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Amanda Cameron
By email: mandycameron48@gmail.com

Our ref: FOI2026/15543
28 July 2026

Dear Amanda Cameron,

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

We are writing in response to your requests of 13 July to Defra and APHA 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.

The GOV.UK guidance states that dogs entering Great Britain by air must travel as cargo unless they are travelling on an approved private charter flight or are assistance dogs.

I would be grateful if you could provide:

- 1. Any legislation, regulations, guidance or policy documents that explain why dogs are permitted to travel in the cabin on approved private charter flights entering Great Britain but are not permitted to do so on scheduled commercial passenger flights.*
- 2. Any risk assessments, scientific evidence or policy papers that were relied upon when establishing or maintaining this distinction.*
- 3. Any correspondence, briefing papers or internal documents held by DEFRA discussing the rationale for permitting in-cabin travel on approved private charter flights while requiring pets travelling on scheduled commercial services to travel as cargo.*
- 4. Details of any reviews, consultations or discussions since 2020 regarding the possibility of allowing regulated in-cabin pet travel on scheduled commercial airlines entering Great Britain.*
- 5. If responsibility for this policy is shared with another government department or agency, please identify the relevant department(s) and transfer this request where appropriate under Section 44 of the Freedom of Information Act.*

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, the amount and breadth of information you have requested is substantial, potentially going back over many years and searching for and gathering it together would involve a significant cost and diversion of resources from the Department's other work.

It may be helpful to explain why your request would involve a significant cost. Your request may be summarised as seeking legislation, regulations, guidance, policy documents, risk assessments and scientific evidence, going back at least six years from organisations including Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). These are not held within one central database but would be shared across multiple policy teams and executive agency colleagues.

Your broad list of communication types and the request for “any correspondence, briefing papers or internal documents”, and “details of any reviews, consultations or discussions” 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 us to refuse a request for information if we estimate that the cost of complying with the request would exceed the appropriate limit, which currently stands at £600. Based on our estimates, we consider that the cost for your enquiry would exceed this limit and, as such, we are refusing your request.

However, if you were to make a new request for a narrower category of information, it may be that we could comply with that request within the appropriate limit, although we cannot guarantee that this will be the case.

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. To refine your request, you could:

- 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 example operational guidance held by APHA or policy documents held by Defra) and resubmit a revised request depending on which organisation you are seeking this from; **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:

[Bring pets to Great Britain](#)

[Pet travel: approved air, sea and rail carriers and routes](#)

[Air carriers: transport pets and assistance dogs](#)

[The Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011](#)

[UK Parliament and UK Government Petitions: Allow small pets to travel in the cabin on flights entering the UK](#)

In refining your request, it may also be helpful to note that all pets travelling into Great Britain (GB) including those travelling by aircraft must be checked for compliance with the necessary health and documentary requirements prior to entry.

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 for the purpose 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. In practice, air carriers must have authorised pet checkers located at the arrival airport.

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. Most pets travelling via scheduled flights are required to 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. 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.

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.

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

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/>