

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')

Preliminary estimates of the changes in canopy cover in British woodlands between 2006 and 2015 (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/bee-h-a2uegs>)

Name of Producer Organisation

Forestry Commission

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

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2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2: Release Practices - Practice 8: Wrongful release

Date of occurrence

On or before 11 August 2016

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

A draft press release written on behalf of an external organisation (a member of which was provided with pre-release access for quality assurance purposes) included a headline finding from the report & was shared with others not on the pre-release list in advance of the release date.

A previous potential breach was reported in April. Following that incident, all those receiving pre-release access for QA purposes were reminded of their obligations, the wording accompanying pre-release access was strengthened and the terms of reference for the QA group were amended to include specific reference to the requirement for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The pre-release lists for these statistics can be found at:
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-83mfrz>

Reasons for breach

The breach is believed to have occurred because one individual on the list of those receiving pre-release access for QA purposes included a headline finding from the report when drafting and sharing a joint press release with others, despite the PRA materials carrying appropriate markings and handling instructions.

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

The external organisation's press release did not go out until after the release date, so there has been no external impact.

Internally, the issue has raised concern over who should receive access to Official Statistics before they are published for QA purposes.

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

Individuals on the PRA list for QA purposes have recently been reminded of their responsibilities following the previous suspected breach (including via being raised at a meeting of the QA group) and the markings on the draft and cover email were strengthened so as to avoid accidental pre-release to those not on the list. The individual responsible for the breach is no longer on the QA group.

In the longer term, the number of people on the PRA list for QA purposes for future editions of this release will reduce, now that the methodology underpinning the estimates has been established. More generally, there are plans to review the requirements for QA of FC Official Statistics; this is expected to result in reductions to PRA lists for QA purposes.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

Available via download from <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-7zhk6a>

6. Any other relevant supporting material