

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## Statistics on UK Sea Fisheries

*(produced by the Marine Management  
Organisation)*

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### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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# **Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers the set of statistics reported in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*<sup>4</sup>, produced by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) which is an arm's length body of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- 1.1.2 Assessments of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

## 1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* are designated as National Statistics, subject to the MMO implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by October 2011.
- 1.2.2 During the course of this assessment the MMO was responsive to the Assessment team's emerging conclusions, and made a number of changes in response to these – see paragraphs 3.5, 3.8, 3.10, 3.13 and 3.24. The MMO has informed the Assessment team that it has also started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The MMO has regular contact with the suppliers of data and the main users of sea fisheries statistics. The MMO carried out a detailed user consultation specifically in relation to the annual publication in 2010 and is making changes

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/annual.htm>

to the timetable for releasing the publication as a result. Users would benefit from the opportunity to engage more regularly with MMO statisticians, and from the provision of more information about methods and quality.

1.3.2 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* presents the statistics in an accessible way using tables, charts and maps and includes commentary that identifies the main messages.

#### **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the MMO could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

#### **1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics**

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Provide a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions at the same time as the revised statistics are released (para 3.6).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Publish full details of the methods used to produce the statistics, or provide links to where information about methods can be found, and include explanations of why particular methods were chosen (para 3.10).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Provide additional information to inform users about the quality, including strengths and weaknesses, of the statistics presented in <i>UK Sea Fisheries Statistics</i> in relation to use (para 3.11).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* is produced by the MMO – an executive non-departmental public body created in 2010. The MMO took over the duties of the Marine and Fisheries Agency, previously an executive agency of Defra.
- 2.2 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* is an annual compendium publication providing a broad picture of the UK fishing industry. It gives information on the size and structure of the UK fishing fleet, details of fish landings made in the UK and abroad by UK and foreign vessels, details of fish imports and exports and an estimate of the sustainability of fish stock in UK waters.
- 2.3 The main sources of data used in the compilation of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* are the administrative systems required under EU legislation (Council Regulation (EU) 1224/2009<sup>5</sup>) to monitor fish landings against pre-assigned fishing quotas. Fishermen working from vessels over 10 metres in length are required by EU law to complete logbooks of fishing activity which are supplemented with details from landings declarations that show the official weight of fish landed and sales notes. Sales notes for vessels measuring 10 metres and under are used to record the landing of fish by these vessels, with local coastal staff estimating details of the related levels of fishing effort involved – a measure based on vessel capacity and time spent fishing. The collection of data on numbers of catches and landings is overseen by officers of the Fisheries Administrations in the UK. The Administrations are: the MMO; the Welsh Government<sup>6</sup>; Marine Scotland<sup>7</sup>; the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for Northern Ireland<sup>8</sup> (DARD); and government departments in Jersey<sup>9</sup>, Guernsey<sup>10</sup> and the Isle of Man<sup>11</sup>. *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* presents statistics for the UK and also includes Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. Although not part of the UK, their fishing vessels fish in UK waters and therefore receive a proportion of the UK's fishing quota.
- 2.4 Data on catches and landings for England, Wales and Northern Ireland are held on the Fisheries Activities Database (FAD). Data for Scotland are held on an equivalent, but separate, database known as the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). The MMO does not have direct access to FIN, but is able to access the key data for Scotland through the UK data warehouse called iFISH. The MMO uses iFISH as the main source of data for *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* and requests data from the Scottish Government where more detailed information is required.
- 2.5 The other main sources of data used in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* are: the Register of Shipping and Seamen produced by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency<sup>12</sup> (MCA); HMRC international trade data<sup>13</sup> and stock assessments

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<sup>5</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:343:0001:0050:EN:PDF>

<sup>6</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/foodandfisheries/fisheries/?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Directorates/marinescotland>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/fisheries-farming-and-food/fisheries.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gov.je/Industry/FarmingFishing/Fishing/Pages/index.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.gov.gg/ccm/navigation/commerce---employment/sea-fisheries/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.gov.im/daff/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/mca/>

produced by Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science<sup>14</sup> (Cefas).

2.6 In response to a user consultation carried out in 2010 (see paragraph 3.1), the MMO is releasing two chapters of the 2010 edition of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* earlier than the full compendium (which will be published in September 2011). Chapter 2 was released under the title *The UK Fishing Industry: Structure and Activity* in June 2011 and chapter 3 is planned for release under the title *The UK Fishing Industry: Landings*<sup>15</sup> in August 2011.

