

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')

Total Factor Productivity of the Food Chain

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-chain-productivity>

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, 29 January 2014.

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

1. Protocol 2 – Release Practices, Practices 7 and 8.

2. Paragraphs 2 and 6(1) of the Schedule to The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008.

Date of occurrence

29 January 2014

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

- The Total Factor Productivity statistics are published biannually.
- 24-hour Pre-release Access (PRA) to the statistical release had been granted to a list of officials in Defra, including one Defra Press Officer, to enable press office to prepare and response to media coverage if necessary.

- The statistics notice due to be published at 09:30 on 30 January was accidentally released by the press officer to two Defra policy staff who had not been granted PRA. The officer was trying to get some additional briefing on the statistics. This breach occurred on 29 January at 13:54.
- The breach was identified by the lead statistician at 14:17, when the policy colleague forwarded the press officers request back to the statistics team for advice.
- The lead statistician immediately put steps in place to restrict further circulation of the statistics.

Reasons for breach

Human error. Because of recent staff changes, the individual in receipt of the statistics under PRA in the Defra Press Office was not fully aware that they should not reveal any statistics to persons not on the pre-release access list.

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

- On identification of the breach, the lead statistician took immediate action to stop any further circulation of the breached statistics beyond those on the PRA list. He emailed the press officer and policy people to explain what they had done wrong and to tell them not to circulate the statistics further.
- The Head of Profession was advised at the earliest opportunity, and subsequently advised the National Statistician's Office.
- A public statement was issued on the Defra website at the same time as the release was published and on the ONS Publication Hub on 30 January. It was not possible to publish the statement on the Defra website on 29 January as, due to the way releases must be pre-prepared for the GOV.UK website, this would have over-written the information already setup for the release the next day.
- These are aggregated UK statistics so there was no need to advise the Devolved Administrations.

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

The breach occurred as a result of human error. The individual responsible for the error has been reminded of the conditions relating to pre-release access of official statistics.

We have reminded the Press Office managers of the requirement.

A prominent warning is attached to the front page of all PRA documents circulated before publication (see section 6). We will review this text.

Further guidance and support will be offered to Press Office and policy teams to reduce the risk of similar breaches occurring in future. The Head of Profession will discuss further with the Press Team.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

Initial statements published at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-chain-productivity>

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

6. Any other relevant supporting material

The following example text is prefixed to all documents circulated to PRA recipients for food statistics releases:

RESTRICTED STATISTICS
Publication is at 09:30 on Thursday 30 January 2014

You are reminded that these are National Statistics to which you have privileged access in advance of release for the sole purpose of being able to respond completely when questions arise at the time of release.

Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately to the appropriate lead statistician and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content, including descriptions such as “favourable” or “unfavourable”.

Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as **Restricted**.

Early release circulation is restricted to the following:

Name Press Office

Name Food and Environmental Risk, Evidence and Analysis

Name Organisation

Etc.