



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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13 August 2014

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0410-14

Thank you for your email of 07 April 2014 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

Thank you for your reply of 24 March 2014 (FOA Request Ref: 0216-14)

My original question was in reference to Mr. Liddington's answer in Parliament on 14 March 2011 (HCDebs, col. 43970). In this answer, Mr Liddington referred to 'countries identified as priorities for UK energy security'. Please can you provide me with a list of these countries?

Thank you for the information sent in your last reply. Further to that information, could you provide information on the following, including any briefing papers, papers on the agenda etc.

For the meeting labelled 9 May 2010 (which you claim actually took place in 2012) could you provide any information/briefing papers related to the agenda items 1) Emerging Powers and 2) LNG diversification?

For the meeting that took place on 9 June 2010 could you provide a copy of the report/paper relating to the second item on the agenda, 'International Energy Strategy Project' and any information relating to the third item?

For the meeting that took place on 13 April 2011 could you provide 1) A copy of the paper presented for item 1 on the agenda; 2) A copy of the paper presented for item 2 on the agenda, 'Oil price stability' and 3) A copy of the paper presented for item 5 on the agenda, Long Term Gas Outlook?

For the meeting that took place on the 9 June 2011, could you provide 1) A copy of the paper presented for item 1 on the agenda; 2) A copy of the paper presented for item 3 on the

agenda, 'UKTI commercial diplomacy' and 3) A copy of the paper presented for item 4 on the agenda, 'Long term role for gas'?

For the meeting that took place on 29 September 2011, could you provide a copy of the paper presented for item 7 on the agenda?

For the meeting that took place on 8 December 2011, can you provide a copy of the paper presented for item 3 on the agenda, 'International Energy Strategy Refresh'?

For the meeting that took place on 8 April 2013 can you provide any further information relating to item 2 on the agenda, 'LNG diversification strategy' and any information relating to 'FCO energy projects' listed under 'Other Business'?

For the meeting that took place on 13 October 2013, could you provide any further information on 'Energy literate foreign policy', listed under 'Other Business'?

Finally, could you answer/provide information on the following?

1) Has the committee discussed or presented reports on the implications of an over-reliance on (specifically) Qatar for LNG imports?

2) Has the committee discussed the possibility of an alternative transit route from Qatar, through Yemen, and therefore bypassing the Strait of Hormuz?

3) Lastly, has the committee discussed or presented papers on the implications of the Arab Spring for UK energy security?

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

In regards to your first question: *Mr Liddington referred to 'countries identified as priorities for UK energy security'. Please can you provide me with a list of these countries?* Having conducted a search of our records, I have established that there is not a single reference document setting out a static list of priority countries. Rather, relevant priority countries have been identified as appropriate against the wide range of different energy security work streams which have been taken forward at any given time. In general, countries that will be priorities for work on energy security will be major producers of energy, major consumers of energy or key transit countries. However, for some areas of work, priority countries may be defined more widely than this. For example, the importance of EU energy security work currently underway means that this is a high priority issue in our relations with all EU countries.

Regarding the rest of your request - our search resulted in a number of papers being located which were of relevance to your request.

The purpose of the International Energy Committee is to formulate government policy on International Energy. This is demonstrated in the wording of the Terms of Reference

released to you on 6th February 2014 (request 0027-14): *“The International Energy Committee (IEC) is a free-standing Committee charged with overseeing and guiding policy and activity across the international energy agenda. It will serve as a forum for senior-level policy discussion and decision-making.”* We have determined that the majority of the information you requested is exempt under section 35(1)(a), which relates to the formulation or development of government policy. This exemption requires the application of a public interest test. It is recognised that there is a public interest in the greater transparency in the decision making process to ensure accountability within public authorities. However, officials need to be able to conduct rigorous and candid risk assessments of their policies and programmes including considerations of the pros and cons without there being premature disclosure which might close off better options and inhibit the free and frank discussion of all policy options.

This information refers to International Energy policy, meetings about which, is ongoing and still under discussion. It is our view that disclosure of this information would mean that we would risk undermining future decision making and discussion on this subject in future. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure of the information.

Much of the information you requested also falls under one of the following sections of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA): 27(1)(a) 27(1)(b) and 43(2).

Section 27(1) (a) of the FOIA recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the UK and other states if it was disclosed. Section 27(1)(b) recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the UK and international organisations if it was disclosed. This is a qualified exemption and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours releasing or withholding this material, balancing open and transparent government against the possible impact to our international relations and foreign policy objectives. The FCO recognises there is a general public interest in openness in foreign affairs in order to ensure that the public are able to scrutinise the manner in which public authorities reach important decisions on matters of foreign affairs. This makes for greater accountability, increases public confidence in government decision-making and helps to encourage greater public engagement with political life. The FCO also recognises that there is a general public interest in being able to evaluate the foreign policy of the government.

