

### Background

This report is based on the actual information on the Teams Request Trackers, at the end of Quarter 1 2010-11. 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.

<b>Requests and Applicants</b>		
No of requests for information which have been logged on to the Natural England request trackers		<b>91</b>
% of requests identified as falling under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.		<b>81%</b>
% of requests identified as falling under the Freedom of Information Act 2000		<b>19%</b>
% of requests that were from private citizens		<b>45%</b>
% of requests that were from businesses		<b>32%</b>
% of requests that were from others		<b>11%</b>
% of requests that were from media		<b>8%</b>
% of requests that were from academics and lobby groups		<b>4%</b>
<b>Timeliness</b>		
Requests completed within the 20 working day legal deadline		<b>76</b>
Requests completed within the extended deadline of 40 working days.		<b>11</b>
% completed within the deadlines		<b>97%</b>
Requests still ongoing but still within 20 working day legal deadlines		<b>0</b>
Requests still ongoing but still within extended 40 day legal deadlines		<b>1</b>
Requests completed beyond the legal deadline.		<b>1</b>
Requests completed beyond the extended deadline.		<b>2</b>
Requests with an extended deadline due to the complexity of the request or the need to consider the public interest		<b>14</b>
The timeliness for responding to requests:		
	0–5 working days	<b>20%</b>
	6–10 working days	<b>12%</b>
	11–15 working days	<b>16%</b>
	16–20 working days	<b>35%</b>
	>20 working days	<b>16%</b>
<b>Provision of Information</b>		<b>Exemptions used</b>
Requests which were granted in full	<b>58</b>	
Requests where all information was provided	<b>38</b>	
Requests where only part of the information was provided	<b>28</b>	• Personal data which

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>includes data about third parties</li> <li>• Information not held</li> <li>• Public safety</li> <li>• Internal Communications,</li> <li>• Course of Justice,</li> <li>• Reasonably accessible by other means,</li> <li>• Manifestly unreasonable</li> </ul>
Requests which were refused in full	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request was too general</li> <li>• Manifestly unreasonable (request over appropriate limit)</li> </ul>
Requests which have been transferred to The National Archives	<b>0</b>	
Requests which have been transferred to another public body	<b>1</b>	
Requests we've been unable to complete as we do not hold the information	<b>12</b>	
Requests we've been unable to complete due to no further information being provided by the applicant for us to complete the request	<b>2</b>	
Requests outstanding at the end of the quarter, but within deadlines.	<b>1</b>	
Requests that were withdrawn by the applicant	<b>3</b>	
Requests where we are waiting for further information before we can proceed	<b>0</b>	
<b>Advice, Referrals and Appeals</b>		
Requests where we have taken external legal advice	<b>0</b>	
Requests we have referred to the Department of Constitutional Affairs, Clearing House as the request could have potential to affect other public bodies.	<b>0</b>	
Requests we have referred to Defra, as the request could have potential to affect the wider Defra family.	<b>0</b>	
Requests where the applicant has requested an internal review	<b>3</b>	
<b>Information Requested</b>		
% of requests related to species including protected species	<b>26%</b>	
% of requests related to SSSIs, SACs or habitat related.	<b>25%</b>	
% of requests related to Agri-environment schemes or other grant schemes	<b>21%</b>	
% of requests related to external communications and corporate services	<b>15%</b>	
% of requests related to planning, coastal access or open access	<b>13%</b>	

### Commentary

The number of requests received this quarter increased again with 91 complex requests being recorded. This is an increase of 36% on the requests received during the previous quarter and

an increase of 48% on requests received during quarter 1 in 2009-10. Quarter 1 of 2010-11 was the busiest quarter on record by a large margin.

This figure demonstrates the increase in requests that we experienced during 2009-10 showing no signs of abating.

Unfortunately we only responded to 97% of requests within the legal deadline in quarter 1. We were late responding to three requests, two by one day and one by three days. Of these requests two were late due to requiring senior officer sign off and one was late due to the sheer amount of redacting that was required prior to providing the information.

Of these 85% were completed within the 20 day limit and 15% needed to be extended due to the complex nature of the requests.

Despite the rise in request we still responded to 20% of requests inside 5 working days and 12% within 10 working days.

RTRACK continues to operate successfully with no issues reported.

### **Complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office**

At the start of the quarter we had three complaints at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and we received a new complaint this quarter.

### **Requests refused this quarter**

We partially withheld information for twenty seven requests this quarter.

This information was withheld for one or more of the following reasons:

- contained personal data about third parties;
- could affect public safety if released;
- was sensitive internal communications;
- could prejudice the course of justice if released,
- was already reasonably accessible by other means,
- would have been manifestly unreasonable to provide;
- was information we do not hold.

We also refused four requests in full this quarter. Three were because the requests were formulated in too general a manner and the applicants did not respond to our invitations to clarify the requests and one because the request was over the appropriate cost limit and the applicant did not respond to our invitation to narrow down the request.

We had 12 requests this quarter that we were unable to complete due to not holding all or some of the information requested. We also had three requests withdrawn by the applicants. They withdrew their requests after we contacted them to explain what we could provide in relation to their requests. Following this communication the applicant decided that we were not the appropriate body to fulfil their request and withdrew it.

### **Appeals decisions this quarter**

We have received 3 requests for internal review this quarter which is a decrease of over 50% on the previous quarter.

## Notable Requests

During this quarter over a quarter (36%) of our requests concerned information relating to species. The majority of these related to species licensing and it has proven to be a very busy quarter for the licensing team. In total they provided information for 24% of the complex requests we received. We have continued to receive numerous requests relating to funding and grants. These accounted for 21% of the requests received. There has also been a rise in the requests we have received relating to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

We have received three more requests from the media relating to big cat or exotic species sighting which now makes five in total during the last two quarters.?. These appear to have been generated from a request we received in the previous quarter requesting any information held on any ['big cat' sightings](#) in England. We have also continued to receive requests relating to senior staff's salaries and expenses.

Some of the more unusual requests received this quarter were questions about hand gliding and paragliding activities in the East Midlands region, the amount of funding given to trade unions and to provide any evidence that soils in orchards contain greater density of earthworms.

During this quarter we have received the following separate requests on the same topic:

- five requests relating to the Special Areas of Conservation in the South West region;
- three requests regarding Helford River;
- three requests relating a proposed incinerator in Cornwall;
- three requests regarding scientific research on bats and wind turbines.

We have also continued to receive requests from the [What Do They Know](#) website.

A full list of complex requests received this quarter is available on Natural England's [disclosure log](#).

Sarah Waterfield  
Lead Adviser - Information Access and Security  
19 August 2010