
Mary Gregory, Deputy Director for Regulation

Ian Knowles
Head of Profession for Statistics
Department for Transport
(by email)

19 December 2018

Dear Ian

STATISTICS ON PORT FREIGHT

As you are aware, we recently completed a compliance check review of the Department for Transport's (DfT) Port freight statistics against the Code of Practice for Statistics. I am pleased to confirm the continued designation of Port freight statistics as National Statistics.

We have concluded that the Port freight statistics are produced independently and offer useful insights to users. By quantifying the different freight cargo types, their weight and number, and the routes taken to and from UK ports, these statistics help to highlight the substantial contribution of the port freight sector to the UK economy.

We note the positive engagement of the statistics team and the improvements that it has made in response to our findings. These include:

- Presenting statistics on international freight upfront in the annual bulletin
- Publishing a new standalone Quality Report setting out the quality assurance processes undertaken and providing an accessible summary of the statistics main strengths and limitations
- Highlighting more clearly in the publication the value of the statistics and their coherence with other freight and trade sources
- Publishing a forward work plan in the new Quality Report, which sets out the development goals for the statistics in an accessible and transparent way
- Publishing better information about the team's user engagement approach, improvements made in response to users' requests, and how users will be informed about future developments
- Noting more clearly the limitations of the published arrivals data and being clear they are not National Statistics
- Ensuring the published pre-release access list is updated each time the statistics are published
- Improving the accessibility of DfT's broader suite of maritime statistics on GOV.UK

We also welcome the statisticians' development plans over the next two years, which include:

- Launching a new web-based data submission tool in spring 2019, with benefits foreseen for freight data quality, reduced supplier burden and timeliness of outputs

- Exploring whether more detailed data might be collected quarterly using the new tool to meet users' requests, while balancing potential increases in burden
- Gaining a fuller understanding of freight data quality informed by a detailed review of trade data sources held by other departments, and the data quality practice areas set out in the Authority's [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data Toolkit](#)
- Reviewing the annual bulletin to ensure relevant caveats are included in the commentary
- Combining DfT's port and domestic waterborne freight outputs to improve overall coherence
- Exploring further engagement with ports who have expressed interest in more direct contact
- Using data science techniques to validate and further develop freight arrivals statistics
- Developing a new dissemination tool for quarterly data

I encourage the team to keep users informed about its progress in realising these developments.

I am copying this letter to Matthew Tranter, Head of Maritime Statistics, Aviation and Maritime Analysis, and Nicola George, Lead Statistician.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mary Gregory
Deputy Director for Regulation