

Public Interest Test – EIR

Reference Number – DAERA/26-477

Requested Information

Details of all Department communications and correspondence (both electronic and physical, internal and external) in relation to the contemplation or proposed application of civil contingencies legislation in relation to Lough Neagh and drinking water supply in Northern Ireland since 2023. This would include, but is not restricted to:

- 1) Letters, email, electronic messenger and any other communications discussing this.
- 2) Minutes and any other records from meetings and engagements (virtual, hybrid and in-person).
- 3) The time, date, venue and attendees of any such meetings and engagements (virtual, hybrid and in-person).
- 4) Any presentation materials circulated or used at any such meetings and engagements.
- 5) Any briefing notes or documents shared or used at any such meetings and engagements.

Exceptions under consideration

Regulation 12(4)(d): The request relates to material which is still in the course of completion, to unfinished documents or to incomplete data.

Regulation 12(4)(e): The request relates to information that involves the disclosure of internal communications.

Regulation 12(5)(a): The request relates to information that would potentially prejudice public safety.

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

- The right of the public to have access to information. Transparency and accountability.
- Greater public awareness and understanding of the Department's response in relation to issues around Lough Neagh which have potential to impact the drinking water quality.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

- Unfinished or internal documents do not provide the complete and considered view of the Department and taken out of context would not provide an accurate reflection of Departmental actions or decisions.

- Disclosure of internal discussions inhibits free and frank discussions. The loss of frankness and candour may damage the quality of advice, leading to poorer decision-making. Some of the information may relate to policy development.
- Certain location or operational information for national infrastructure assets are not deemed suitable for release to the world at large due to public safety considerations.

Conclusion

Following consideration of the Public Interest Test in relation to the use of exceptions cited above, the Department has decided not to disclose some of the information as requested for the above.

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