



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Somalia Unit
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

26 August 2014

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST REF: 0616-14

Thank you for your email of 19 June asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked for:

'Records relating to any meetings between FCO staff, or the Foreign Secretary or his staff, relating to Soma Management Ltd. or its affiliates, from 1 Jan 2012 to the present.

Relevant records would include, but are not limited to, diary entries, email correspondence pre- or post-meeting, notes of meetings, recordings or transcripts of meetings, and preparatory or follow-up memoranda.

To assist in your search, Soma Management Ltd.'s affiliates include Soma Oil & Gas Exploration Ltd. and Soma Oil & Gas Holdings Ltd.'

Persons associated with these entities include Basil Shibliq, Lord Michael Howard of Lympne, Robert Allen Sheppard, The Earl of Clanwilliam, Hassan Khaire, Philip Edward Charles Wolfe, Peter Damouni, William Richard Anderson, Georgy Dzhaparidze, and Mohamed Ali Ajami.'

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you requested.

I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

Please find attached information that we can release to you. We are releasing a list of meetings held between FCO Ministers and officials and representatives of Soma Oil and Gas, as well as a record of a meeting between Lord Howard of Lympne and the then acting FCO Africa Director.

Some of the information has been withheld under the following exemptions of the FOIA:

- Section 40 (Personal information)
- Section 41 (Information provided in confidence)
- Section 43 (Commercial interests)

Some of the withheld information is personal data relating to third parties. It is our view that disclosure of this information would breach the first data protection principle, which states that personal data should be processed fairly and lawfully. Section 40(2) and (3) of the FOIA therefore apply. It is the fairness aspect of this principle which we think would be breached by disclosure in this case. In such circumstances section 40 confers an absolute exemption on disclosure. We do not therefore have to apply the public interest test.

Some information has been withheld under section 41(1), as it is information that was provided in confidence. It is our view that disclosure of this information would constitute an actionable breach of confidence and so disclosure would also be unlawful under the FOIA. In these circumstances, section 41 of the FOIA confers an absolute exemption on disclosure and there is no public interest test to apply.

Some of the information has also been withheld under section 43 (2) of the FOIA, which relates to commercial interests. The use of this exemption was carefully considered. The factors in favour of disclosure of this information, including the general public interest and greater transparency and accountability, were carefully weighed against the need to allow business-people and commercial organisations the space to conduct their lawful business competitively and without fear of disclosure of sensitive commercial information. We consider that this transparency also poses risks to the protection of commercially confidential information. Failure to protect such commercially sensitive information would limit the sources of information and interlocutors available to the FCO and limit the FCO's ability to promote the British economy and lobby for the interests of British businesses overseas. In this case after such consideration we believe that as much of the FCO's interaction with Soma Oil and Gas was commercially privileged, the public interest in withholding the redacted information outweighs the public interest in its release.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the FOIA, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless it is exempt. The information we have supplied to you may now be published on our website together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context.

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other re-use, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by the FCO will have been produced by government officials and will be protected by Crown Copyright. You can find details on the arrangement for re-using Crown Copyright information on the [TNA](#) website.

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I hope you are satisfied with this reply. However, if you wish to make a complaint or if you would like a review of our decision, please write to the FOI and DPA Team, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Room K4.10-13, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH. E-mail: foi-dpa.imd@fco.gov.uk. You have 40 working days to do so from the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may then apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the FCO. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely,

Desk Officer
Somalia Unit



We keep and use information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We may release this personal information to other UK government departments and public authorities.