



Ministry
of Defence

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Policy Secretariat

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[REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]
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Your Reference:

Our Reference:
2015/07146

Date:
5 October 2015

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email dated 13 August 2015. You asked:

Please can you tell me how many bearskins the MOD ordered in 2014 and which regiments still use the bearskins. How much was spent in 2014 on bearskins? What species are bear were used and from which countries. Which suppliers were used? Is there any information on whether these regiments or the MOD have considered any alternatives to making hats out of real bearskin.

On 4 September 2015 I wrote to you to acknowledge your email as a request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA); to inform you that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) held information relating to your request and to explain that we believed that some of the information fell within the scope of qualified exemptions: Section 38 (*Health and Safety*) and Section 43 (*Commercial Interests*). As such it was necessary for us to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemptions outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

We have now completed this work and I can tell you that we have concluded that part of your request, 'Which suppliers were used?' and 'How much was spent in 2014 on bearskins?' falls entirely within the scope of the qualified exemptions provided for at Section 38(1) (*Health and safety*) and Section 43(2) (*Commercial Interests*) of the FOIA and has been withheld.

Section 38(1) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would likely to endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or endanger the safety of any individual.

Defence Equipment & Support

Section 43(2) provides that information is exempt if its disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any organisation or person holding it, including the MOD and its contractors.

The FOI Act contains a presumption in favour of disclosure and there is a public interest in the release of information which supports the accountability of the MOD for its use of public money; for example, to demonstrate that value for money is being obtained for taxpayers and that effective contractual processes are in place. Greater transparency of decision making processes makes government more accountable and the release of information would allow an increased public understanding of how the procurement processes are undertaken in an open and honest way.

Section 43(2) (Commercial Interests)

The Public Interest Test recognised that releasing details about the cost of ceremonial caps could damage the commercial relationship between suppliers and the MOD. Specifically, the disclosure of this information could weaken a company's position in a competitive environment by revealing market sensitive information or information of potential usefulness to competitors. More widely, it could result in companies generally being deterred from sharing commercially sensitive information with the MOD if they are unsure about whether their information would be protected.

Section 38 (Health and Safety)

The Public Interest Test also concluded that if the names of the suppliers were released into the public domain employees of those suppliers could be at risk of verbal abuse or physical harm.

Information held by the MOD for the remainder of your request is provided in the following paragraphs.

I should tell you that the Ministry of Defence does not buy bear pelts – only ceremonial caps. In calendar year 2014 the Ministry of Defence ordered 127 Ceremonial Caps (Bearskins). Each cap can be expected to last around 50 years undergoing a number of restorations during that time. The purchase of new pelts by our suppliers is therefore kept to a minimum. Pelts are sourced from Canada and come from animals culled as part of a programme to manage the wild population licensed by the Canadian Government. No bear is ever hunted to order and the Ministry of Defence suppliers only have access to stock made available by the Canadian authorities following a cull.

Ceremonial caps are used by the following Regiments:

Grenadier Guards
Coldstream Guards
Scots Guards
Irish Guards
Welsh Guards

Over the last 20 years there have been a number of trials of synthetic alternatives to bear pelts which have, to date proved unsuccessful as nothing has matched the properties of the natural product.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st

Defence Equipment & Support

Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely



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