2.7 The MMO also publishes three datasets that accompany *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*. These are used mainly as management tools by the UK Fisheries Administrations to monitor fish catches and landings against EU determined quotas. These are:

- *Quota Use Statistics*<sup>16</sup> which provides weekly details of the live weight of fish landed for key quota species against the relevant quota;
- *Monthly Return of Sea Fisheries Statistics*<sup>17</sup> which gives a monthly update of UK landings; and
- *UK Vessel Lists*<sup>18</sup> which provide information about all UK-registered vessels, with those over 10 metres in length and those 10 metres or under shown separately.

2.8 The main uses of the statistics presented in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* and associated outputs are:

- to provide an overview of the fishing industry to inform the development and monitoring of fisheries policies produced by Defra;
- to monitor catches against EU quotas assigned under the Common Fisheries Policy<sup>19</sup>;
- to make European comparisons using the catch data MMO sends, for the whole of the UK, to Eurostat and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries<sup>20</sup> in accordance with Council Regulation (EU) 1224/2009;
- to provide Members of Parliament with relevant statistics to support fishing communities within their constituencies;
- for research by academics in monitoring and commenting on changes in fishing patterns; and
- in the management of EU quota stocks by fish producer organisations, such as the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.uktradeinfo.com/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cefas.defra.gov.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/annual.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/quota.htm>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/monthly.htm>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/vessel.htm>

<sup>19</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/index_en.htm)

<sup>20</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs\\_fisheries/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/index_en.htm)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cfpo.org.uk/>

- 2.9 Marine Scotland produces an equivalent release, *Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics*<sup>22</sup>. These statistics are the subject of a separate assessment and the Assessment report<sup>23</sup> is available on the Authority's website.
- 2.10 It costs the MMO approximately £43,000 per year to produce *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*. This includes the cost of producing the three accompanying datasets listed in paragraph 2.7 but excludes the cost of operating the administrative systems that provide the data. This estimate takes into account the savings mentioned in paragraph 3.18.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/09/15155811/0>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

### 3 Assessment findings

#### Principle 1: Meeting user needs

**The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.**

- 3.1 The MMO carried out a consultation in February 2010 with users of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* focusing on the content and format of the publication. A range of users responded, including government departments, port offices, the media, sea fisheries committees and fish producer organisations. The MMO carried out interviews with each user and has published full details of the consultation<sup>24</sup> on its website. The MMO told the Assessment team that all the recommendations arising from the consultation have been implemented and have provided details of the changes made in a special note published in the release. In addition, the MMO receives informal feedback from users throughout the year and has acted upon this feedback to make changes to its releases, for example making more detailed tables available on its website rather than in the paper version of the publication.
- 3.2 MMO statisticians contribute to a Eurostat working group. Although no national user groups exist for these statistics, MMO statisticians engage with users such as the Environment Agency<sup>25</sup>, the devolved administrations and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee<sup>26</sup> (JNCC) through MMO's Stakeholder Relations team. The MMO has documented information about the users and uses of the statistics<sup>27</sup> on its website although this could include more detail, for example by explaining the specific use made of each of the users listed. We suggest the MMO consider means of engaging with a wider range of users, particularly those outside government and the fishing industry, on a more regular basis and ensure that information about these users and the uses which they make of the statistics are fully documented. In doing so, we suggest that the MMO refer to the types of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief: *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>28</sup>.
- 3.3 The MMO has released sections of the 2011 edition of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* ahead of the usual publication date of September in response to the user consultation. The MMO included a note to highlight these changes on its website prior to the release of the new outputs.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/ukseafish/additional/user\\_consultation.pdf](http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/ukseafish/additional/user_consultation.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/>

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/ukseafish/additional/national\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/ukseafish/additional/national_statistics.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

**Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.**

- 3.4 The MMO announces changes to methods or classifications used in the production of the statistics in a special note<sup>29</sup> published both in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* and separately on its website.
- 3.5 MMO statisticians told the Assessment team that they follow Defra's revisions policy<sup>30</sup>, although this policy relates specifically to National Statistics produced by Defra. Defra intends to include statistics produced by its arm's length bodies such as the MMO and told us that, at present, the senior statisticians within the MMO keep Defra's statistical Head of Profession informed of the extent of any revisions made. As a result of this assessment, the MMO have told us that they will make it clear to users of the statistics that the statistics presented in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* are covered by the Defra revisions policy and include a link to where the revisions policy can be found.
- 3.6 The statistics in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* were revised for the first time in the 2009 publication due to late returns of landings data and changes to how the data for vessels of 10 metres or under in length were recorded. The statistics for 2005 to 2008 were revised but, although this is noted in the published report, information on the extent of the revisions was not included. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MMO should provide a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions at the same time as the revised statistics are released<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 1).
- 3.7 The MMO publishes *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* free of charge on its website. The MMO does not currently charge for supplementary statistical services but is considering whether such charges should be introduced. The MMO told the Assessment team that it plans to consult with users about this and will make users aware of any charges before they are introduced.

