

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

Farmer Intentions Survey 2011/12 – England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farmer-intentions-survey>

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

Peter Helm, Head of Profession (HoP) for Statistics,

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2 May 2013

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 – Release 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”

Date of occurrence

2 May 2013

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

The Farmer Intentions Survey is an annual publication, first published in 2012. It is an official statistic. The release was due to be published at 09:30 on Thursday 2 May 2013. However, a technical issue meant that there was a 3.5 hour delay in publishing. The release was published by 13:00 the same day.

Reasons for breach

- The delay in publication was due to a problem with the new single government website www.gov.uk. Defra migrated to the single government website on 10 April 2013 and it is administered by the Government Digital Service (GDS).
- The delay was caused by a behind the scenes change made by GDS. The change resulted in a requirement for a mandatory field to be completed before new publications can be created within a publication series. This change was not flagged up to Defra.
- The statistician responsible for publishing the release became aware there may be a problem when trying to create the publication on the previous evening. This should have been a case of selecting the appropriate publication series from a drop down list, a procedure that worked when all the new content was loaded on the website prior to the 10 April launch. On this occasion an error was triggered 'document series is invalid'.
- This issue was immediately logged with the GDS online support system, the only method available to us, but no response had been received by the next morning.
- The statistician tried to log the call through the GDS online support system twice again the next morning before 09:30 and asked a colleague to also try but the problem persisted.
- The statistician also contacted the GDS team who worked with Defra on our transition to the single website. The GDS team tried to create the publication. When they received the same error message they asked their technical team to look into the problem urgently.
- It was not possible to publish a statement about the delay in publication on the website where the release should have been published due to the technical error that caused the breach.
- A statement was not published on the Publication Hub.
- A resolution and explanation of the problem was provided: some publications require an update of existing content on the website. In this instance a new publication had to be created. Due to the behind the scenes changes made by GDS, the document could not be created and the publication failed.
- The Farmer Intentions Survey release went live at 13:00. This issue had not affected the other publications that went out the same morning as they were updates of existing content.
- The Head of Profession was advised at the earliest opportunity, and subsequently notified the National Statisticians Office

3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)

No complaints about the delay have been received.

4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

We are now completing the mandatory field for all our publication series. This will prevent a recurrence of the problem.

The problem of having an online help but no telephone helpline service provided by GDS has been flagged up to Defra Internal Communications team and to GDS.

Statistics teams will be reminded of the need to publish an initial public statement about a breach on the website and the Publication Hub as soon as possible.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

No initial statements published. A link to where this breach report is published on the Statistics Authority website will be provided from GOV.UK at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics#corporate-procedures-and-standards>