8 December 2016

Dear Mr Mountain

Update to the REC Committee

I am writing to provide information to the Committee regarding a recent breach of data protection.

An administrative error occurred on 7 December 2016 when around 2000 Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) applicants were contacted by email about tissue tagging. This contact was required in relation to compliance with the terms of the scheme compliance. Email addresses were copied into the wrong field resulting in all email addresses being visible to all applicants – this was human error and officials have assured me that no other personal information was disclosed.

Scottish Government officials were made aware of this breach through an applicant and also from ScotEID which manages the system on Scottish Government’s behalf. ScotEID has advised that it intends to submit a formal complaint early next week. A number of applicants have also contacted area offices and the level and nature of complaints is being tracked centrally.

An email was issued the same day (7 December) apologising for and explaining the error to all affected applicants. That apology also sought to assure applicants that the Scottish Government takes applicants’ privacy very seriously and that steps are being taken to minimise the risk of this error, which is not related to the IT system, happening again.

The Permanent Secretary, Director General for Economy and Director for Agriculture, Food, Rural and Communities provided an update on this issue when they appeared in front of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee on 8 December 2016.

Officials are currently preparing a report for myself and Mr Mackay, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution who has overall portfolio responsibility for data protection matters, which will describe the breach, its impact and the mitigation measures taken. We will write to you again as soon as we have this information.

Yours sincerely

FERGUS EWING
St Andrew’s House, Regent Road, Edinburgh  EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot