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Amanda Cameron
By email: mandycameron48@gmail.com

Our ref: FOI2026/16492
20 August 2026

Dear Amanda Cameron,

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: In-cabin pet travel on private charter flights versus commercial airlines

Thank you for your request for information of 28 July 2026 about in-cabin pet travel on private charter flights versus commercial airlines. We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your information request and our response are set out below.

Information request of 28 July 2026

Please provide any legislation, statutory instrument, policy document, operational guidance or formal instruction that states pets entering Great Britain on scheduled commercial passenger flights must travel as manifest cargo rather than in the passenger cabin.

If no such legislation or formal policy exists, please confirm:

- Whether the requirement for pets to travel as manifest cargo on scheduled commercial passenger flights is based on legislation, APHA carrier approval conditions, operational arrangements, or commercial airline policy.*
- Whether APHA has the legal authority to approve a scheduled commercial airline to transport pets in the passenger cabin, provided that the airline can demonstrate compliant identity, documentary and biosecurity checks equivalent to those required of approved private charter operators.*
- If APHA does not have that authority, please identify the legislation or regulation that prevents it.*

Further email of 20 August 2026:

I am following up on the narrowed information request submitted on 29 July 2026, which Defra has already acknowledged in correspondence arising from my internal review.

As you are aware, the narrowed request asks:



Is the distinction between approved private charter flights and scheduled commercial passenger flights established by legislation, formal government policy, APHA approval conditions, or operational arrangements?

I am seeking clarification of the legal or policy basis for that distinction, rather than extensive historical correspondence.

As this narrower request has already been received and identified separately by Defra, I would be grateful for an update on its current status and an indication of when I can expect a substantive response.

Further email of 20 August 2026

I am following up regarding my amended/narrowed FOI request submitted on 29 July 2026, which followed my original FOI request submitted on 13 July 2026.

Following my follow-up of 19 August, the Defra Information Rights team informed me today that my enquiry is not being handled under the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations and “has been passed to the Defra correspondence team to provide you with a response under general correspondence.” I appreciate the clarification. However, my original enquiry has now been outstanding for approximately three weeks, and until receiving today’s email I had not been informed that it had been transferred to the correspondence team, nor had I received an acknowledgement from that team or an indication of the anticipated response timescale.

For clarity, the outstanding question is:

Is the distinction between approved private charter flights and scheduled commercial passenger flights established by legislation, formal government policy, APHA approval conditions, or operational arrangements?

This is an important question for Pet Travel Reform UK because I am trying to establish the basis on which companion animals may enter Great Britain using certain approved air services while the position differs for scheduled commercial passenger services. I would therefore be grateful if you could:

- 1. Confirm when the correspondence team received the enquiry;*
- 2. Confirm that the original submission date of 29 July 2026 remains recorded;*
- 3. Provide the relevant correspondence/reference number, if one has been allocated; and*
- 4. Advise me of the anticipated timescale for a substantive response.*

I am not seeking to restart the enquiry as a new request. I am simply following up on the outstanding enquiry that Defra has confirmed has been transferred internally for response.

I have also attempted to use the link provided in your email to contact the Defra Correspondence Team directly. Unfortunately, the link leads to a “Page not found” message, so I am unable to contact the team through the route you have provided.

Please therefore forward this correspondence directly to the appropriate Defra Correspondence Team and confirm that it has been received by them.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

We want to be as open as possible in answering requests for information. The FOIA itself also requires us to provide reasonable advice and assistance to those seeking to make such a request.

Unfortunately, we are unable to comply with the first part of your request because the cost of determining whether the requested information is held and, if held, locating, retrieving and extracting that information would still exceed the appropriate limit under section 12(1) of the FOIA.

Your request may be summarised as seeking legislation, statutory instrument, policy document, operational guidance or formal instruction, going back an unspecified amount of time. Your broad request for “any policy document or formal instruction” within an unspecified timeframe means a standard search is not possible and completing it would exceed reasonable time limits. To meet this request in full would mean having to access multiple team and individual inboxes and spending multiple hours completing the necessary searches. In addition, it would be necessary to consider how teams and policy areas have changed over time; relevant colleagues may now occupy different roles within departments and executive agencies which may impact upon their ability to search through past documents and folders. The amount of time involved in this is therefore considerable. Based on our initial enquiries and comparisons with other searches for similar information, we estimate this task would take well over 24 hours of staff-time.

Section 12(1) of the FOIA allows a public authority to refuse a request where the cost of compliance is estimated to exceed the appropriate limit, which is currently £600. Based on our estimate, we consider that the cost of complying with this request would exceed that limit and we are therefore refusing this part of your request under section 12(1) of the FOIA.

