
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Kevin Williamson
Lead Statistician
Marine Management Organisation
(by email)

12 February 2019

Dear Kevin

STATISTICS ON UK SEA FISHERIES

As you are aware, we recently completed a compliance check of the Marine Management Organisation's [UK Sea Fisheries statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm the continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics, subject to your team addressing the areas highlighted below. Our Agriculture and Environment Domain Lead, Job de Roij, will continue to engage with your team on progress in the coming months.

The UK Sea Fisheries statistics provide an important overview of the UK fishing industry. Our review found many positive features that demonstrate the quality and value of the statistics. For instance:

- The statistics team engages closely with stakeholders and users, particularly those in the fishing industry. It regularly meets with large and small operators to discuss topics such as data quality. The statistics are promoted via a range of channels, including Twitter and specialist news media such as Fishing News.
- The team works closely with statisticians in the Scottish Government to include figures for Scotland, and coordinates the collection and processing of data from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This ensures that processes are aligned and that data quality remains high. You share best practice, for instance, for coding and the production of spreadsheets.
- The bulletin captures short- and long-term trends in the data. To aid user interpretation of the statistics, it offers reasons for changes, explains limitations of any comparisons made and describes how changes to the methods and/or legislation have affected trends in the data.
- To help users understand data quality issues, the bulletin contains information on bias, distortive effects and limitations in the data sources, such as the effects of illegal and unreported fishing. It also includes a revisions policy, which explains common causes of revisions and presents the scale of the revisions in an intuitive way.
- Methods and changes to the methods, such as the move from pen and paper to electronic data reporting for fishing activity, and their impacts on quality of the statistics, are well-explained. Recent improvements to the IT systems have streamlined administrative data processing and minimise potential for errors.

Our review also identified several areas for improvement, including enhancing the accessibility and the clarity and insight of the statistics.

We encourage you to move away from lengthy, descriptive commentary and instead focus on providing a clear and coherent narrative about the UK fishing industry. The commentary should provide insights for users and help them answer key questions about the industry. It would also be helpful for users if the bulletin included information on fisheries policies to enable them to put these statistics into context. However, we appreciate that fisheries is a politically sensitive topic and that the future policy and legal framework for the UK is unclear, and we recognise the challenges

associated with providing balanced commentary. We encourage your team to actively consider how it will disseminate information to users as future arrangements for the statistics are confirmed.

We wonder if a long report is the best way to disseminate these statistics. A short executive summary or overview, published alongside the bulletin, might be more effective at bringing out the main messages. It may also prove a useful platform for engaging with new, non-expert users; a better understanding of their needs will enhance the value of the statistics by ensuring that they are relevant and meaningful for a wide range of audiences. We also encourage you to explore options for shortening the main report. For example, consider: how much value the overview of the World Fishing Industry (Chapter 6) adds to a publication about UK Sea Fisheries; whether the assessment of the fish stock exploitation (Chapter 5) could be published as a separate document; and, whether all the charts and tables are needed in the main bulletin.

We recommend that you review the structure and update the content of the bulletin's gov.uk landing page, to ensure that all information about the statistics is easily accessible and remains relevant. For instance, we encourage you to review the 'uses of the statistics' document, which helpfully sets out the range of uses and users of the statistics, but was last updated in 2014. To be transparent about your user engagement activities, you should make your summary report of a 2015 user survey and the continuous user survey via Google Docs readily available on the landing page.

Lastly, it might be helpful to review how you communicate your quality assurance arrangements to users. Clearly mapping out the links between the different processes and stages would help users better understand how the survey and administrative data are collected and processed. You should ensure that you continue to review your quality assurance arrangements so that they respond to changes to data collection and IT systems and reflect the complexity of the data. As highlighted above, we know that you work closely with statisticians in the Scottish Government, and we encourage you to share best practice in this area. Our [Quality Assurance and Administrative Data](#) framework should provide a helpful starting point.

I am copying this letter to Ken Roy, Head of Profession for Statistics at Defra.

Yours sincerely



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