Response to SEPA consultation on proposals for an integrated authorisation framework

07 March 2017

The Commissioner responded to Part 4 of the consultation.

1. As Scottish Information Commissioner, it will be of little surprise that I support the broad aims of the consultation paper to improve transparency and decision-making, particularly to strengthen public participation in decision-making.

4.2 Public information

2. I particularly welcome the proposal to resolve the practical issues associated with paper registers by making all information available electronically. This will make more information available to more people and will allow users to search more effectively. It is also very much in keeping with the requirement under the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 to actively disseminate information (particularly by electronic means).

3. As not everyone in Scotland can or will use electronic information, it is important to continue to offer the option to request paper copies for a reasonable fee. Even where paper copies are requested, the availability of electronic information will still benefit the public as SEPA staff should be able to locate requested information effectively, reducing the potential for costs associated with searching.

4.3 Public participation

4. I note the intention to tailor public participation in specific decision-making activities and that the precise approach will be detailed in guidance. I welcome this, because being open about consultation and involvement is an important step in achieving transparency. Organisations that set clear expectations enable the public to know what they can contribute and when.

5. I also welcome the intention to make it easier for consultees to access relevant information. I hope that the guidance will also address the timing of relevant information. Over the last 11 years of operation of FOI law, we have seen many examples of the importance of such information being accessible at the outset of consultation: informed communities make better contributions.

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