However, under section 16 of the FOIA, we have considered how we might assist you in refining your request so that it may fall within the appropriate limit.

The best way we can help you is to ask you to consider narrowing down your request to focus more clearly on the precise information you are seeking. You will need to:

- specify a time period in your request, consider reducing it (for example 6 months); **and**
- explain more fully and precisely the kind of information you are looking for and consider reducing the quantity of document types in your request; **and**
- ask us to omit information that falls within scope of your request but would add nothing to your understanding of the matter, e.g. housekeeping emails, such as meeting requests, acknowledgements, draft documents, where the finalised document also falls within the scope of the request, etc; **and**
- browse through material that has already been made publicly available by Defra and APHA to see if this provides some of the information you are looking for or

helps you to identify more precise questions that we might be able to answer at lower cost. For example:

<https://www.gov.uk/bring-pet-to-great-britain>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pet-travel-approved-air-sea-and-rail-carriers-and-routes>
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/air-carriers-transport-pets-and-assistance-dogs>
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/2883/contents>
<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/750817>
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2006/1107/contents>

Please note that if you modify your request, we will handle it as a new request and so the 20-working-day deadline for responding to requests would then commence from the date that we receive the modified request.

The remaining parts of your correspondence ask Defra to provide confirmations, explanations and interpretations regarding the legal and operational basis for current pet travel arrangements.

Requests that fall within either the FOIA or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) must be requests for information held in a recorded form.

Any correspondence seeking views, explanations, opinions, interpretations, legal analysis or legal advice does not constitute a valid request for recorded information under the FOIA or EIRs and would instead be treated as general correspondence.

This includes requests asking Defra to:

- confirm whether a particular practice is based on legislation, policy, operational arrangements or commercial decisions;
- provide an interpretation of the legal powers available to APHA;
- explain whether APHA has authority to undertake a particular action; or
- identify legislation which may or may not prevent a particular course of action.

Such questions seek an explanation, interpretation or legal analysis rather than recorded information and therefore do not amount to valid requests under the FOIA or EIRs.

Nevertheless, in the interests of being helpful, we have provided the following response as general correspondence and outside the FOIA.

There is no specific legislative requirement that stipulates pets must travel as manifest cargo on scheduled flights.

As set out in Article 11 of the of the Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011 (the 2011 Order) a carrier who moves a pet animal into GB must be approved by APHA. A carrier may be approved “subject to such terms and conditions as the authority considers necessary or expedient to ensure that pet animals are checked by or on behalf of the carrier for compliance with the Pets Regulation”. Therefore, APHA only grant approval where the carrier can demonstrate that they have the necessary

processes in place to ensure that pet animals are checked for compliance with our health, ID and documentary requirements before they are permitted to enter GB.

Operations at airports are sensitive and complex, and other vital border controls will be considered by carriers when determining where these checks are carried out at the arrival airport. Therefore, in practice most pets being transported via scheduled flights travel to GB by air as 'manifest cargo' so that pets can be transferred directly to the pet checking facility and not through the main airport terminal to account for wider operational arrangements. This approach ensures that a documentary record of the pet's arrival is available to customs and other border control officials. However, chartered flights may have different operational arrangements in place at their arrival airport.

Currently, the only animals that are authorised to travel in the cabin of scheduled flights into GB are Recognised Assistance Dogs. Under Regulation (EC) 1107/2006, airports and airlines must provide free assistance and carriage for Recognised Assistance Dogs in the cabin. The number of Recognised Assistance Dogs in the cabin will be determined by the airline and may be restricted for health and safety reasons depending on passenger information and numbers.

We understand that many pet owners would like to travel with their pets in the aircraft cabin on scheduled flights, however, this needs to be balanced against our biosecurity requirements. The Government is content that the existing pet travel arrangement ensures the necessary import checks have been conducted to safeguard our domestic biosecurity and maintain animal welfare standards whilst working within the complex operational arrangements of an airport.

If you have any further questions regarding Defra's position on this matter, we recommend you direct any queries to the Ministerial Contact Unit who will allocate your query to the right policy team for response. More information on how to contact the Unit is available here: [Contact Defra - GOV.UK](#)

We attach an Annex giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Guy Mawhinney
Information Rights Team
InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk



Annex A

Copyright

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Annex B

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 11 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Damian Lynch Head of Information Rights via email at InformationRequests@defra.gov.uk and they will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our website.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for a decision. Please note that generally the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure.

The ICO can be contacted using the following link:

<https://ico.org.uk/>