

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Tuberculosis in Cattle (Bovine TB)

*(produced by the Department for Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality.

Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the set of statistics reported in *Incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) in Cattle in Great Britain*⁴ (Bovine TB), produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- 1.1.2 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality⁵. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *Incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) in Cattle in Great Britain* are designated as National Statistics, subject to Defra implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by February 2013.
- 1.2.2 Defra has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The statistics covered by this report are based on data from the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency’s (AHVLA) database, known as Sam⁶. Sam captures detailed data about every TB test performed by Government

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/landuselivestock/cattletb/>

⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

⁶ Sam is the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency’s database that captures detailed data about every TB test performed by Government Veterinarians or by Official Veterinarians in Great Britain

Veterinarians⁷ (GVs) or by Official Veterinarians⁸ (OVs) in Great Britain, so the data underpinning the statistics for England, Wales and Scotland are comparable and the cost of producing *Bovine TB* is low.

- 1.3.2 When *Bovine TB* was reinstated in April 2012, following a suspension of four months, Defra published helpful information for users explaining and quantifying the revisions to the statistics. Defra is pursuing a range of further improvements to the bovine TB statistics, working with government users and the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency. However, Defra does not engage with users outside government about its plans for developments to the statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that Defra could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Take steps to engage with the wider user community outside government, document the use made of the bovine TB statistics and publish information about users' experiences of the statistics (para 3.1).
Requirement 2	Pre-announce the reinstatement of the county tables and publish a timetable of releases for 12 months ahead (para 3.2).
Requirement 3	Confirm that future changes to methods or classifications will be announced in advance of the release of <i>Bovine TB</i> , and consult users outside the TB Statistics Working Group on plans for significant change (para 3.3).
Requirement 4	Provide more information about the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that the revised statistics are released (para 3.4).
Requirement 5	Review the classification of regions and counties used in the bovine TB statistics against users' requirements, and publish the outcome (para 3.5).

⁷ A Government Veterinarian is employed directly by government to carry out bovine TB testing

⁸ Official Veterinarian is the term used to describe private practice veterinarians who perform work on behalf of an EU member state

Requirement 6	Publish more information about the methods used to produce the bovine TB statistics, and their quality, taking into account the use of the statistics. Present this information using language that is accessible to a non-technical audience (para 3.6).
Requirement 7	Signpost similar statistics for Northern Ireland in the releases (para 3.7).
Requirement 8	Improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.9).
Requirement 9	Disseminate the bovine TB statistics in forms that enable and encourage analysis and re-use (para 3.10).
Requirement 10	<p>a) provide details in the Statement of Administrative Sources about the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used to produce the bovine TB statistics; and</p> <p>b) investigate how the statistics team can ensure that statistical requirements are considered when changes to Sam are designed and implemented (para 3.11).</p>

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) in Cattle in Great Britain (Bovine TB)* is a monthly release that presents statistics about bovine tuberculosis (TB), an infectious disease caused by a bacterium which can also infect and cause TB in badgers, deer, goats, pigs and other mammals. Statistics for Northern Ireland⁹ are published separately by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.
- 2.2 *Bovine TB* presents analysis of: the number of herds tested during the reference period; the number of cattle tested; the number and percentage of herds where the status 'Officially TB Free'¹⁰ (OTF) was withdrawn; and the numbers of cattle compulsorily slaughtered. Defra publishes *Bovine TB* approximately ten weeks after the end of the period to which the statistics relate.
- 2.3 Defra has published bovine TB statistics since 1996, the first year that administrative records were computerised. Since October 2010, Defra statisticians have published supplementary tables¹¹ that present the statistics from *Bovine TB* broken down by region and county. Similar statistics were previously published by Defra staff responsible for monitoring bovine TB policy but Defra told us that responsibility was transferred to the statisticians to support the production of coherent GB, regional and county statistics from a single source. The regional statistics are published on the same day as *Bovine TB*. In December 2011, Defra suspended the release of the county tables due to an upgrade to the IT program used to manage these statistics. Defra statisticians told us that when the system is operational these statistics will again be released on the same day as *Bovine TB*.
- 2.4 *Bovine TB* is produced using data from a system for administering TB testing in GB¹² (Sam) that is managed by AHVLA, an agency of Defra. Sam replaced a previous system (VetNet) in Autumn 2011. Official Veterinarians (OVs) or Government Veterinarians (GVs) performing TB testing send the data to AHVLA via a secure system. The data are then validated automatically and uploaded to Sam. AHVLA provides training and guidance for OVs and GV's on the use of Sam, together with a support desk. Defra statisticians have direct access to Sam to extract data to produce *Bovine TB* and the supplementary tables.
- 2.5 Defra delayed the release of *Bovine TB* between December 2011 and March 2012 in order to manage the transition from VetNet to Sam and to allow time to assure the quality of the data. Defra released these statistics¹³ on 3 April 2012, together with a revised time series back to 1996 and information about the nature and extent of revisions.

