

**Welsh Government Consultation:
'Proposals concerning the publication of Official Statistics'
Response from Natural Resources Wales**

Natural Resources Wales is the principle advisor to the Welsh Government on the environment, enabling the sustainable development of Wales' natural resources for the benefit of the people, the economy and wildlife. Our purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used, now and in the future.

As an evidence-based organisation, Natural Resources Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the Welsh Government's proposals on the publication of official statistics. Our response is based on our dual role both as a producer of Official Statistics (and other statistical data) and as a user of many of the environmental, social and economic statistics which are currently published by the Welsh Government.

Our response is provided below in relation to the questions outlined in the consultation document.

What impact will these proposals have on your work?

As one of the organisations named in the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2013, Natural Resources Wales welcomes the opportunity to work more closely with the Welsh Government on the production and publication of those Official Statistics for which we are responsible. As we develop our role in this area, we are keen to discuss how we can work alongside the Welsh Government, ensuring that we avoid both duplication and gaps in relation to environmental statistics¹. Further detail will be required as to what is meant by 'working together' and the Welsh Government providing a 'leadership role', ensuring that all parties have a good understanding of our respective roles and responsibilities. We would also welcome more detailed discussion regarding the support that could be offered by the Welsh Government as we develop our new role in relation to the publication of official statistics.

As part of this evolving discussion, we are keen to gain greater clarity as to which environment statistics we will be responsible for, and which will be covered by either

¹ With reference to the term 'environmental statistics', please note that this is as yet undefined and could potentially encompass a wide range of data sources from biodiversity to waste and associated public attitudes and behaviours.

the Welsh Government or other responsible bodies. A distinction should also be made between responsibility for the *production* of data and the *publication* of data, with clarity as to who is responsible for which aspects. We would also welcome a discussion with the Welsh Government and others as to the range of environmental statistics which are required, in order to build a clear shared vision of what data is needed and how the production and publication of this should be prioritised.

What do you use the statistics for?

Natural Resources Wales makes use of a wide range of statistics to inform our work, encompassing our advice, delivery, and monitoring and evaluation. We utilise a wide range of environmental statistics, along with other social and economic datasets such as those relating to health, population and the economy.

As we consider the future development of a State of Natural Resources Report (as proposed in the Welsh Government's Environment Bill), we will need to review a range of regularly published statistics to determine whether they could be a potential source of data and information. We will also be reviewing existing Welsh statistics (environmental, social and economic) to potentially help inform our Corporate Plan indicators.

Do you agree with the focus on making datasets available in an open format with more analytical - but less frequent - statistical releases?

Yes, in principle we are in agreement with this. It is in keeping with wider trends in relation to the publication of statistics, such as the direction that is being taken by the ONS and the GSS more generally.

However, further consideration should be given to the 'accessibility' of available datasets, particularly by 'non-expert' users. Consideration should be given to providing appropriate metadata and guidance so that all users can understand how the data can be interpreted, and whether there are any assumptions or constraints to take into account. We would welcome a review of user's needs and whether the current design of StatsWales supports the proposed changing pattern of publication and use.

We also support the proposal for more analytical statistical releases, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss some of these in more detail. In terms of frequency, we would recommend that this should be steered by the needs of users of individual statistical outputs.

Where we are proposing to stop or reduce the statistics that are available, are there dependencies between our statistics and your work

that we have not considered?

A key area of interest to Natural Resources Wales is the proposal to stop the publication of the State of the Environment Report. As this is closely linked to the development of a new State of Natural Resources Report (as proposed in the Environment Bill), we consider this to be an important area of discussion as we move forward. The scope, timing, and data collection responsibilities of this have as yet to be determined, and will impact on any proposed changes to the current publication of environmental statistics. Discussion should also encompass how and where the proposed State of Natural Resources Report should be published, and whether it will be available via StatsWales.

In the interim, cessation of the State of the Environment report could lead to an increase in individual requests for data on some of these topics, and managing these requests with current resources is an area of concern. We are also concerned that proposals to stop the State of the Environment will result in updated data not being published, with the potential implication of people using the out-of-date statistics which are available on StatsWales. We would be keen to discuss the opportunity to publish some of our data on StatsWales, and to provide links to some of our related publications, for example those related to the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey.

With regard to changes to the publication of certain compendia publications, we have some concerns about the proposal to stop the production of the Local Area Summary Statistics. As we move toward the development of Natural Resource Planning as our future approach to managing the environment, the need to take account of economic and social data means that the provision of these statistics in an integrated document at the local authority level will be important source of information.

In terms of stopping the publication of Fly Tipping release as official statistics whilst continuing its availability as underlying data, we would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this proposal with you in more detail, in particular regarding how this data will be provided to the Welsh government in the future.

Similarly, as users of agriculture statistics, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss the detail of any changes to the production of other compendia publications on this topic.

We are also users of the greenhouse gas and air quality inventories. As we currently take this data from the Defra, DECC, and NAEI sites, we would support the proposal to no longer publish these on StatsWales.

With regards to the other changes, although it has been noted that some outputs could be stopped as the data is available from other UK or England / Wales sources, consideration should be given to accessibility of the Wales-only data. In some

instances, there could be value in providing the Wales-only data on StatsWales to make it more accessible to users without them having to search wider datasets for it.

Are there particular issues of timing that we should consider when planning for reducing the frequency of statistics?

In general, we consider that the frequency of statistical outputs should be considered on an individual basis, and determined by users needs. Consideration should also be given to aligning the publication of Wales' indicator data with that of UK equivalents so that the Welsh data is available concurrently.

With regards to the frequency of environmental statistics, this should take into account the timescale of the proposed State of Natural Resources report, which is currently being considered on a 5 year reporting schedule.

Yours sincerely



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