

Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE): compliance with the Statistics & Registration Services Act 2007

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 brought all 'Official Statistics' under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. The purpose of the Act is to improve public trust and confidence in official statistics by increasing transparency and independence in the way they are produced.

The Act directly led to the creation of a Code of Practice for official statistics. This contains eight principles, and a statement of associated practices. The Act also created the Pre-Release Access (PRA) order for official statistics. This drastically limits the circulation of official statistics prior to release.

This document explains some of the ways Natural England complies with the principles of the Code of Practice, and the PRA order. It is by no means exhaustive, but gives an indication of the efforts made to comply to date.

The Code of Practice

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The MENE survey started life with a scoping study in 2007. This identified the most appropriate way of measuring engagement with the natural environment by the English adult population. The scoping exercise involved extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including discussion on the types of statistical outputs the survey should produce.

To accompany the second annual report, Natural England has produced a user engagement survey which seeks to improve the statistical service provided to MENE data users.

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity & Principle 3: Integrity

The official statistics are issued impartially, separate from any other statement or comment about the figures. Furthermore, Natural England publishes no statement or comment prior to publication.

In addition to the Annual Report and Technical Summary, Natural England has produced an interactive on-line data viewer which allows users to undertake their own analysis of the data. In addition, Natural England provides the raw data and metadata for non-commercial use on request.

The publication of the statistics was announced on the Natural England website four weeks in advance. From July 2011 onwards, Natural England will publish monthly results to better comply with the need to publish statistics as soon as they are deemed ready.

All statistical reports are released on the Internet with no charge to the user. Any errors and revisions are announced on the Natural England website.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

The methods used in the MENE survey were objectively chosen and based on sound statistical methods. Wherever possible the MENE survey uses standard practices.

A Technical Report has also been published which contains detailed descriptions of the survey design, sampling approach and data analysis.

The MENE survey and reports has been subject to a rigorous period of quality assurance and scrutiny by the survey contractors, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and Defra.

Principle 5: Confidentiality

At the outset of the survey, respondents are given a leaflet by the interviewer explaining how the personal information collected from them is stored, used, and how they can access it. Personal information is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Natural England protects the security of its statistical data and ensures that no statistics or analysis will identify an individual.

Principle 6: Proportionate burden & Principle 7: Resources

The information provided by the MENE survey gives local people, local government and other organisations the ability to address local issues, confident in the knowledge that they are making decisions based on sound evidence. The scoping study determined that the chosen approach would deliver the best value for money compared to other methodologies.

Natural England has sought to balance quality against cost. Expenditure on the survey has been monitored against cost over time.

Pre-release Access Order

Natural England follows the strict rules governing pre-release access to official statistics as set-out below.

- The statistics are published on a pre-announced date, as soon as they are ready.
- Access to the statistics prior to publication is limited to those with an operational need, i.e. people involved in the production and dissemination of the statistics.
- Those with access for operational purposes are bound not to disclose the value of any statistics, or indicate size or trend.
- The official statistics are issued impartially, separate from any other statement or comment about the figures.

- To date, a small number of individuals have been granted pre-release access - limited to a strict maximum of 24 hours in advance of publication. A list containing the names of those individuals is available to view on the Natural England website.