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[REDACTED]
By e-mail: [REDACTED]

Our ref: FOI2024/12601
23 August 2024

Dear [REDACTED],

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Animal Welfare Committee report of August 2023 on alternatives to the culling of newly-hatched chicks

Thank you for your two requests for information of 16 and 31 July 2024 about the Animal Welfare Committee report of August 2023 on alternatives to the culling of newly-hatched chicks. We have handled your requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your information requests and our response are set out below.

Your request of 16 July 2024 was as follows:

I would like to request under the Freedom of Information Act, any information, documents, data or reports used to produce the Animal Welfare Committee report of August 2023 on alternatives to the culling of newly-hatched chicks.

Your request of 31 July 2024 was as follows:

I wanted to make a request under the Freedom of Information Act for a clarification of information contained in an opinion report by the Animal Welfare Committee in August 2023, on the subject of culling day-old cockerills.

Basically, the report says 40-45 million male chicks from egg-laying breeds are culled each year (Line 28). It also says that 70 percent of these are sold to animal feed wholesalers and 30 percent to zoos and wildlife centres (Lines 125, 133). That suggests between 28-31.5 million will go to the wholesalers, and between 12-13.5 million go to zoos. However, it also says that the consumption of culled hatchery chicks in British zoos is 3.5 million (133). Obviously, this is much less than 12 -13.5 million. I wanted to find out how the report's compiler arrived at the figure of 3.5 million, whether I've misread the document, whether the figures are miscalculated, or whether zoos and wildlife centres acquire up to 13.5 million but only use 3.5 million to feed their animals.

We can confirm that evidence was collected from a variety of sources to inform the development of the AWC report. We enclose some information within the scope of the requests within the attached Annex; these are set out below:

Documents specifically relating to your request of 31 July 2024 are as follows:

- An anonymised data set provided by the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) relating to the use of day-old chicks by their member establishments in 2021 is attached as Annex C.
- An email from a member of staff at Kiezebrink UK Ltd, a commercial supplier of exotic animal feeds and raw food diets, detailing the split in their customer base is attached as Annex D.
- A summary document produced internally regarding the use of male day-old chicks as a food source for exotic animals is attached as Annex E.

We would also like to clarify, in response to your request, that the figures stated in Lines 125, 133 of the report refer collectively to chicks used by zoo and wildlife centres, the latter of which includes a large number of raptor rehabilitation centres and conservation programmes, that exist in addition to the zoos themselves. We agree that this point was not made clear in the report text.

Documents specifically relating to your request of 16 July 2024 are as follows:

- An internally produced literature review of the culling of day-old chicks and in-Ovo technologies is attached as Annex F.
- A slide-pack used in a presentation given to the AWC working group by the Respeggt Group in 2022 is attached as Annex G. Please note that the figures included within this presentation are now out of date.
- A slide-pack used in a presentation given to the AWC working group by Orbem in 2022 is attached as Annex H.
- A slide-pack used in a presentation given to the AWC working group by PLANTegg 2022 is attached as Annex I.

After careful consideration we have decided that names, roles and contact details of junior staff and contact details of all staff in Annexes C to I 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 UK 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 junior staff involved would not reasonably expect their names, roles and contact details to be disclosed in relation to this request for information, and equally the senior members of staff would not reasonably expect their contact details to be disclosed in relation to this request.

We can also confirm that we hold additional information in scope of your first request and part of your second request. However, this information is being withheld in its entirety as it falls under the exemptions at sections 35(1)(a) and 43(2) of the FOIA, which relate to information whose disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the formulation and development of government policy and commercial interests respectively.

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

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

We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosure of information around the culling of newly-hatched chicks and we understand that the release of this information would aid transparency and accountability.

However, it is also important that Defra protects the safe space within which officials and stakeholders can share information in confidence. We recognise that the culling of newly-hatched chicks is an emotive issue and acknowledge that this is likely to become the subject of policy workstreams going forwards. Defra prides itself on having close links with industry and in the widespread use of codesign across all sectors and programmes. There is a risk that release of some of the information requested at this moment in time would dissuade stakeholders from participating in full, frank and open discussions with officials and Ministers going forwards, and that this would prove damaging to the process of formulating successful policy in future.

We have therefore concluded that, in all the circumstances of the case, the information should be withheld.

Section 43(2) – Commercial interests

We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosure of information concerning the culling of newly-hatched chicks. We understand that the release of such information will aid openness, transparency and accountability within government.

However, there is a stronger public interest in withholding this information because Defra needs to ensure that third parties are not discouraged from engaging with us for fear that information they provide in confidence will become public and in doing so risk damage to legitimate commercial activities. In this case, disclosure of such information would be to the detriment of the third parties involved as it will disclose details that are sensitive from a financial and intellectual property perspective that could be used by their competitors and compromise their ability to remain competitive in the market. Release of the information would therefore prejudice the commercial interests of the third parties that have chosen to engage with Defra on this issue.

We have therefore concluded that, in all the circumstances of the case, the information should be withheld.

Could I further ask under FOI whether Defra has any information suggesting that culled day-old chicks intended as prey food for larger animals are simply disposed of.

Following a search of our paper and electronic records, we have established that the information that you have requested is not held by Defra.

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 us.

Yours sincerely

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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Copyright in other documents may rest with a third party. For information about obtaining permission from a third party see the [Intellectual Property Office's website](#).

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 Vanessa Drury, Head of Information Rights via email at InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk and they 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 can be contacted using the following link:

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