

Background

This report is based on the actual information on the Teams Request Trackers, at the end of Quarter 1 2007-08. We only track complex requests, which are defined as:

1. requests which fall outside our normal course of business;
2. requests for information where we might refuse eg sensitive, confidential information or a repeat request;
3. requests for information related to the policy making process;
4. requests on which it may be necessary to consult with others either within Natural England or outside;
5. requests for large amounts of information or information which may be difficult to locate;
6. requests which seem unclear or too general to deal with, and where we will need to seek clarification from the applicant;
7. requests for information where a search is made, but none is found.

Requests and Applicants		
No of requests for information which have been logged on to the Natural England request trackers		24
% of requests identified as falling under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.		83%
% of requests identified as falling under the Freedom of Information Act 2000		17%
% of requests identified as falling under the Data Protection Act 1998		0%
% of requests that were from private citizens		58%
% of requests that were from business		21%
% of requests that were from media		8%
% of requests that were from NGOs, pressure groups, other public bodies		13%
Timeliness		
Requests completed within the 20 working day legal deadline		20
Requests completed within the extended deadline of 40 working days.		1
% completed within the deadlines (Balance Scorecard Metric)		88%
Requests completed beyond the legal deadline.		3
Requests completed beyond the extended deadline.		0
Requests with an extended deadline due to the complexity of the request or the need to consider the public interest		1
The timeliness for responding to requests:		
	0–5 working days	14%
	6–10 working days	18%
	11–15 working days	18%
	16–20 working days	32%
	>20 working days	18%
Provision of Information		Exemptions used
Requests which were granted in full	18	
Requests where only part of the information was provided	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Information • Information not

		held
Requests which were refused in full	3	• Request was manifestly unreasonable
Requests which have been transferred to The National Archives	0	
Requests which have been transferred to another public body	0	
Requests we've been unable to complete as we do not hold the information	1	
Requests we've been unable to complete due to no further information being provided by the applicant for us to complete the request	0	
Requests outstanding at the end of the quarter, but within deadlines.	0	
Requests where we are waiting for further information before we can proceed	0	
Advice, Referrals and Appeals		
Requests where we have taken external legal advice	0	
Requests we have referred to the Department of Constitutional Affairs, Clearing House as the request could have potential to affect other public bodies.	0	
Requests we have referred to Defra, as the request could have potential to affect the wider Defra family.	0	
Requests where the applicant has requested an internal review	1	
Information Requested		
% of requests related to SSSIs, species or habitat related.		40%
% of requests related development/planning related.		22%
% of requests related to Environmental Stewardship.		17%
% of requests related to organisation development issues		4%
% other types of requests.		17%

Commentary

Quarter 3 again proved to be the quietest quarter for the number of complex requests received. However, this reduction in requests received hides the complexity of a number of the requests. This is a growing trend of receiving complex requests which are either time consuming to respond to or require a considerable amount of consultation both internally and externally.

Three requests were over the deadline for providing a response:

- 22 days - Request not acted on until too late (Organisational Development)
- 23 days - Request not acted on until too late (Board Services)
- 24 days - Large complex request (East of England Region)

For the last request we received a rare thank you for our 'prompt attention', which was nice to receive.

I have discussed with the IMOs and/or the individuals concerned, the importance of dealing with a request promptly and not waiting until near the deadline.

The majority of the information requested related to species, protected site management, agri-environment schemes and planning applications.

RTRACK continues to operate successfully with no issues reported.

Complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office

At the start of the quarter we had 7 complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). During the quarter we had 2 cases closed after informal resolution in our favour. Unfortunately, we pick up another related to our refusal to release full address details of HLS agreement holders.

In December the ICO started investigating 4 of the complaints, which were from the same individual, we expect a decision during quarter 4.

Requests refused this quarter

We refused 3 requests this quarter as manifestly unreasonable as that amount of work needed would be over our appropriate level and the applicant failed to narrow down their request. They all concerned extensive details including reports on licences issues under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to permit killing or taking of wildbirds (in this case Cormorants) for the purpose of preventing serious damage to fisheries, including fish farms.

Appeals decisions this quarter

There was only one internal review this quarter and this related to our Green Belt policy paper (NEB P07 28). The initial reply was deemed to be inappropriate and on review we supplied the information originally requested.

Notably Requests

A request from the BBC requesting copies of certain internal correspondence on the Hen Harrier shooting incident. The released information led to a entry on the Open Secrets blog http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/opensecrets/2008/01/harry_and_the_hen_harriers_or.html.

A full list of complex requests received this quarter will be available on Natural England's disclosure log <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/foi/disclosure-log.htm>

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