



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Africa Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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12 October 2105

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0905-15

Thank you for your email of 10 August asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

Please supply me with any correspondence, meetings and engagements between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or its ministers and the Soma Oil and Gas company or directors and others associated with it.

Please could you disclose me the information starting from 1st January 2013, including memos of meetings/other correspondence etc.

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.

Under section 21 of the Act, we are not required to provide information that is already reasonably accessible to you. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has already responded to part of this question – meetings' relating to Soma Oil and Gas until August 26th 2014 – and the response has been published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foi-release-meetings-between-the-foreign-secretary-and-fco-staff-relating-to-soma-management-limited>

Since the date of the above FOI response, FCO officials have met representatives of Soma Oil and Gas on one further occasion – the designate UK Ambassador to Somalia met with Directors of Soma Oil and Gas at the requesting of Soma Oil and Gas on 29 May 2015. A meeting note was taken, however we have judged it to be exempt under Section 43 (2) of the Act, which relates to commercial interests. The use of this exemption was carefully

considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO. In this case after such consideration we believe that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in its release.

You also requested correspondence. Soma Oil & Gas Non-Executive Director, Lord Clanwilliam wrote to the Minister for Africa, Grant Shapps on 11 August 2015. We have decided to release these documents along with email correspondence arranging the above meeting.

Some of the information contained within the correspondence has been redacted as it is personal data relating to third parties, the disclosure of which would contravene one of the data protection principles. In such circumstances sections 40 (2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act apply. In this case, our view is that disclosure would breach the first data protection principle. This states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. It is the fairness aspect of this principle, which, in our view, would be breached by disclosure. In such circumstances, s.40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. There is, therefore, no public interests test to apply. Some information is also being withheld under Section 43 (2) of the Act - commercially sensitive - as per the above paragraph.

Once an FOI request is answered, it is considered to be in the public domain. To promote transparency, we may now publish the response and any material released on gov.uk in the [FOI releases](#) section. All personal information in the letter will be removed before publishing.

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Yours sincerely,

Somalia Unit



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