

Forestry Commission
620 Bristol Business Park
BRISTOL
BS16 1EJ

Keith Taylor MEP
Via email

Tel 0300 067 4130

26 June 2018

Dear Mr Taylor

Thank you for your request for information regarding the lease agreement between the Forestry Commission and Europa Oil and Gas, and supplementary letters to the Forestry Commission and Michael Gove, Secretary of State for the Environment. As I have overall responsibility for the management of the Public Forest Estate in England I have been asked to provide you with a single response.

Firstly, turning to your request for information, as stated in the correspondence you received from the Forestry Commission on the 31 May 2018 the information you are seeking is exempt under section 39(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 because this information is "environmental information", as defined in regulation 2 of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

In response to your requests:

- To ask if a new lease agreement has been reached between Europa Oil and Gas and the Forestry Commission for use of Bury Hill woods (Leith Hill, Surrey) when the current lease expires in September.
- To ask to see a copy of the lease if already agreed.
- To ask how long the lease runs for if already agreed.

The current lease agreement between the Forestry Commission and Europa Oil and Gas expires in September 2018. Negotiations with respect to the lease renewal are ongoing and therefore the information you have requested is exempt from disclosure under section 12 (4) (a) of the Regulations, as this information is not held by the Forestry Commission. The ongoing work on the lease, if requested, would be exempt from disclosure under the provisions in regulation 12(4)(d), material in the course of completion.

In response to your question of the process for other interested parties to apply to take on the lease; information which we consider may come within the scope of this element of your request is not held by the Forestry Commission and therefore is exempt from disclosure under section 12 (4) (a) of the Regulations.

Turning to your correspondence regarding the activity of Europa Oil and Gas and INEOS on the Public Forest Estate; remember the Forestry Commission is a Government Department. Oil and gas exploration is licenced by the Oil and Gas Authority and the Forestry Commission accepts that there will be occasions where temporary activities such as those proposed at Leith Hill and Sherwood Forest can be accommodated without impeding our ability to manage the public forest

estate. These activities are undertaken alongside our commitments to climate change initiatives as referenced in your letter.

I would like to take this opportunity address some of the claims made in your letter. The Forestry Commission has entered into an agreement with INEOS to allow access for seismic surveying in the Sherwood Forest Area. The license stated that INEOS must obtain written consent from Natural England before entering or undertaking any work on SSSI or SAC land and provide to the Forestry Commission a copy of such consent.

In regard to the eviction of the unauthorised encampment at Leith Hill this was an operation undertaken and financed by Europa, as was the subsequent fencing. Public access remains in place over all but the very small area leased to Europa and this has no material effect on people continuing to enjoy the forest.

Given the land is open access you are most welcome to visit at any time, but I see no benefit in having a meeting on site or indeed elsewhere given that we are not considering any change in our approach to permitted oil and gas exploration activities.

I have tried to deal with your request as fully as possible. If you have any questions then I would be happy to try and answer these for you. However, should you wish to complain about the way your request has been handled please contact:

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Director England
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Email: seceng@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Complaints regarding non-compliance with the requirements of the open information legislation should initially be made to the Forestry Commission itself. We aim to resolve any complaints with you directly. However, should the matter fail to be resolved, you may make an appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Further information of the role of the Information Commissioner and guidance on FOI/EIR can be found on the Commissioner's web site: www.ico.org.uk or by calling the helpline: 0303 123 1113

Yours sincerely



Simon Hodgson
Chief Executive
Forest Enterprise