

# REPORTING A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

## 1. Core Information

<b>Title and link to statistical output</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Forecasts of Farm Business Income by type of farm in England – 2016/17 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income">https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income</a></li> <li>2. Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2015/16 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fly-tipping-in-england">Fly tipping in England - GOV.UK</a></li> </ol>
<b>Name of statistical producer</b>	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
<b>Name and contact details of person dealing with report</b>	Jane Simcock Jane.simcock@defra.gsi.gov.uk 02080266274
<b>Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income">https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income</a></li> <li>2. <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fly-tipping-in-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fly-tipping-in-england</a></li> </ol>
<b>Date of report</b>	9 March 2017

## 2. Circumstances of breach

<b>Relevant principle/protocol and practice</b>	Protocol 2 (Release Practices), Practice 4 “Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 09:30 on a weekday, to maintain consistency and to permit time for users to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours”
<b>Date of occurrence of breach</b>	1) 28 February 2017 and 2) 2 March 2017
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Forecasts of Farm Business Income by type of farm in England are published annually. It is a National Statistic. This latest release was due to be published at 09:30 on Tuesday 28 February 2017. The lead statistician checked at 09.30 and noticed only the 2015/16 statistics notice was available on the webpage. This was immediately raised with the on-site publication team who, again immediately, started to investigate the problem. The publication team raised the problem with the Government Digital Service (GDS). The issue was resolved by 10.00 am.</li> <li>2. The Fly-tipping statistics for England are published annually. These are official statistics. This latest release was due to be published at 09:30 on Thursday 2 March 2017. The lead statistician checked at 09.30 and noticed only the 2015/16 datasets were available on the webpage and not the statistics notice. The on-site publication team were immediately informed and started to investigate. The publication team raised the problem with GDS support, highlighting that this seemed similar to an issue with ‘Forecasts of Farm Business Income by type of farm in England – 2016/17’ statistics released on 28 February. The issue was resolved by 9.54am.</li> </ol> <p>Different Defra publication teams are responsible for each of these releases.</p> <p>GDS confirmed both releases were published on time. However a technical issue seems to have arisen which meant that, at least on some browsers, the statistics notices were hidden behind the previous years’ statistics notices.</p>	

The issue behind this problem was further explained by GDS Support in a report provided on 8 March. This explained that the 'Publication' document format that Defra used to publish these statistics had recently been migrated to the new publishing pipeline. As part of this process, Publications were inadvertently restricted from instructing the Publishing API to reduce the cache time to zero leading up to the scheduled publication time. This meant that when the statistics were published, users could not see the published statistics for 15 to 30 minutes, due to the page caching.

### **3. Impact of the breach**

- As the Head of Profession (HoP) was on leave when both breaches happened, the breaches were reported to a member of his team and the HoP was advised on his return on 6 March.
- The lead statistician for the farming statistics received calls from two key users - Farmers Weekly at 09.33 and National Farmers Union at 09.41, asking where the 2016/17 forecasts were. It was explained to them that they had been published but were apparently hidden behind the 2015/16 forecasts. A link was provided that took them directly to the notice.
- As there is a lot of media attention around Fly-tipping statistics Defra's Press Office received a lot of enquiries from the press asking where the statistics notice was. Press Office contacted the statistics team who immediately provided a direct link to the publication for them to pass on.
- A short statement about the breaches has been published on the website (see links in Section 2 above).
- At the time of writing this report, no further communications or complaints have been received for either breach.

### **4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence**

This issue looks to have been the result of a technical problem with the publishing system. No issues were reported relating to any other Defra statistics published during this period.

GDS Support responded to the Defra on-site publication team responsible for the Farm Business Income release at 17.32 on 28 February to confirm that the incident had been passed to triage to figure out why the publication was not visible on the website immediately. They contacted both publication teams again at 11.17 on 3 March confirming they had identified the issue that was preventing the cache time from being reduced for scheduled publications and had fixed it. The same issue had affected the publication of both statistical releases.

In their follow-up report provided on 8 March, which covers the problems with both the Fly-tipping and Farm Business Income releases, GDS Support explained what they have since done to fix the problem and also to mitigate against recurrence.

- All of the formats that allow scheduling have now been migrated and restrictions on them giving instructions to reduce cache time have been removed.
- Also the test coverage for this area of functionality has been extended and it will be ensured that scheduling and cache reduction are tested explicitly.
- GDS Support believe that the measures they have taken should mean that this particular issue will not occur again

The Defra statistics teams will maintain their usual vigilance in monitoring release times.