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<sup>29</sup>[http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/ukseafish/additional/special\\_note.pdf](http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/statistics/documents/ukseafish/additional/special_note.pdf)

<sup>30</sup><http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/natstats/documents/defra-compliance.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

### Principle 3: Integrity

**At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.**

- 3.8 A press release<sup>32</sup> was published by statistical and communications staff in the MMO to accompany the 2010 release of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*. MMO statisticians told the Assessment team that amendments were requested by the senior management team at the MMO who wanted to make changes to the statistics included in the draft press release to present a more positive picture. MMO statisticians told us that they ensured that the press release remained factual and balanced but that they could not rule out the possibility of similar situations in future. As a result of this assessment, the MMO has introduced a process for the publication of press releases which restricts the involvement of individuals outside the statistics team and requires the release to be signed-off by the Head of Statistics and Analysis at the MMO.
- 3.9 No further incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://marinemanagement.org.uk/news/press/100930.htm>

## Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

**Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.**

- 3.10 Details of the methods used to collect data on catches and landings are included as an annex in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*, but this information is not very detailed or comprehensive, focusing solely on the collection of fish catches and landings data. The MMO has made improvements during this assessment to the information available in through the release of *The UK Fishing Industry: Structure and Activity* (see paragraph 2.6), for example by adding details of the methods used for the statistics on the number of fishermen but this information could be more detailed. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MMO should publish full details of the methods used to produce the statistics, or provide links to where information about methods can be found, and include explanations of why particular methods were chosen<sup>33</sup> (Requirement 2). We suggest that the MMO publish a single document outlining methods used, accessible both from its website and from the release.
- 3.11 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* contains a short section describing the reliability and completeness of the data. This section explains, for example, improvements to the data collection, such as the addition of sales notes and monthly diaries of activity relating to shellfish for vessels 10 metres or under in length. However it does not explain the scale of the improvements made or the impact that they have had on the quality of the statistics. It also states that the reliability of the statistics is dependent upon the 'honesty of the documentation provided by fishermen'. Despite the extensive enforcement activity associated with fishing in the UK, the MMO believes that there may be some illegal and unreported landings, and that these will be excluded from the statistics. A dedicated team in the MMO works specifically to reduce the amount of illegal activity, particularly in relation to the illegal trade in fish, although the MMO told us that due to its nature the extent of this is difficult to quantify. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the MMO should provide additional information to inform users about the quality, including the strengths and weaknesses, of the statistics presented in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* in relation to use<sup>34</sup> (Requirement 3). We suggest that the MMO present the information to meet Requirement 3 alongside the information needed to meet Requirement 2.
- 3.12 The data on catches and landings used to compile *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* are collected from three different documents all required by EU legislation: the logbook completed to record vessel activity; the landing declaration; and the sales report. These documents must be received before the data can be considered final (with the exception of Scotland where only the logbook and landing declaration are required). A series of automated cross checks are carried out between these three sources using the UK Cross Check Management System to assure the quality of the data. The data are also cross-

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<sup>33</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>34</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

referenced to additional sources of data such as satellite tracking data and at-sea surveillance activity. The Community Fisheries Control Agency<sup>35</sup>, which coordinates the operational control of fishing activities in EU member states, and the European Court of Auditors<sup>36</sup> regularly check the accuracy of this system. Built-in validation checks are used in both the FAD and FIN databases (see paragraph 2.4). MMO statisticians also carry out checks which include: identifying outliers, checking for consistency between data tables and comparing prices recorded on sales reports against typical fish prices. The weekly and monthly publication of these datasets also acts as an additional quality assurance check because fishermen and fish quota managers check the data published against the data held in their own records. The MMO told the Assessment team that these quality assurance processes are fully documented.

