



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Nobel House
Area 1E
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

T: 03459 33 55 77
helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

[Redacted]

By email: [Redacted]

Our ref: FOI2020/30229
13 January 2021

Dear [Redacted]

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Meetings with Meat Processors

Thank you for your request for information of 11 November 2020 about meetings with meat processors. We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your information request and our response are set out below.

I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request any minutes, notes or briefings produced relating to the following meetings:

** George Eustice's 3/4/20 call with meat processors*

** Zac Goldsmith's 22/4/20 roundtable with the International Meat Trade Association, Alliance Group and Lamex Food Group*

We enclose a copy of the information you requested.

Some of the information you requested is being withheld as it falls under the exemptions at sections 27(1)(a), 27(1)(c) and 27(1)(d) and section 35(1)(a) of the FOIA, which relate respectively to international relations and the formulation and development of government policy. These exemptions are engaged as the release of the information Defra holds that falls under the scope of this request could compromise the ability of government to negotiate on easements with the EU.

In applying these exemptions, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosure.

Sections 27(1)(a), 27(1)(c) and 27(1)(d) (International relations)

Sections 27(1)(a), 27(1)(c) and 27(1)(d) of the FOIA relate to information which, if released, would, or would be likely to, prejudice relations between the UK and any other state, the interests of the UK abroad and the promotion or protection by the UK of its interests abroad.

We recognise that there is a public interest in promoting the accountability and transparency of government concerning discussions with meat processors. However,



discussions between the UK and the EU about areas of mutual interest are ongoing and it would not be in the public interest to disclose information which might prejudice the outcome of these discussions. In a similar vein, there is a high public interest in protecting information which may relate to, or inform, the government's positions. The effective conduct of international relations depends upon maintaining trust and confidence between governments and international organisations. In this case, the information involved, which if released, would reduce the UK Government's ability to protect and promote UK interests and would prejudice our relations. The public interest in openness of government is therefore outweighed by the substantial interest in the Government being able to successfully pursue the UK's national interests abroad.

Section 35(1)(a) (Formulation and development of government policy)

Section 35(1)(a) of the FOIA provides that information held by a government department is exempt information if it relates to the formulation or development of government policy. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosure of information concerning meetings held by senior officials, particularly as the release of the information may promote greater public understanding of the policy-making process, which would be consistent with the Government's commitment to greater transparency. However, there is a stronger public interest in public authorities having a safe space in which ministers and Government can operate and communicate with informed third parties in private and also manage stakeholder relations in confidence, particularly when such third parties are part of an ongoing collaborative process. Release of the information requested would risk inhibiting officials and Ministers from having full, frank and open discussions as part of the process of formulating policy, particularly if they felt that speculative information relating to live policy issues would be released before final decisions were made on those issues. There is also a risk that releasing information relating to meat processing would adversely affect our relationship with other member states.

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

Finally, we have also decided that names of officials should be withheld under sections 40(2) and 40(3A) of the FOIA as the information constitutes personal data relating to persons other than you. These sections exempt personal information from disclosure if that information relates to someone other than the applicant, and if disclosure of that information would breach any of the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

We consider that disclosure of this information is likely to breach the first data protection principle, which provides that personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly, and in a transparent manner. Disclosure would not constitute 'fair' processing of the personal data because the members of staff concerned would not reasonably expect their contact details to be disclosed in relation to this request.

Information disclosed in response to this FOIA request is releasable to the public. In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA and the government's Transparency Agenda, this letter and the information disclosed to you may be placed on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk), together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. No information identifying you will be placed on the GOV.UK website.

We attach Annex A, explaining the copyright that applies to the information being released to you, and 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 the address below.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Information Rights Team

InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk

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 or logos) 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 11 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Andrew Mobsby, Head of Information Rights via email at InformationRequests@defra.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's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure.

The ICO's offices are currently closed so please visit their website on how to contact them during this period, here:

<https://ico.org.uk>

Additionally, if you wish to make a complaint to the ICO please use the following link:

<https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/official-information-concerns-report/official-information-concern/>