

Annex for Review 202300391456 of FOI 202300385648

Section 30(b)(i) – free and frank provision of advice

An exemption under section 30(b)(i) of FOISA (free and frank provision of advice) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, inhibit substantially the free and frank provision of advice. This exemption recognises the need for officials to have a private space within which to provide free and frank advice to Ministers/other officials before the Scottish Government reaches a settled public view. Disclosing the content of free and frank advice on GFG and the Lochaber smelter will substantially inhibit the provision of such advice in the future, particularly as these discussions relate to a sensitive ongoing issue.

This exemption is subject to the ‘public interest test’. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing a private space within which officials can provide full and frank advice to Ministers/other officials, as part of the process of exploring and refining the Government’s position on GFG and the Lochaber smelter until the Government as a whole can adopt a decision that is sound and likely to be effective. This private thinking space is essential to enable all options to be properly considered, based on the best available advice, so that good decisions can be taken. Premature disclosure is likely to undermine the full and frank discussion of issues between Ministers and officials, which in turn will undermine the quality of the decision making process, which would not be in the public interest.

Section 30(b)(ii) – free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation

An exemption under section 30(b)(ii) of FOISA (free and frank exchange of views) applies to some of the information requested. This exemption applies because disclosure would, or would be likely to, inhibit substantially the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation. This exemption recognises the need for Ministers and officials to have a private space within which to discuss and explore options before the Scottish Government reaches a settled public view. Disclosing the content of free and frank discussions on GFG and the Lochaber smelter will substantially inhibit such discussions in the future.

This exemption is subject to the ‘public interest test’. Therefore, taking account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is a public interest in disclosing information as part of open, transparent and accountable government, and to inform public debate. However, there is a greater public interest in allowing Ministers and officials a private space within which to explore and refine the Government’s position on GFG and the Lochaber smelter until the Government as a whole can adopt a decision that is sound and likely

to be effective. This private thinking space is essential to enable all options to be properly considered, so that good decisions can be taken.

Premature disclosure is likely to undermine the full and frank discussion of issues between Ministers and officials, which in turn will undermine the quality of the decision making process, which would not be in the public interest.

Section 33(1)(b) – commercial interest and the economy

An exemption under section 33(1)(b) of FOISA applies to some of the information you have requested because it is likely to prejudice substantially the commercial interests of the company and the Scottish Government as an interested party.

This exemption is subject to the ‘public interest test’. Therefore, taking into account of all the circumstances of this case, we have considered if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption. We have found that, on balance, the public interest lies in favour of upholding the exemption. We recognise that there is some public interest in release to ensure full transparency. However, this is outweighed by the public interest as there is a risk to the companies commercial interests and those of the Scottish Government and the taxpayer.

Section 38(1)(b) – personal data of a third party

An exemption under section 38(1)(b) of FOISA (personal information) applies to some of the information requested because it is personal data of a third party, such as names/contact details of individuals, and disclosing it would contravene the data protection principles in Article 5(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation and in section 34(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018.

This exemption is not subject to the ‘public interest test’, so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.