing of the personal data, second, disclosure would not satisfy any of the conditions for data processing set out in Schedule 2 to the DPA. Therefore, we have concluded that this information is exempt from disclosure regulation 12(3) and 13(1) of the EIRs.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs, 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](http://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 sincerely

[Name Redacted]

Defra Agri-Tech Policy

## Annex A

### Copyright

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by copyright. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including for private study and non-commercial research, and for any other purpose authorised by an exception in current copyright law. Documents (except photographs) can be also used in the UK without requiring permission for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder.

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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](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

## Annex C

**Email From:** ABC

**Sent:** 04 September 2013 16:28

**To:** Defra

**Subject:** abc - introduction and offer of support

Afternoon,

I understand that you will be taking over from [Name redacted] on the Agricultural Technologies Strategy workstream, so I thought I'd drop you a quick e-mail to introduce myself and offer abc's support.

Abc is the umbrella organisation for the agricultural biotechnology industry in the UK, comprising of six member companies - BASF, Bayer, Dow AgroSciences, Monsanto, Pioneer (DuPont) and Syngenta.

We've been involved with the Ag Tech Strategy since it kicked off last year, and before that we held our roundtable to launch the Going for Growth report on the potential of the UK ag tech industries, which was attended by the then ministers from BIS and Defra. I'm also in regular contact with [Name redacted] in the BIS comms team, feeding into their promotion of the Strategy.

Obviously we're keen to support the strategy being turned into action, and we previously discussed the potential for abc to use our second Going for Growth roundtable as a discussion forum for academics and industry to talk about delivering the strategy. In terms of topics, we'd discussed metrics as an area which will probably need more discussion, but we'd be open to any reasonable suggestions which might support your work plan.

We'd like to choose a date for the roundtable fairly soon, so that we can maintain the momentum, so please just let me know your initial thoughts, and then I can raise it with [Name redacted] to consider how it might tie in to the overall communications strategy. Our last roundtable was held in the BIS conference centre, so if we can borrow a room there again, that would be great. If not, we'll happily host it at the secretariat offices.

If you're free in the next few weeks to meet up for a coffee with me and name redacted, the abc Chair, to discuss further that would be great.

Look forward to hearing from you soon,

ABC

Two meetings were held between Defra and the ABC on the 17<sup>th</sup> January at which the Agri-Tech Strategy was discussed:

**Extract from note from David Heath's Office of meeting held between Defra Minister (David Heath) and members of the Agri-biotech Council, Agri-Tech Strategy reference:**

ABC thanked Defra for the support they have received from the new ministerial team and commented how engaged they were with the Defra-BIS agri-tech strategy.

**Extract from note of official level discussion between members of the ABC and Defra:**

All

Here is a short note of my meeting with Agricultural Biotechnology Council members yesterday (Thurs 17 Jan 2013). ABC members were (Bayer & ABC Chair)[Names redacted] I've flagged a few points/comments/questions I have following the meeting which I'd be grateful for any thoughts on.

- I provided a general update on the UK Agri-Tech Strategy, where we had got to and where we were headed. After that we had a general discussion about their interests in what the Strategy should address, which can be broadly summarised as the following two actions;
- Encourage UK government to signal or help facilitate willingness to engage in greater UK public/private partnerships with EU and global partners to tackle global challenges.
  - They noted this is the short/medium term win/goal.
  - They very strongly believed that ... the UK was missing out on using its existing strengths (science base) to exploit global opportunities.
    - They noted that the Netherlands (and potentially other Member states) are also currently writing Agri-Tech strategies; perhaps we should contact them with regard to joint collaborations. The example given to me was that potentially Rothamsted could team up with a UK private sector company, and work with similar partnership in the Netherlands, and with another global partner to address a global challenge. Their point was that usually an individual company/institute wouldn't take on such a challenge as there is too much risk on the return, but in collaboration they can share the risk around. (Comment; when I pressed them on what a global challenge was they were a little vague, and just said it could be integrated crop management, chemicals or new breeds, say for nutrition.)
    - They also mentioned there is a lot of IP left on the shelf, which these collaborations could potentially use.

