

Forestry Commission Breaches of Code of Practice

Introduction

This document provides summary information about any identified breaches of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics that may be reportable by the Forestry Commission to the UK Statistics Authority.

It covers all Official Statistics, but stricter standards for reporting are applied to outputs identified as National Statistics.

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Scottish Forestry Strategy Indicators – April 2010

One of the Scottish Forestry Strategy indicators, using data from an external provider, was not ready in time for the pre-announced publication date. FC Scotland decided to delay the publication to allow the indicator to be included, but did not pre-announce this delay. The indicators were published two days late, with the delay noted in the list of publications. There has been no adverse reaction from users.

Woodland Area, Planting and Restocking – June 2010

A figure from the draft release was included in an email from FC GB Press Office to senior and press office staff in FC GB and national offices, two days before release. The figure was provided as background to an expected NGO press release that could be linked to the stats release. All recipients were rapidly told that the figure should not be used or distributed more widely, and complied with this.

Sustainable Forest Management Indicators – October 2010

The Sustainable Forest Management Indicators 2010 were published as an electronic book, initially in June and revised in October. A draft version of the revised e-book, with changes to two indicators, was inadvertently published on the FC website in August in place of the initial version. This was only noticed by statistics staff a few days before the scheduled revised publication in October. We are not aware of the early release having been noticed by anyone else, and the SFM indicators are a secondary publication not classified as National Statistics, so this is considered to be a minor breach with no damage appearing to have been done. It was decided not to try to roll back to the initial version for a few days, instead just publishing the full revised version on the due date. The cause of the inadvertent publication in August could not be established two months after the event. Publication could only take place with manual intervention, but no-one involved was aware of any such action. For the future, a system has been set up to require a specific email request for any eBook replication.

FC England Indicators – November 2010

The new official statistics publication "Forestry Commission England CSR07 Performance Indicators: Interim Update on Progress at 30 September 2010" was published on 3 November without giving 4 weeks notice. Most of this update had already been compiled by the FC England Data and Evidence Manager for his team's internal management use. FC England decided that it would be suitable to provide to Defra in response to a new requirement for sponsored bodies performance reporting, requested at short notice. It was agreed with FC Statistics HoP that it would be better to publish the update at short notice giving equality of access, rather than investigate the possibility of providing most of the statistics as further "operational" use of administrative and management data.

National Forest Inventory Woodland Area Statistics: Wales – March 2011

In providing pre-release access to the non-NS statistics release in final form, the e-mail was accidentally sent to a FC colleague not included on the pre-release access list. The colleague (with the same name as one of the pre-release access recipients) alerted the sender immediately and deleted the e-mail. The statistics release was not distributed any further and no damage has been done, so this is considered to be a minor breach.

Forestry Commission England Headline Performance Indicators at 30 September 2014: First Release – November 2014

The PDF file for these indicators (outside the scope of National Statistics) became available on the FC statistics website before the scheduled 9:30 am release time, due to an accidental, overnight replication of the FC website. Records from the web server show that the number of persons who might have viewed the PDF file before the release time is no more than four. We are not aware of the early release having been noticed, and no damage has been done, therefore the breach is considered minor.

National Forest Inventory: Preliminary estimates of canopy cover change in British woodland – [not yet released]

A journalist sought confirmation of an order of magnitude figure from a draft release that had been circulated to a restricted list of experts for quality assurance. The figure was not in the public domain.

Forestry Commission press office have responded to the journalist, explaining why it cannot comment, and referring to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and to the latest published figure on this issue.

National Forest Inventory: Preliminary estimates of the changes in canopy cover in British woodlands between 2006 and 2015 – August 2016

A draft press release written on behalf of an external organisation (a member of which was provided with pre-release access for quality assurance purposes) included a headline finding from the report & was shared with others not on the pre-release list in advance of the release date.

Following the previous potential breach (see above), all those receiving pre-release access for QA purposes were reminded of their obligations, the wording accompanying pre-release access was strengthened and the terms of reference for the QA group were amended to include specific reference to the requirement for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The external organisation's press release did not go out until after the release date, so there has been minimal impact.