- 3.13 Several different sources are used to compile *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*, including data from the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). Previously, it was not made clear in the release whether statistics from these sources are classed as National Statistics, official statistics or non-official statistics. As a result of this assessment, the MMO has clarified this through a statement in the preface and footnotes in the body of the release. The MMO has also added definitions of official and National Statistics in the glossary.
- 3.14 The MMO told the Assessment team that it has a good working relationship with statisticians within the Marine Scotland, with whom they work closely and also with those at the Welsh Government, DARD, and the government departments of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.
- 3.15 The MMO also promotes comparability at a European level by contributing to the Eurostat working group and it told the Assessment team that Eurostat considered the UK to be leaders in good practice. The MMO provides details of related publications and organisations in an annex to the release and also on its website.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://cfca.europa.eu/pages/home/home.htm>

<sup>36</sup> [http://europa.eu/institutions/inst/auditors/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/institutions/inst/auditors/index_en.htm)

## **Principle 5: Confidentiality**

**Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.**

- 3.16 Data in the FAD database are held at Cefas and are accessible only by designated staff in Cefas and the MMO. The MMO has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. This includes aggregating data before they are made available to users and not releasing statistics which cover fewer than five vessels.
- 3.17 Confidential data are provided to organisations working with or for the MMO or Defra. These organisations are required to sign a data sharing agreement with the MMO which covers the requirements of the *Code*.

## **Principle 6: Proportionate burden**

**The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.**

- 3.18 Some changes have been made in line with EU legislation to improve the quality of the data reported by the fishing industry. The most recent change was made in 2005 and required buyers of fish to register and submit sales notes for landings made by vessels of 10 metres or under in length. An explanatory memorandum<sup>37</sup> was published which evaluated the costs and benefits of the change.

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1605/pdfs/uksiem\\_20051605\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1605/pdfs/uksiem_20051605_en.pdf)

## Principle 7: Resources

**The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.**

- 3.19 The 2009 edition of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*, published in 2010, was the first to be available only electronically. The MMO told the Assessment team that this has led to savings of around £2,000 on a total cost of producing the volume of around £20,000.
- 3.20 The MMO told us that it follows Defra's recruitment and development policies to ensure that suitably skilled people are employed in the statistical production process.

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

**Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.**

- 3.21 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* includes good descriptive commentary and a range of graphs, tables and maps that enhance clarity and interpretability for the user. However, the commentary could go further to explain reasons for the trends illustrated. We suggest the MMO enhance the commentary in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* to explain trends in the statistics, and ensure that the points detailed in annex 2 are addressed.
- 3.22 Monthly and weekly catch data are published in eight spreadsheets which provide more timely and detailed information to accompany the annual volume. The MMO told us that these were used by port officers to monitor catches in their area but that they knew little about their wider use. Some users who responded to the consultation carried out as part of this assessment commented that they would prefer a single weekly spreadsheet which would bring together all the data by fish stock in one place. MMO told the Assessment team that it was aware that a more user-friendly presentation of the weekly spreadsheets which would allow users to select combinations of data, for example for specific stocks, would be an improvement. We suggest that MMO review the content and format of the weekly and monthly spreadsheets to improve ease of use.

## **Protocol 1: User engagement**

**Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.**

3.23 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

## Protocol 2: Release practices

**Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.**

- 3.24 The 2009 edition of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*, published in 2010, was not accessible from the National Statistics Publication Hub. As a result of this assessment, MMO statisticians have added this release, and the 2008 edition, to the Publication Hub. They have also used the Publication Hub to announce future release dates for *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*, *The UK Fishing Industry: Structure and Activity* and *The UK Fishing Industry: Landings*.
- 3.25 The MMO told the Assessment team that because *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* is a compendium publication, pre-release access is not required.

### **Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes**

**Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate *safeguards*.**

- 3.26 Defra has published a *Statement of Administrative Sources*<sup>38</sup> which covers the statistics produced by the MMO. The statement includes details of the EU and UK legislation which requires the collection of sea fisheries statistics, and states the primary purpose of the data.
- 3.27 The statistical team in the MMO manages the administrative systems required for the EU Common Fisheries Policy. The MMO told us that it had worked with the devolved administrations to establish common UK data systems to maximise the value of the data at the UK level for operational purposes. The iFISH system is accessible by analysts in the MMO and Marine Scotland and allows summary information to be produced for the UK.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/national-statistics/adminsources/>

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the sea fisheries statistics published by MMO, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Consider means of engaging with a wider range of users, particularly those outside government and the fishing industry, on a more regular basis and ensure that information about these users and the uses they make of the statistics are fully documented. In doing so, we suggest that the MMO refer to the types of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief: <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> (para 3.2). |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Publish a single document outlining methods used, accessible both from MMO's website and from the release (para 3.10).  |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Present the information to meet Requirement 3 alongside the information needed to meet Requirement 2 (Para 3.11).   |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Enhance the commentary in <i>UK Sea Fisheries Statistics</i> to explain trends in the statistics, and ensure that the points detailed in annex 2 are addressed (para 3.21).   |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Review the content and format of the weekly and monthly spreadsheets to improve ease of use (para 3.22).  |

