

Access to Information Statement

Natural England is committed to promoting and actively developing a culture of openness, transparency and customer focus. Our policy is aimed at helping the public and our partners to understand and be involved in our work.

Natural England will:

1. **pro-actively publish and release information.** In addition to our normal publications the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires us, mainly through our Publication Scheme, to pro-actively publish electronically other documents and information. We will review what we publish and take account of demand for information. We will publish information electronically and in other cost effective ways appropriate to the needs of the intended audience.
2. **use language appropriate to the intended audience.** Where there are different audiences, different approaches will be considered (eg full detail for specialists, summaries for the general reader). We will communicate in plain language and avoid the use of jargon where not appropriate. We will take account of, and ensure we are well informed about, the special communication needs of our intended audiences.
3. **make it as easy as possible to find information.** In particular we will make material available on our website. We will continue to improve our website to make it as user friendly as possible to enable people to find the information they want quickly and easily. We will, when necessary, draw attention to publication of information using other media as appropriate.
4. **encourage better information management.** Through the creation and storage of records electronically and using metadata, taxonomies and thesauri.
5. **consult openly and widely wherever appropriate and practical.** There may be times when action will need to be taken too quickly for wider public interest reasons to enable this to happen. In such cases, we will inform stakeholders as quickly as is practical about the reasons for our action, keep them fully informed of progress, seek feedback and consult and involve them in the longer term as practical.
6. **encourage those who do scientific research for us to publish their research in peer-reviewed scientific journals** promptly and in line with contractual agreements.
7. **publish our targets and achievements and monitor our performance** against them promptly and openly eg in our Annual Report. We actively seek and welcome feedback from all stakeholders, including the general public, and continue to look at how we can improve our accessibility to deliver a better service to customers eg through regular customer research programmes.
8. **strive to answer requests that are reasonable and specific.** We will treat all requests fairly and without prejudice taking into account the public interest in making information available wherever possible.
9. **give a clear explanation of our decision** if information cannot be published or released. We will also tell people how to complain if they do not agree with any decision not to release information.
10. **not normally charge** for replying to information requests unless in answering the request we would incur large costs for materials or for presenting information in a specifically requested format. Our charges will be determined by the Access to Information legislation and set out in the Publication Scheme or agreed in advance for information released on request.

Access to whom?

It is important to note that any person or organisation may apply for, and receive, information held by us. They do not need to be UK citizens or bodies, or to be resident in the country, or to prove an interest in obtaining the information.

Information that cannot be released

The Environmental Information Regulations 2004, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998 set out exceptional circumstances in which a request for information may be refused. For example we cannot release information that affects other legal rights or processes, particularly where personal privacy may be breached. We may refuse to release information where it is likely that doing so could lead to damage to the environment or sensitive species being harmed. We will only take decisions not to release information after careful consideration and give our reasons clearly in writing.

Responsibilities

All managers should ensure that:

- their staff are aware of this **Access to Information Statement**.
- their staff are aware of the law and the guidance available on accessibility issues.
- information is managed in accordance with best practice to facilitate retrieval and disclosure.
- material for the Publications Scheme and websites is regularly updated and improved.
- the content and style of documents produced internally is such that they are suitable for disclosure.
- requests for information are dealt with fairly and promptly.
- requests for and decisions on release of information are recorded.
- decisions not to release information are properly taken and clearly communicated.
- complaints about refusal to release are reviewed impartially.

The **Executive Director, Customers** is Natural England's Information Champion and is responsible for promoting this statement and ensuring it is consistent with new legislative and other requirements.

The **Access to Information Specialists** will produce and review regularly the Natural England Publications Scheme.

Records Management Service will, through the Knowledge Advisers, encourage best practice for records management.

The **Internal and External Communications Team** will provide advice on issues surrounding ease of reading and presentation.

Customer Service Excellence Team will provide corporate monitoring and will process any complaints.

The **Access to Information Unit** within the **Customer Services** function will provide advice on Access to Information issues and will monitor requests and responses.

This statement was approved by Natural England's Executive Board on 17 October 2006.