



**Information Commissioner's Office**  
Promoting public access to official information  
and protecting your personal information

## **Press Release**

**For immediate release**

**Date: 14 May 2008**

### **New guidance on FOI for public bodies**

New guidance is being published today for public authorities on how to handle requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).

The booklet, [\*Hints for Practitioners handling FOI and EIR requests\*](#), has been produced in collaboration between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The guidance provides FOI practitioners with advice on best practice in responding to requests for information. It will also help to ensure that freedom of information requests are handled consistently across the public sector.

Michael Wills, Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, said: "Clear guidance is key to the successful delivery of FOI and Environmental Information Regulations. The *Hints for Practitioners handling FOI/EIR requests* booklet is a clear and concise place of reference which is fully supported by the Ministry of Justice in conjunction with DEFRA and the ICO."

Lord Jeff Rooker, Minister for Sustainable Food and Farming and Animal Health at Defra said: "The Government is committed to delivering on our international obligations to increase access to environmental information such as the impact of EU agricultural subsidies, noise mapping and energy efficiency. This booklet will enable practitioners to be more environmentally aware so that they can take an informed part in environmental decision making."

2nd Permanent Under Secretary for the MOD, Sir Ian Andrews, said: “The MOD is pleased to have been so instrumental in the production of these FOI request guidelines. It’s important for us and other government departments to share our best practices in order to help practitioners deal with requests in the most effective way. The MOD understands the importance of being open and we hope by contributing to this booklet we have played a part in ensuring a more efficient and consistent approach to FOI requests across the public sector.”

Graham Smith, Deputy Commissioner at the ICO, said: “Since the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations came into force three years ago they have brought real benefits for members of the public and for public bodies. Research carried out by the ICO has shown that over 80% of individuals feel that being able to access information held by public authorities promotes accountability and transparency and almost nine out of ten feel that the new laws have increased their knowledge of public authorities.

“Access to official information is now a key part of the UK’s democratic life and is changing public sector culture. This guidance will help FOI practitioners handle information requests as efficiently as possible for the benefit of the public.”

The booklet can be downloaded from the ICO’s website – [Hints for practitioners handling FOI and EIR requests](#) – or ordered by contacting the ICO on 08456 306 060.

## **ENDS**

If you need more information, please contact the Information Commissioner’s press office on 020 7025 7580 or visit the website at: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)

## **Notes to Editors**

1. The Information Commissioner promotes public access to official information and protects personal information. The ICO is an independent body with specific responsibilities set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003.

2. For more information about the Information Commissioner's Office subscribe to our e-newsletter at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)
3. The full research is available at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk). The research, using a sample of 1000 people, was conducted by SMSR Ltd of Kingston upon Hull. A full breakdown of the methodology is available
4. The Information Commissioner's Office is currently working on a publication scheme initiative to produce model schemes which will deliver greater proactive disclosure from public authorities.