These public interests have to be weighed against a stronger public interest in the United Kingdom being able successfully to pursue our national interests abroad. If the UK has discussions with or about foreign governments or other interlocutors which are then disclosed, we may acquire a reputation in the international community for indiscretion. That in turn may risk making others more reluctant to deal with us, and this making our work more difficult. We are conscious that release of this sensitive information would undermine trust and damage the UK's reputation as well as significantly increase the risk of provoking a negative reaction by other states and therefore hinder the UK's ability to protect and promote its interests. After balancing the arguments for and against disclosure, I have come to the conclusion that in this case the balance of the public interest lies in withholding the information.

Section 43(2) of the FOIA allows for information to be exempt if its disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person, including the information holder. This is a qualified exemption which requires that the FCO considers carefully the balance of public interest in publishing the information. The FCO considers that there is a general public interest in greater transparency in how Government operates and in demonstrating the methods of communication it conducts with companies. Open policy making may also lead to increased trust and engagement between citizens and government.

With regard to this information and section 43(2) however, we have had to balance the important public interest in disclosure of information against the public interest in protecting the UK's commercial relationships. The FCO believes that publication of some information discussed in private would undermine the working relationship between the UK government and commercial companies, which would be prejudicial to the UK's commercial interests. Disclosure of information could reduce the willingness of companies to engage with the UK. This would reduce the ability of government to support UK commercial objectives and weaken the UK's economic outlook. The FCO considers that this factor outweighs the public interest in releasing the information.

We determined that one of the documents you requested – on FCO Energy Projects – can be released. Where possible, information is disclosed in full however some of the information in this document has been redacted under Section 27(1)(a) of the FOIA. This section recognises the need to protect information that would be likely to prejudice relations between the UK and other states if it was disclosed. For this reason we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Some information has been redacted under section 35(1)(a), which relates to the formulation or development of government policy. This exemption requires the application of a public interest test. It is recognised that there is a public interest in the greater transparency in the decision making process to ensure accountability within public authorities. However, officials need to be able to conduct rigorous and candid risk assessments of their policies and programmes including considerations of the pros and cons without there being premature disclosure which might close off better options and inhibit the free and frank discussion of all policy options. It is our view that disclosure of this information would mean that we would risk undermining future decision making and discussion on this subjects in future. For these reasons we consider that the public interest in maintaining this exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure of the information.

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by the FCO will have been produced by government officials and will be protected by Crown Copyright. You can find details on the arrangement for re-using Crown Copyright information on the [TNA](#) website.

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Yours sincerely,

Desk Officer for Middle East and North Africa Energy
Climate Change and Energy Department



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FCO Energy Projects

FCO Prosperity Directorate, in which CCED sits, is moving towards a greater use of project-based working. In the future, we will deliver a portfolio of projects, managed as a programme, alongside traditional policy work. This structure will allow for clear outcomes and deliverables, and give us clear goals to share with the other government departments we work with. This approach will not be appropriate to all our work, which will continue outside the project-based format.

At present we have a portfolio of seven energy projects, most involving work with other departments, usually DECC.

1. EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative). Joint project with DfID and Posts (FCO lead). Using momentum generated by the UK Presidency of the G8 and the transparency agenda, this project involves a global push to increase membership of, and adherence to, EITI (which improves governance, aids development and helps provide a level playing field for foreign investors). Success will be measured by an increased number of EITI candidate countries.
2. International Energy Governance. Joint project with DECC. This project will determine the extent to which the current remit and membership of international energy institutions support our international energy goals. This coincides with the International Energy Agency's move to extend associate membership to seven key consumer countries (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, and South Africa). [Redacted]
3. [Redacted]
4. Eastern Mediterranean. Managed well, hydrocarbon development in the Eastern Mediterranean has the potential to bring prosperity, increased stability and energy security, and even enhanced political co-operation [Redacted]. It also offers significant commercial opportunities for the UK. [Redacted]
5. Unlocking UK Electricity Infrastructure Investment. Joint project with DECC. This work will facilitate international understanding and investment for the effective delivery of a decarbonised, secure and affordable UK electricity system by maximising the potential to attract the £110bn of inward investment needed. This will involve, with DECC and UKTI, developing and delivering a programme of identification and evaluation of credible investors and policy officials, following it up with targeted engagement. [Redacted]
6. [Redacted]
7. Rhum. DECC led project with FCO, HMT [Redacted]. Restoring production at the North Sea Rhum gas field - a joint venture between BP and a subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company, where production was suspended in late 2010 [Redacted]