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**Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead**

Ian Lonsdale  
Head of Profession for Statistics  
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs  
(by email)

15 December 2021

Dear Ian

**Funding for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England**

As you are aware we recently reviewed the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) [Funding for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England](#) statistical publication against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Since the statistics were first published in response to discussions between yourselves and the UK Statistics Authority in 2014 it was intended that the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) should review them against the Code. Having done so we found many positives in our review particularly round the level of detail in some of the context and explanations:

- There is good collaboration across different parts of Defra to produce these statistics. Pulling in professional capabilities and knowledge from different teams to produce something of public value is a great example of effective collaboration.
- Methodological decisions are clearly stated and explained. For example, decisions around using a five-year average are clearly set out and the advantages of controlling for volatility are clearly justified. This adds to the value of the publication by helping ensure decisions are understood and the statistics are used correctly.
- There are some good examples of additional contextual information that will help inform users of these statistics. This can be seen in the descriptions of historical changes in funding that follow on from associated tables and in the use of hyperlinks to the glossary as well as linking out to all external sources used. We welcome that the team has agreed to add further context to the data tables by highlighting specific flood events.

We identified several areas where we consider that the publication could be improved to enhance its trustworthiness, quality and value:

- The pre-release list should be more clearly linked from the main publication or landing page. Knowing who has access to statistics prior to publications is important to public trust and transparency and making the information easy to find can enhance this.

- While much of the background and context in the report is very good there are some areas, particularly around internal data sources where it could be improved. For example, there is currently a simple statement that data are taken from accounting systems and historical management information – it would aid public understanding of the data and results if this could be expanded upon and, where any of these data are published, linked to. For example, there is a good explanation of what grant-in-aid funding is but not where data on this is taken from and whether the public can access this via Defra spending data.
- The publication provides information on the total budgeted and actual spend on flood and coastal erosion risk management but the total budgeted is provided only for the most recent year. This, combined with the lack of historical reports, means that data for previous years' budgets are lost to the public. It would aid both transparency and value if the historical budgeted amounts were to be included in the report alongside the related actual spends. This is especially important given the initial creation of this publication was due to public interest in the historical budgeting. Additionally, if the historical reports are archived then these should be clearly linked to from the publication page.
- More-recent casework received by OSR relating to these statistics was around regional breakdowns of spending. While we understand there may be practical limitations to producing a complete set of these, the team should continue to explore the feasibility of providing such breakdowns. If possible then this should be added to the publication and if not possible then given the high level of interest the team should share its findings and reasons for any limitation publicly potentially as a note in the publication.
- Publishing the data tables in a reusable format, for example ODS or Excel, may enable greater re-use, and the main publication itself could be made more accessible by publishing in html. The latest [GSS accessibility guidance](#), which was shared with the team, will provide useful pointers.

Thank you to all involved for their positive engagement during this review; we look forward to continuing to engage with you and the team and we hope that the above helps inform the development of this publication further. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further or if we can offer further assistance.

Yours sincerely



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