Public Interest Test – EIR

Reference Number – DAERA/26-659

Requested Information

Information relating to the economic analysis underpinning the current Consultation on Wildlife Intervention Options, specifically the cost assumptions and calculations contained within Annex VIII and Annex X.

The requester has sought access to information supporting the figures presented within those annexes, including:

The spreadsheet model used to generate the published cost estimates;

Value and volume data underpinning the various cost categories, for example wage rates, labour inputs, equipment numbers and purchase costs;

A breakdown of total costs by category, such as labour, traps, vaccine and other associated costs;

At a minimum, a breakdown of labour and non-labour costs; and

Supporting volume data and assumptions used in the calculations, including information such as hours worked, hours per trap, numbers of traps and other operational inputs used to derive the cost estimates.

The request relates to information used to develop and inform the economic analysis of the wildlife intervention options presented in Annex VIII and Annex X of the consultation documentation.

Exemption / Exception under consideration

Regulation 12(5)(a) – International Relations

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

- There is a significant public interest in transparency and accountability in relation to the Department's policy development and decision-making processes.
- Disclosure would promote public understanding of the options considered by the Department and the basis upon which decisions have been reached.
- Regulation 12(2) of the EIRs requires a presumption in favour of disclosure.
- There is a public interest in enabling scrutiny of the information underpinning policy development and consultation proposals.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

- The detailed cost information relating to the stopped-restraint options was supplied by DAFM on the understanding that it would be used solely for the purposes of informing DAERA's options analysis and not for wider disclosure.

- There is a public interest in maintaining effective working relationships and cooperation between administrations on matters of mutual agricultural and environmental interest.

- Disclosure contrary to the expectations of DAFM could undermine established information-sharing arrangements between the two administrations.

- There is a strong public interest in ensuring that public authorities can continue to exchange information freely and confidently in support of policy development and decision-making

- Disclosure may reduce the willingness of DAFM to share similar information with DAERA in future, potentially affecting cross-border cooperation and evidence-based policy development.

Exemption / Exception under consideration

Reg 12 (5) e – Commercial or Industrial information

Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

- There is a significant public interest in transparency and accountability in relation to the Department's policy development and decision-making processes.

- Disclosure would promote public understanding of the options considered by the Department and the basis upon which decisions have been reached.

- Regulation 12(2) of the EIRs requires a presumption in favour of disclosure.

- There is a public interest in understanding the costs associated with different options and how public resources may be utilised.

- Disclosure would facilitate informed public debate regarding the relative costs and benefits of the options considered.

Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

- DAFM has advised that it does not support disclosure of the detailed stopped-restraint cost information due to its commercially sensitive nature.

- The information contains detailed cost data relating to private businesses and was originally supplied to DAFM in confidence before being shared with DAERA for the specific purpose of informing the options analysis.

- Disclosure could prejudice legitimate commercial interests by revealing sensitive information relating to operational costs, methodologies and business activities

- There is a public interest in protecting confidential commercial information where disclosure would be likely to cause commercial harm.

- There is a public interest in ensuring that public authorities can obtain commercially sensitive information when required to inform policy development and decision-making.

- Disclosure of confidential information contrary to the expectations of those who supplied it could discourage the future provision of similar information.

Conclusion

Having carefully considered the competing public interests, we recognise a strong public interest in transparency and accountability regarding the assessment of options and the expenditure of public funds. This favours disclosure of the information underpinning the analysis.

Regulation 12(5)(a) was considered applicable to a limited element of the requested information. The detailed cost information relating to the stopped-restraint options was supplied by DAFM, a government department in another jurisdiction, on the understanding that it would be used solely for the purposes of informing DAERA's options analysis.

Consideration was also given to Regulation 12(5)(e), which relates to the detailed cost information underpinning the stopped-restraint options contained within the economic analysis supporting the Consultation on Wildlife Intervention Options.

DAFM has advised that it does not support disclosure of this information due to its commercially sensitive nature. The information contains detailed cost data relating to private businesses and was originally supplied to DAFM in confidence before being shared with DAERA for the specific purpose of informing the options analysis. Disclosure could prejudice the commercial interests of the businesses concerned and undermine the confidentiality attached to the information.

Disclosure contrary to the expectations of DAFM could also adversely affect future information-sharing arrangements between the two administrations and reduce the willingness of DAFM to share similar information with DAERA in support of cross-border cooperation, policy development and environmental decision-making. Consideration was therefore given to whether release of the information would adversely affect relations between the administrations and their ability to cooperate effectively on matters of mutual agricultural and environmental interest.

It was considered that disclosure of information supplied in confidence by another administration would be likely to undermine established information-sharing arrangements and could adversely affect future cooperation. Accordingly, Regulation 12(5)(a) was considered engaged in respect of this information.

It was also considered that the information met the requirements of Regulation 12(5)(e), as it comprises confidential commercial information, the disclosure of which would be likely to adversely affect legitimate economic interests. Therefore, both exceptions were considered to be engaged.

On balance, although there is a significant public interest in transparency and accountability, we consider that the public interest in maintaining the exceptions under Regulations 12(5)(a) and 12(5)(e) outweighs the public interest in disclosure of the limited category of detailed stopped-restraint cost information. In reaching this conclusion, account has been taken of the fact that additional information will be released which provides a detailed breakdown of the costs associated with the cage-trapping and controlled shooting options, thereby enhancing transparency in relation to the Department's analysis. Accordingly, the detailed stopped-restraint cost information should be withheld, while the remaining cost information relating to the other options should be disclosed.

[redacted]

Veterinary Service Animal Health Group