

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		28
% of requests identified as falling under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.		79%
% of requests identified as falling under the Freedom of Information Act 2000		17%
% of requests identified as falling under the Data Protection Act 1998		4%
% of requests that were from private citizens		46%
% of requests that were from business		25%
% of requests that were from NGOs and pressure groups		18%
% of requests split between Academics and politicians		11%
Timeliness		
Requests completed within the 20 working day legal deadline		26
Requests completed within the extended deadline of 40 working days.		0
% completed within the deadlines (Balance Scorecard Metric)		93%
Requests completed beyond the legal deadline.		2
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		0
The timeliness for responding to requests:		
	0–5 working days	7
	6–10 working days	6
	11–15 working days	5
	16–20 working days	7
	>20 working days	2
Provision of Information		Exemptions used
Requests which were granted in full	22	
Requests where only part of the information was provided	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Information • Volunteered

		Information
		• Information not held
Requests which were refused in full	2	• Request was manifestly unreasonable • Personal Information
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	3	
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	1	
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		2
Information Requested		
% of requests related to SSSIs, species or habitat related.		43%
% of requests related to Environmental Stewardship.		14%
% of requests related to Classic Schemes.		14%
% of requests related development/planning related.		4%
% of requests related to organisation development issues		4%
% other types of requests.		21%

Commentary

The number of requests received is again down on the last quarter. We feel that this under recording is probably due to the reduction in the number of Information Management Officers (IMOs) available during this quarter. The main reasons for the reduction are the formation of Incentive Schemes Services (ISS) which reallocated a number of regional IMOs and other inter-organisational moves. It has taken us a number of weeks to get these roles vacancies filled.

Again it is pleasing to report that the number of request completed inside 2 weeks is continuing to increase, the rate is now over 45%. Two requests were slightly over (1 day and 2 days) the deadline for providing a response. This was caused by one request not initially being acted upon. When I was contacted for advice, we realised that we didn't have enough time to deal with the request effectively. The other was caused by IT problems on the day of response. I have discussed with the IMOs 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

This is the first report totally compiled from RTRACK our web based request tracking system.

Requests refused this quarter

We only refused to provide information on five occasions and three of these were only applied to part of the information requested. The part refusals were for personal information, volunteered information the release of which would harm the interests of the person who provided it and information we didn't hold.

The full refusals were for the detailed address information for agreement holders in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) within the area covered by the Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Avon Local Team, see Appeals below. The other was for a vast amount of information on Environmental Sensitive Areas (ESA) inspections. We contacted the applicant with a view to narrowing and focusing their request. We didn't receive any further information from them, so we had no choice but to refuse to deal with the request, as we assessed it to be manifestly unreasonable in its current form.

Appeals decisions this quarter

We have had two appeals this quarter:-

1. An appeal against our refusal to provide detailed address information for agreement holders in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) within the area covered by the Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Avon Local Team. This appeal was not upheld and our original decision stood. We only release the name of the agreement holder and the name of the farm or business if applicable. The requestor was directed to the Information Commissioner's Office if they wish to appeal this decision.
2. An appeal against the information provide in response to request for details of research that Natural England is supporting in relation to gardens and the relationship between housing morphology and green space. We released details of the only piece of research that matched the request. No other matching research is being currently undertaken. This appeal was not upheld and our original decision stood. The requester was directed to the Information Commissioner's Office if they wish to appeal this decision.

Notably Requests

- A request to see all agendas and minutes from Natural England's Executive Board since vesting day.
- Prosecutions by Natural England for damage to a SSSI. These had been previous released as English Nature, but we were able to release an up to date prosecutions list.

The information released for both these requests is available on Natural England's disclosure log <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/foi/disclosure-log.htm> as is a full list of complex requests received this quarter.

Darren Green
Specialist – Access to Information
22 October 2007