

## BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

### 1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

Official Statistics release on UK's carbon footprint.

[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint)

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

Peter Helm, Head of Profession for Statistics, Defra, 24 March 2015

### 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 3, Practice1 '... and ensure that no statement or comment – based on prior knowledge – is issued to the press or published ahead of the publication of the statistics'.

Date of occurrence

18 March 2015

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

- The UK Carbon footprint statistics are released annually
- The data is provided by researchers at Leeds University under contract to Defra. Defra conducts the analysis and produces the statistics release.
- The breach concerned release of information to a BBC journalist the day before publication of the statistics (18 March 2015) without approval from Defra.
- 7 days before publication (12 March) Defra sent a draft of the text and charts that we were intending to put in our release to 2 researchers at the University of Leeds for QA purposes. The covering e-mail clearly stated that the material was confidential

and draft and must not be shared with anyone else. Their QA was very helpful.

The day before the release date, the lead researcher held a discussion with a BBC journalist. He has since admitted verbally to Defra that within the conversation he provided a small amount of information that he had also seen in the draft material. The BBC article, published on their website at 08.03 on 19 March, did not contain anything that was directly included in the statistical release.

#### Reasons for breach

The breach occurred because the Leeds University researcher divulged some draft material provided to him for QA purposes in error.

### 3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)

Ministerial and Press Office concern within Defra about the possibility of information being provided to a journalist prior to publication

The Leeds University researcher is aware of the error and has apologised verbally to Defra.

### 4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

Short term: lead statistician wrote to the Leeds University team on 24 March to:

- ensure they are fully aware of their responsibilities under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the Defra guidance on avoiding breaches
- explain that information provided for Quality Assurance purposes is confidential and must not be disclosed prior to publication
- clarify that in future they seek Defra's approval before releasing or discussing any information to the media that is taken from Defra-commissioned research that is unpublished.

Long term: will seek to insert a clause into the current contract for this research which will:

- require the contractor to understand the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and how they apply to their work under the contract in order to ensure compliance.
- require the contractor to seek to clarify in writing from Defra if they are in any doubt about the scope of their obligations under the Code.
- ensure no data from the research is released to the media before it is published and without Defra approval.

### 5. Links to published statements about this breach

Initial statement published in 'Details' at: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint)

A link to where this breach report is published on the Statistics Authority website will be provided from GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics#corporate-procedures-and-standards>.