



Mr Stephen McDermott,
TheJournal.ie

Our Ref: FoI/Req/20/145

Date: 16 October 2020

Dear Mr McDermott,

I refer to the request, which you have made under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 for access to records held by this Department, as follows:

“Under the Freedom of Information Act, I am requesting the release of any emails between consular director Elizabeth McCullough and the Department of Health or Chief Medical officer, as well as any briefings provided to her, regarding domestic preparations and potential repatriations relating to Covid-19 between January and March this year.”

Further to our subsequent telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence, it was agreed to have a more targeted scope of inquiry, as follows:

- To remove reference to domestic preparations; and
- To have a timeline covering the period from 20 January to 29 March.

I have identified 40 records that fall within the scope of your request. These records are listed in the schedule attached. I have made a decision grant the release of 27 records and to part-grant the release of 13 records with exemptions under Section 33(1) (d) to international relations, Section 36(1) (b) commercial sensitivities and Section 37(1) personal information.

Personal Information is a mandatory exemption; I am still obliged to consider whether the public interest would be best served by releasing the records in full. I have taken into account the benefit to the public to be given access to correspondence in a manner that demonstrates transparency and accountability of the Department. In the main, the information redacted relates to personal contact information and does not affect the substance of the record. I have particularly considered whether releasing the personal information would provide any additional benefit in this regard. I have weighed this against the right of individuals to have their personal information remain private and have found that there is a clear prerogative for this information to remain private.



As I am working remotely and do not have access to a printer or scanner, I have transcribed the records and saved them in PDF format. The exempted information in the records is shown as “REDACTED”.

Right of Appeal

Should you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so in writing to the Freedom of Information Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 76-78 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2 or by email to foi@dfa.ie. A fee applies for an appeal for access to non-personal information; the level of this fee has been set at €30. For methods of payment, please contact FOI Unit at foi@dfa.ie, or 01-4082857.

You should make your appeal within 4 weeks (20 working days) from the date of this notification. However, the making of a late appeal may be permitted in appropriate circumstances. The appeal will involve a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department.

Yours sincerely

Arthur Hendrick
Consular Directorate