Other issues:

- They were extremely interested in the Leadership Council and how it would work. I described it as a work in progress etc, however, they were very strongly concerned that it would be just another Committee which would then have lots of sub-committees and never actually do anything.
  - They recommended there is some sort of 'Executive' set up to support the Leadership Council. This would be a small (I think full-time) group of expert individuals which could ensure actions in the Strategy are taken forward. They particularly linked this back to their point about the global opportunities, where they thought a skilled individual could sit on this Executive to identify these opportunities to make sure it happens. I think this idea is explained in more detail/better in the Syngenta call for evidence response, apols, I haven't had a chance to look.
  - More broadly on the Leadership Council I asked if they had any names to put forward. Fairly quickly and unanimously they suggested (name redacted), primarily because of his wide experience working in academia and industry, they said he was very knowledgeable about where research/spin-outs had been successful or unsuccessful in the UK.
  - Not for the Leadership Council, but they also noted (name redacted) the head of a company called (redacted) would be great to speak to. Apparently the company is based in Oxford, UK, but does all its work abroad, which is extremely unusual. They thought he would be very knowledgeable about venture capital and global challenges/opportunities.
- They didn't go into any detail but they noted a potential problem with IP in the UK. I understand this is addressed in their call for evidence submission.
- Finally, they offered their help on anything for the Strategy. In particular they noted the stakeholder groups they got together for their 'Growing for Growth' reports (which was a catalyst for this strategy), and that they would be pleased to convene them again on our behalf if we wished.

Welcome all your thoughts, and happy to discuss.

**From:** ABC information [[mailto: @abcinformation.org](mailto:@abcinformation.org)]  
**Sent:** 25 April 2013 12:01  
**To:** Defra official  
**Cc:;** [Names redacted]

**Subject:** ag tech strategy - media suggestions for info

Morning [Defra – name redacted],

At the workshop last week, we discussed how we could support your media team in teeing up the launch of the Ag Tech strategy...specifically, suggestions for who they might use as key contacts in the stakeholder group to get interviews/case studies lined up in advance of the launch, and which of the broadsheet journalists we've had good experience with in the past on ag tech stories.

I hope that the below is a useful reference. abc would like to do all we can to support the launch of the ag tech strategy and ensure that the team have access to all of the people and venues they need to make it a meaty, and of course positive, story for journalists. So please just let me know if we can provide anything further.

Also, it would be great if you could let me know who will be the BIS (name redacted) press lead on the launch, so that we can arrange a catch up with them closer to the time,.

BBest,

**Email between BIS and ABC which refers to a Defra official – sent 03.12.13**

Hi name redacted,

I hope you're well, and apologies for bring out of touch recently...I can't believe we're already three chocolates into the advent calendar!

Name redacted and I will be meeting with Stephen Axford and name redacted for a catch-up on the ag tech strategy before Christmas, so I thought I'd get a bit of an update from you about the latest comms work ahead of that.

As I recall from my last conversation with Defra before he moved teams, the communications plan was due to be finalised and agreed by the Leadership Council at the end of October. Has that now been agreed, and what 'phase' are you in at the moment? Obviously abc (name redacted) is still keen to support, but in a way that's useful to you, rather than to just prolong the debate about the focus of the strategy (which I sense from Stephen's recent comments may be a bit of a frustration!).

Happy to catch up over the phone if that's easier, and I should be in the office most of this week, so I'll look forward to speaking shortly.

Best,

ABC.

[Name Redacted]

**Agricultural Biotechnology Council**

PO Box 49710

London

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[Phone number Redacted]

Fax:

[www.abcinformation.org](http://www.abcinformation.org)

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**Email from BIS to ABC, refers to Defra official.**

**From:** BIS official (Communications)  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 22, 2013 22:50  
**To:** '@abcinformation.org'  
**Subject:** ag tech strategy - media suggestions for info

ABC

**Email from ABC to Defra official**

Sent Fri 04/10/2013 16:16

Apologies but I don't know if anyone made contact with you following your helpful email to [Name of Defra official redacted] last month.

I have forwarded your email to our media relations team and I'm sure they will be in contact with you as we move nearer to the launch of the strategy.

I am working on the wider communications plan which will take us to launch and beyond - would you be able to help us cascade the messages via your own channels?

Happy to have a chat if that would suit you.

Many thanks

BIS official (name redacted)

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

**BIS working together for growth**

Hi name redacted,

It was good to talk earlier, and interesting to hear some further info the work that is going on around the Ag Tech Strategy in October.

As I mentioned, if it would be of interest, it would be good to set up a meeting with yourself and Dr name redacted, our Chair, to discuss our role, and potential next steps.

Let me know when might work for such a meeting – we would of course be happy to arrange this after the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> October.

Regards,



Name redacted

Name redacted

**Agricultural Biotechnology Council**

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