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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB**

Jim Mather MSP  
Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism  
Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
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6 August 2010

Dear Jim

**PRE-RELEASE ACCESS TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS**

Thank you for your letter of 15 July about the Scottish Government's internal review of the *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008*.

The policy in Scotland on this matter is of course a matter for the Scottish Government and Parliament. However, it will not have escaped your notice that it is at odds not just with the views of the UK Statistics Authority but with those of the Cabinet Office and Westminster government, the views expressed by the Treasury Committee of the House of Commons in 2006, the views of the Royal Statistical Society, and those of leading statistics authorities worldwide.

It has been argued that the issues are different in Scotland. We do not see them as sufficiently different to justify such divergence. Whilst the Code of Practice for Official Statistics cannot, under the Statistics Act, cover pre-release access directly, there are some general principles of statistical good practice that need to be considered. These include the principle that statistics should be released as soon as they are ready; and the principle that statistics should be made equally available to all who might wish to make use of them. The policy of the Scottish Government sits uncomfortably with both of these principles.

That said, we seem to have taken this debate as far as we can. You do not accept our arguments and we do not accept yours, and the relative merits of the Scottish Government's report and that of the Statistics Authority will be for others to judge.

I have asked Statistics Authority staff to ensure that this impasse does not adversely affect the constructive and cordial dialogue we have with officials in the Scottish Government on more specific statistical matters.

I should add that it is no criticism of the integrity of professional government statisticians to suggest, as we did in our report, that they might come under pressure not to say things in statistical commentary that would be seen as unhelpful by their employers. I have the

highest regard for the integrity of government statisticians, and I regret that our suggestion has been read in this way.

I am copying this letter to Jil Matheson, the National Statistician.

Yours sincerely

*Michael Scholar*

**Sir Michael Scholar KCB**