

Background

This report is based on the actual information on the Teams Request Trackers, at the end of Q4 2004-05. We only track complex requests.

Requests

- 88 requests for information have been logged on to the English Nature request trackers.
- 91% were identified as requests under the Environmental Information Regulations.
- 9% were identified as requests under the Freedom of Information Act.
- 44% of requests were from businesses.
- 34% of requests were from private citizens.
- 22% split between NGOs, pressure groups, academics and other public bodies.

Information Requested

- 53% of requests related to SSSIs, species or habitat related.
- 18% of requests related development/planning related.
- 7% of requests related to management agreements
- 6% of requests related to contracts, surveys and datasets.
- 5% of requests related to human resource issues
- 11% other types of requests

English Nature Performance

- Overall English Nature has dealt with 70 requests within our 15 working day service standards.
- We have dealt with 9 requests within the extended deadline of 40 working days.
- We have provided all information in 53 cases.
- We have partially provided information in 15 cases. Reasons were personal information, commercial information, unfinished/incomplete information, volunteered data and Information not held.
- We have refused in full in two cases due to data protection.
- We have transferred the request to a Local Biological Recording Centre under our SLA in six cases.
- The information was not held in four cases.
- We have taken the option to extend the deadline on nine cases due to the complexity of the request.

- At the end of the Quarter we had seven ongoing cases all still within our service standard deadline or the extended deadline.
- We have four cases where we are waiting for further information before we can proceed.
- We have taken external legal advice on three cases.
- We have referred one case to the Department of Constitutional Affairs, Clearing House as the request could have potential to affect other public bodies.
- We have had one appeal against our original decision.

Action Points

We are very happy with the way we are approaching the requests, there is a general culture of wanting to release. A major issue, is the worry about the damage (perceived or not), to the relationships we have with third parties, when information regarding them has to be released. We received some legal advice to help us clarify the situation in terms of confidential information and commercial interests.

- The Tracker must be kept, correctly up to date.
- Some requests have been left for a week before any advice has been sought or action taken. If the information requested requires third party consultation this lost time can be significant.
- Verbal requests have to be confirmed in writing as soon as possible.
- If necessary third parties must be consulted as early as possible.
- Please refer to the guidance in the reference section of the Intranet.

Internal and External Advice

I have over 120 internal requests for advice on the complex requests received and on other issues. These other issues have been hypothetical and are being raised due to the increased profile that Access to Information has received both internally and externally.

We have been externally consulted by DEFRA on the release of information that could form the basis of an answer to a PQ.

Request of the Quarter

From a well known NGO requesting details of management agreements including site location, agreement holder, basis for management agreement, type of site, amount paid and term of agreement. This request was complied with except that 365 agreements were withheld due to data protection and confidentiality issues. The applicant has appealed this decision, and we are reviewing this now.

Darren Green
Corporate Data Manager, April 2005