



## NMA Briefing on the Independent Commission on Freedom of Information's Call for Evidence

**The Freedom of Information Act and the public's right to know are under threat as never before.**

- An “Independent Commission” has been appointed to consider restricting the sorts of information available; strengthening the ministerial veto; reducing opportunities to appeal refusal notices; and introducing charges for requests.
- All of these proposals will seriously restrict the ability of your news organisation and the wider public to hold public authorities to account. The introduction of charges in the region of £20 per request will make major FOI-based investigations of multiple institutions (e.g all 43 police forces in England and Wales) and the cumulative, day-to-day reporting of national and local public bodies prohibitively expensive and fraught with obstacles.
- There are also serious concerns about the objectivity of the Independent Commission. The panel contains Jack Straw who is an outspoken critic of FOI and has already endorsed many of the ideas under consideration. There is no-one on the board representing the FOI requester’s perspective.

**Here is what you can do to support FOI:**

- **Respond** to the Call for Evidence by the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015 deadline. Below are some links to useful materials and attached is briefing from the NMA to help you. We will publicise our response ahead of the deadline, as will the Campaign for Freedom of Information and the Information Commissioner, Christopher Graham. These are likely to contain helpful information.
- **Campaign:** Tell your newsdesks and editorial teams that now is a really good time to run stories highlighting the best of FOI and the threats to the Act. They may want to dust off past investigations based on FOI and give charities and campaigners who have used FOI the opportunity to pledge their support for it in the paper. Cover their stories and encourage them to campaign and respond to the consultation as well. There will be a briefing meeting for NGOs and media organisations by the Campaign for Freedom of Information at their HQ on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October at 2pm, 60 Farringdon Road, London, EC1R 3GA. [admin@cfoi.demon.co.uk](mailto:admin@cfoi.demon.co.uk).



- **Brief ministers and MPs:** Because of our concerns about the Independent Commission and the likelihood that it will make recommendations to restrict the Act, it is essential that we raise our concerns now with ministers and MPs outside it. Attached is a list of the relevant ministers and MPs. Please brief/write to the minister and also identify MPs from the list in your readership area who you can write to. We have also included a list of points you should raise. Encourage them to voice their support for the FOIA in Parliament. You can also include a copy of the letter to the Prime Minister signed by 140 NGOs and media organisations, including NMA, in support of the FOIA.

**Please also send us your coverage of the campaign to save FOI so that we can publicise it on our FOI campaign page.**

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to let me know at [lucyg@newsmediauk.org](mailto:lucyg@newsmediauk.org) or 0207 963 7497

**Consultation deadline: 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

**Helpful materials:**

Information Commissioner's speech to the LSE, 1<sup>st</sup> October:

<https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/news-and-blogs/2015/10/working-effectively-lessons-from-10-years-of-the-freedom-of-information-act/>

Campaign for Freedom of Information "Stop FOI restrictions" page:

<https://www.cfoi.org.uk/campaigns/stop-foi-restrictions/>

Justice Select Committee Report on Freedom of Information, 2012

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/news/foi-report/>

NMA's campaign page on Freedom of Information

<http://www.newsmediauk.org/Freedom-of-Information>