## Annex 2: Standard for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 As part of the assessment process, we investigate the extent to which the *Standards for Statistical Releases*<sup>39</sup> are met. This annex presents the documentation of this exercise. The purpose of this is to assist producers of statistics to identify where they do and do not meet the Standards, and to provide guidance in meeting Requirements which relate to the Standards. The Standards mainly relate to Principle 8 of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, which focuses on the ‘frankness and accessibility’ of official statistics. An important aspect of this is the need for comprehensive and appropriate commentary, and ensuring that statistical releases are accessible to a wide range of users.
- A2.2 Whilst this annex presents additional detail about the general strengths and weaknesses of the relevant statistical releases, it does not constitute an exhaustive account of all such features of them. In implementing any Requirements of this Assessment report, we encourage producer bodies to apply the general principles underpinning these observations as widely as possible.

### Identify the statistics being released and their status

- A2.3 The title of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* describes the coverage and the time period to which the statistics relate.
- A2.4 The frequency of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* is clearly stated in the release and on MMO’s website. Where different sources are used, time periods are included in headings within the release. The date of the next release is clearly stated in the context of changes being introduced with the 2010 volume. The MMO states the day of release for the weekly spreadsheets on its website, along with the day of the month of the publication of the monthly spreadsheets.
- A2.5 The National Statistics headings and logos are included in the PDF version of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics*.
- A2.6 All releases clearly identify the originating department and include the contact details for the responsible statistician.
- A2.7 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* includes a summary of the main points at the beginning of the release.
- A2.8 As *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* is a compendium publication, it contains a range of previously published data along with some new data. It is not clear to the user which tables contain new data or which have been published previously.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

### **Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English**

A2.9 Chapter 1 of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* provides an overview of the UK fishing industry which highlights the main messages. Changes over the year and trends over longer time periods are commented on.

A2.10 The language used in the volume is straightforward and clear. A glossary is included to explain any technical terms used.

A2.11 The description of the statistics in *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* is good, containing information on trends and regional and international comparisons, although more explanation of trends would add value to the statistical release. There is good use of maps, tables and charts to illustrate the main messages.

### **Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound**

A2.12 The text is impartial and is evidence-based.

A2.13 The text includes useful and professionally sound comments on changes, patterns and trends. Percentage changes figures are mainly used to report changes over the period.

### **Include information about the context and likely uses**

A2.14 Appendix 2 of *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* contains details of the legislative context for collecting the figures. Full details are given of the main legislation used.

A2.15 Appendix 2 also includes some information about the reliability and completeness of the data. This includes some statements which give an incomplete picture, such as 'the reliability of the statistics is dependent upon the honesty of the documentation provided by fishermen'.

### **Include, or link to, appropriate metadata**

A2.16 Information on the various sources of data is included in Appendix 2. There is a separate link on the website to further information about the EU's data collection framework. Despite this, there is a lack of more general information on the website or in the annual volume itself about methods and quality of the data used in producing fish statistics. Although the text gives some information on changes to how the data are collected as a result of changes to the EU regulation, this information is not summarised anywhere.

A2.17 *UK Sea Fisheries Statistics* provides statistics on the UK fishing industry. Links to relevant departments in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and Eurostat are included in the release, although no specific comments are made about comparability of the figures.

- A2.18 As the data used to produce these statistics come from an administrative source whose operation is governed by EU regulation, changes to definitions and methodology are fairly common. Changes to the figures are included in a 'special note' published as part of the annual volume although no numerical comparisons are made to illustrate the extent of the changes.
- A2.19 Revised data are noted in the special note section of the publication. No prior warning is given to users about these revisions. Figures in the monthly landing spreadsheets are labelled as provisional although there is no mention of when the final figures will be published.

## Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from February to July 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Catherine Barham and Kat Pegler – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the MMO in February. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 10 March. The Assessment team subsequently met the MMO during April to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

### Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 13 responses from the user consultation and an additional 4 responses from suppliers. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Government departments	5
Industry associations	5
Other	3
Suppliers	4

A3.5 Overall, users were generally happy with the level of engagement they receive from the MMO and with the presentation and content of the releases. Some users commented that they would like more detailed statistics to be made available in the release. Some also commented that the presentation of the weekly spreadsheets could be improved.

A3.6 Three users raised concerns about the level of accuracy of the statistics with one user suggesting that tighter control of the data used to produce the statistics would help to improve this. Comments were also received regarding accessibility of the statistics and questioning whether sufficient staff were available to deal with the number of enquiries received.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document



