

# Public Interest Test –EIR

Reference Number – DAERA/26-179

## Requested Information

- A Severity Matrix: A copy of the formalised criteria or "scoring" document used to distinguish between High, Medium, and Low severity incidents.

## Exemption / Exception under consideration

Regulation 12(4)(d) - Material in the course of completion, unfinished documents, and incomplete data.

## Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

- Access to official information can improve public confidence and trust and Departments have a duty to operate transparently.
- Regulation 12(2) requires the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to apply a presumption in favour of disclosure.

## Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

- Part of the request is for material which is still in the course of completion. Disclosure at this stage would risk undermining the integrity and effectiveness of the ongoing review process.
- Releasing the document prematurely would undermine the planned and orderly publication process, which exists to ensure that accurate, accessible, and contextually explained information is made available to the public.
- Withholding the document until the review is concluded helps ensure that final decisions are well-informed, accurate, and fully developed.

## Conclusion

Following consideration of the Public Interest Test the Department has decided that on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exemption does outweigh the public interest in disclosing the available information due to the effects any disclosure of an unfinished document may create confusion surrounding how the Department assesses water pollution incidents. The Department intends to publish the water pollution severity classification system once a review has been completed.

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**Water Pollution Regulation and Enforcement Team**