

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics occurs where one or more provisions of the Code were not followed in situations where an exemption or exception had not been approved by the UK Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment, as required in paragraph (xii) of the Code's preamble. Rules on pre-release access to statistics are covered in the relevant Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders; the Code applies as if it includes these orders.

1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link if relevant)

UK Biodiversity Indicator in your pocket 2011
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/UK-Biodiversity-Indicators-2011-statistical-release.pdf>

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

Peter Helm, Defra Statistical Head of Profession, 20 May 2011

2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Release Practices;

Practice 7, Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes. Publish records of those who have access prior to release.

Practice 8 – 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. pre-release access.

Date of occurrence

19 May 2011

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

It was discovered on 19 May 2011 that a Defra employee, who is on the pre-release access list (internal Defra policy staff: Senior Civil Service director), had forwarded the release to two other Defra employees (internal Defra policy staff: one Senior Civil Service Deputy Director, and one Grade 7 in the Natural Environment White Paper team) between the time of pre-release and release of the statistical publication.

Reasons for breach

There is no reason to believe that this is anything more than an honest mistake from the person involved, who did not realise the two people who the email was sent to were not on the pre-release list access list.

3 Reactions and Impact

None – immediate corrective procedures minimised the potential for those outside the pre-release access list viewing the information. No information was sent outside the department.

4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

The National Statistician's Office was informed of the breach.

The person breaching pre-release access has been contacted about the breach and the statistical Head of Profession has followed up on this to re-affirm the conditions attached to the privilege of advance access to a statistical release.

The two persons who wrongly received the statistical release as a consequence of the breach were requested to delete the email without reading it and did so.

Defra guidelines will be reviewed and be made more explicit to prevent similar events from occurring.