

Statistical Disclosure Control for FC Surveys

Introduction

1. This paper reports on an exercise undertaken on the results from the Forestry Commission's Sawmill Survey to ensure that the information provided by businesses is treated in confidence.

Statistical Disclosure Control

2. Statistical disclosure control (SDC) concerns safeguarding the confidentiality of information. This can be done by suppressing the publication of figures or by modifying the data so that the risk of identifying individual businesses is reduced.
3. As part of an overall strategy to bring about a consistent and coherent approach to confidentiality protection, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has produced standards which set out minimum requirements on Statistical Disclosure Control for tabular output. These standards not only require a minimum number of businesses contributing to a figure, but also place a restriction on the proportion of that figure which is covered by the largest business.

Forestry Commission Surveys of the Timber Industry

4. The Forestry Commission runs 3 annual surveys of the timber industry. These are:
 - Sawmill Survey – covering around 250 sawmills in the UK
 - Survey of Round Fencing Manufacturers – covering around 100 round fencing mills in the UK
 - Private Sector Softwood Removals Survey – covering around 40 UK harvesting companies
5. The surveys are voluntary and, to encourage higher response rates, the Forestry Commission assures respondents that their returns will be treated in confidence and aggregated with data from others so that it will not be possible to identify an individual respondent in any publication.
6. Results from these surveys are published annually. In order to ensure that respondents' data remain confidential, breakdowns to be published are checked to ensure that each figure represents at least 3 respondents or that permission is obtained from those providing potentially disclosive data for their figures to be published.
7. For the Removals and Fencing surveys, the results are published at quite aggregated levels only, so the potential for disclosing data for individual businesses is minimal. Results from the Sawmill Survey are however published in more detailed breakdowns and are therefore more susceptible to potential statistical disclosure.

Sawmill Survey

8. The sawmill sector consists of a small number of large businesses owning multiple mills (as well as a large number of smaller businesses), for which each mill is counted as a separate entity. In applying the ONS standards to the Sawmill Survey, the results need to be considered on a business rather than a mill basis.
9. Results from the Sawmill Survey for 2006 (and earlier years) were published in Forestry Statistics 2007. The results (which include estimates for non-respondents) from the main survey (of all sawmills) covered:
 - Consumption by softwood/ hardwood by UK/ imported (Table 2.8)
 - Number of mills by size of mill (Table 2.9)
 - Number of mills by country (Table 2.10)
 - Number of mills by type of wood sawn (Table 2.11)
 - Softwood consumption by size of mill (Table 2.12)
 - Softwood consumption by country (Table 2.13)
 - Softwood production by size of mill (Table 2.14)
 - Softwood production by country (Table 2.15)
 - Sales to bioenergy by softwood/ hardwood by country (Table 2.16)
 - Per cent of consumption/ production volumes certified (Table 2.31)
 - Chain of custody certificates by size of mill (Table 2.32)
10. In addition to the above, a more detailed survey, covering the 50 or so largest sawmills (those producing over 10,000 m³ sawnwood), provides details on:
 - Source of logs by country (Table 2.18)
 - Sawnwood product markets by country (Table 2.19)
 - Other products by country (Table 2.20)
 - Employment by country (Table 2.21)
11. Hardwood results from the detailed Sawmill Survey are not currently published, as they are all potentially disclosive.

Results of Disclosure Control Checks on the Sawmill Survey

12. In order to check the published results for potentially disclosive data, mills were grouped into businesses and, for each published figure, the following data were derived:
- The number of businesses contributing to that figure,
 - The total value of the figure and
 - The percentage of the total value accounted for by the largest business.
13. Any figures for which the number of businesses is very small or for which the largest business contributes too high a proportion is deemed susceptible to disclosure.
14. At a UK level, there are sufficient businesses contributing to the annual Sawmill Survey for all mills, with no one business dominating, to ensure that the majority of figures are not likely to be disclosive. However, with only a few businesses reporting consumption of imported softwood, these results could be potentially disclosive.
15. Softwood consumption and production data covers a large number of businesses (around 200 for the UK as a whole), so breakdowns of these figures by size of mill or by country are not likely to be disclosive. Whilst there are hardwood consumption and production data for around 70 businesses in the UK, the vast majority of these businesses are relatively small and are located in either England or Scotland. As a result, more detailed hardwood breakdowns may be disclosive.
16. For the detailed survey, the softwood results are not disclosive at a UK level. However, the inclusion of country breakdowns could potentially result in the disclosure of some data for some businesses.

Conclusions

17. The majority of the Sawmill Survey results published in Forestry Statistics 2007 are not potentially disclosive. However, the following results are potentially disclosive:

- Consumption of imported softwood (all mills)
- Softwood consumption by source of logs and country (larger mills)
- Softwood production by sawnwood product markets and country (larger mills)
- Softwood other products by destination, type of product and country (larger mills)
- Employment by type and country (larger mills)
- Hardwood results from the detailed survey (not currently published)

18. Any future release of data should ensure that either:

- Statistical disclosure control methods are applied where necessary, or
- there is agreement from relevant businesses to the release of any potentially disclosive results.

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May 2008