

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')

Operation HERRICK Redeployment Data for Vehicles, Major Items of Equipment and Material (October 2012 to September 2014)

This is an Official Statistic.

Link to publication:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-herrick-redeployment-statistics-2014>

Name of Producer Organisation

Ministry of Defence (MOD)

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

Simon Mahony,

Email: DefStrat-Stat-ChiefStatistician@mod.uk
Ministry of Defence,
Main Building,
London
SW1A 2HB

Tel: 020 7218 1466

Breach report completed on 17 December 2014.

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2: Release Practices; Practice 8 (Public Disclosure):

“Ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access before publication. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.”

Date of occurrence

Monday 27 October 2014.

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

On 27 October the Ministry of Defence Comms office published an infographic containing the following figures:

- Total number of vehicles returned from Camp Bastion (Afghanistan) – 3,400
- Total number of twenty foot equivalent units of equipment returned from Camp Bastion (Afghanistan) - 4,550

The infographic was produced as part of a series of communications on the withdrawal of UK Armed Force from Afghanistan, and was disseminated through the MOD's twitter feed and the MOD's GOV.UK homepage.

The breach was discovered on 28 October when members of the central statistical team noticed the infographic online.

The official Operation HERRICK Redeployment statistics were published on 29 October 2014, for the first time. These show the correct number of vehicles and major equipment (3,029) and twenty foot equivalent units (4,385) redeployed by 30 Sept 2014.

Reasons for breach

In June 2014, the number of vehicles and twenty foot equivalent units expected to be returned from Camp Bastion (Afghanistan) was provided in an internally produced 'Lines To Take' document detailing information on Afghanistan that can be released externally. It was estimated that 3,400 vehicles and 5,000 twenty foot equivalent units of equipment would be returned between 1 October 2012 and 31 Dec 2014.

The figures released on 27 October were taken from the June 2014 'Lines To Take' document but were not accurately described as forecast figures. Furthermore, the number of twenty foot equivalent units of equipment was changed from 5,000 to 4,500. Key personnel within the team who provided the data have now left post and it has not been possible to discuss to discuss the breach with them.

The MOD Comms team believed they were releasing the correct figures and had checked their accuracy. A separate area of the Comms team had been made aware of the forthcoming release of the official statistics, but the team that released the infographic were not aware that these statistics were due to be released as official statistics and therefore should not have been added to the infographic. This may be partly due to the fact that this was the first release of these official statistics, and the period of pre-announcement of the publication date was short due to a user requirement for the statistics.

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

The breach was discovered on 28 October, and the Head of Profession was informed that day. The Head of Profession sought details from the relevant teams and, following advice from the National Statistician's Office on 12 November, confirmed that this was a breach.

Given the serious nature of the potential breach, the MOD Permanent Secretary's office was notified on 28 October. Contact was made with the National Statistician's Office once initial investigations had been completed on 30 October 2014 to notify them of the potential breach.

Defence Statistics are not aware of any use of the figures in the media.

The figures have been updated on the online story on the MOD's gov.uk pages. The infographic was released on twitter and facebook. These posts have now been widely shared, MOD Comms has monitored feedback on the infographic and there has been no negative comment. These social media channels do not allow amendments to historical stories and releasing a revised infographic after the story has faded could have a bigger reputational impact.

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

- The Head of Profession for Statistics met with the MOD Comms team on 5 November and discussed how to prevent such breaches in future. Policy teams in MOD will be given specific guidance to not provide statistics to the Comms team for proactive release without checking with the Chief Statistician's Office (guidance already exists to involve statisticians in any publication containing statistics).
- The team that produce the official statistics were provided with further guidance on 29 October on their responsibilities under the Code of Practice, to ensure that breaches of the actual official statistics do not occur. This was followed up with further guidance on 27 November.
- The Head of Profession for Statistics will reiterate existing policies in MOD, which include the requirement to contact the central statistical team before making any proactive release of statistics.
- When official statistics are being released for the first time and there is a shorter period of pre-announcement, the responsible statisticians will ensure that all areas of the Comms team are informed of the release date, and the requirement not to release statistics on this subject area.