

16/03/2015

Our Ref: IM-FOI-2015-0252



Sir Stephen House QPM
Chief Constable

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 2002
SUBJECT: Loch Morar missing person general query

I refer to your email dated 03/02/2015 regarding the above which has been handled in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

QUESTION

I work for a television production company called Nutopia. We're making a natural history series about Britain and we're dedicating an episode to the Scottish Highlands.

We're doing a piece on Loch Morar -the deepest point in Britain - and I was hoping to get some information about it.

We've been told the loch is extremely dangerous, that people have been reported missing on it, and have never been found. I wonder if it might be possible to obtain a figure of exactly how many people have been reported missing.

(Time period clarified on 18/02/2015 to cover ten years)

RESPONSE

I will initially try to explain how the retrieval of missing person data in relation to a specific geographic area is particularly problematic.

A missing person can be a vulnerable person and will invariably have friends and family who care about them and who are anxious to ensure that they are safe and well. Enquiries are undertaken whether that person is missing for the first time or if they have been missing on numerous occasions before and not all missing persons are lost, or in danger.

Very often the individual is missing because they choose to be missing but in all cases, Police Scotland seeks to locate missing persons and ensure their well-being. Within Police Scotland it is the responsibility of the division receiving a report of a missing person to carry out all initial procedures and recording. Ownership of the investigation will primarily rest with the division covering the place from where the person has gone missing from, although there may be occasions where progression of the investigative process will logically take place in another area. This would preclude us making assumptions that using the geographical area code covering Loch Morar is a reliable guide to capture all reports which would meet your request criteria.

In addition, by their very nature, numerous locations may be recorded for potential searches related to locating a missing person. Unfortunately the systems currently utilised for the purposes of incident recording, do not provide a method whereby we are able to search for specific terms such as 'Loch Morar'. Therefore, the information is not easily retrievable and reliably identifying any such files would undoubtedly greatly exceed the cost limit set out in the regulation.

However a review of local N Division records confirms that we hold one unresolved long term missing person case on file which meets the criteria requested and dates from 2004.

Unfortunately in order to accurately identify those incidents that relate to long term missing persons in the level of detail as noted in your request, even for a short space of time, would require us to manually examine every potential incident report. In addition this would not capture any long term missing reports which originated from other areas of the UK. It would be a considerable task to undertake and the cost of locating and retrieving the information would exceed the "appropriate level" as stated in Freedom of Information (Scotland) (Fees) Regulations 2004.

I realise this response is disappointing but please be assured that Police Scotland treats all reports of missing persons with the utmost seriousness, regardless of the circumstances or the area in which they are thought to have gone missing.

I trust that the information available is of assistance and should you require any further assistance concerning this matter please contact me on 01463 720555 quoting the reference number given.

If you are not satisfied with the way in which your request has been dealt with, you are entitled in the first instance and within 40 working days of receiving this letter to request a review of the decision made by the Service. Should you wish to do so, contact details are; Police Scotland, FOI Central Processing Unit, Clyde Gateway, 2 French Street, Dalmarnock, G40 4EH. (Or email foi@scotland.pnn.police.uk).

Once informed of the review decision, if you are still not satisfied, then you are entitled to apply to the Scottish Information Commissioner within six months for a decision. The contact details are: Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner, Kinburn Castle, Doubledykes Road, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9DS, telephone 01334 464610. Should you wish to appeal against the Scottish Information Commissioner's decision, there is an appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

Yours sincerely

Donna Quick
Information Management
Freedom of Information