⁹ <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/dard-statistics/animal-disease-statistics.htm>

¹⁰ Officially TB Free (OTF) status applies to herds that are not subject to any movement restrictions due to TB

¹¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/landuselivestock/cattletb/regional/>

¹² <http://animalhealth.defra.gov.uk/about/official-vets/access-to-sam/what-is-sam.htm>

¹³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-tb-statsnotice-120403.pdf>

- 2.6 *Bovine TB* is used by Defra to monitor a Business Plan Quarterly Data Summary¹⁴ impact indicator about OTF cattle herds¹⁵. This indicator is presented alongside an input indicator about the total cost to government of bovine TB control in animals in England. The management of bovine TB is a devolved matter and policy differs across the countries of the UK, but the Welsh and Scottish Governments also use these statistics to inform and monitor policy. Article 1(a) of European Commission Decision 2008/425/EC¹⁶ requires that Member States seeking a financial contribution from the Community for national programmes for the eradication, control and monitoring of certain animal diseases, including bovine TB, must submit an application. Council Decision 90/424/EEC¹⁷ sets out the reporting requirements. England, Wales and Scotland submit annual plans and retrospective financial claims to the European Commission that must include information about numbers of: herds and cattle tested; herd restrictions; and animal slaughters. This information is based on Defra's bovine TB statistics. The farming and veterinary communities use the statistics to understand the latest disease picture and to monitor trends at local, regional and GB level.
- 2.7 Defra estimates that the total annual cost of producing the bovine TB statistics is approximately £25,000.

¹⁴ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/about/what/quarterly-data/>

¹⁵ <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/defra-business-plan-quarterly-data-summary>

¹⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32008D0425:EN:NOT>

¹⁷ [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=31990D0424&model=guichett)

[lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=31990D0424&model=guichett](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=31990D0424&model=guichett)

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The statistics team in Defra engages with some government users, AHVLA and bovine TB veterinary experts through its quarterly TB Statistics Working Group meeting. This group has over 20 members and was established to take forward developments in the bovine TB statistics. The statistics team told us that it has some knowledge about the potential wider user community for these statistics, but currently the only contact with users outside government is in response to queries received through the dedicated email address advertised in *Bovine TB* and on Defra's website. Defra has not documented the use made of the statistics or published any information about users' experiences. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should take steps to engage with the wider user community outside government, document the use made of the bovine TB statistics and publish information about users' experiences of the statistics¹⁸ (Requirement 1). We suggest that in meeting this requirement Defra should refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*¹⁹ when documenting use. We also suggest that Defra publish information about the TB Statistics Working Group, including its membership, terms of reference and minutes of meetings.
- 3.2 Defra publishes the bovine TB statistics for GB and the regions at the same time. The monthly publication timetable is pre-announced 12 months in advance. In December 2011, Defra suspended the publication of the county tables. Defra told us that the tables were not reinstated with the other bovine TB statistics in April 2012 as an upgrade is needed to the IT program used to produce them. Defra told us that it expects to resolve this issue before the end of 2012 and that these tables will then be published every month with the GB and regional statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should pre-announce the reinstatement of the county tables and publish a timetable of releases for 12 months ahead²⁰ (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 Defra told us that it is carrying out a systematic review of the bovine TB statistics, including:
- a review of several aspects of the methodology – for example, whether the calculation of the incidence rate is still appropriate for use in the light of changes to the TB testing programme in recent years;
 - providing users with an extended monthly time series; and
 - improving the timeliness of publication.

Defra is working closely with the TB Statistics Working Group on this review but has shared little information with the wider user community. It would be appropriate to formally consult on some of these changes, which are significant and will affect all users of the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should confirm that future changes to methods or classifications will be announced in advance of the release of *Bovine TB*, and

¹⁸ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1, 2 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

²⁰ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 4, Principle 2, Practice 4 and Protocol 2, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

consult users outside the TB Statistics Working Group on plans for significant change²¹ (Requirement 3).

- 3.4 In April 2012, following the suspension of *Bovine TB* during the transition to the new administrative data source (Sam), Defra published some very helpful information for users about the nature and extent of the resulting revisions to the statistics²². However, Defra does not routinely publish information about the nature and extent of revisions to these statistics, which are open to revision for three years. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should provide more information about the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that the revised statistics are released²³ (Requirement 4).
- 3.5 *Bovine TB* does not explain the geographic classifications used to produce the regional and county statistics. As part of this assessment, users with an interest in statistics for Wales told us that reasons for the choice of classifications is not clear and that the county breakdown presented for Wales is not appropriate for their use. Defra told us that the regions and counties used to classify the records on Sam are determined by AHVLA but that the coding may offer some analytical flexibility which could be explored. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should review the classification of regions and counties used in the bovine TB statistics against users' requirements, and publish the outcome²⁴ (Requirement 5).
- 3.6 *Bovine TB* includes some information about the source of the statistics and how key measures and trends are calculated. The release also cautions users about some factors which may affect the interpretation of the statistics – for example, the disruption to TB testing during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001²⁵. However, concepts and definitions are not explained and the release contains technical language which the Assessment team found hard to understand. Defra does not explain the methods it uses to produce the statistics beyond the data collection process, or provide sufficient information about their quality. For example, Defra is reviewing the 'incidence rate' to establish whether the calculation is still appropriate for use following changes to the TB testing regime, but the release does not provide any information about how decisions about the frequency and targeting of tests might influence the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should publish more information about the methods used to produce the bovine TB statistics, and their quality, taking into account the use of the statistics. Defra should present this information using language that is accessible to a non-technical audience²⁶ (Requirement 6). We suggest that in meeting this requirement Defra should publish information about the quality assurance procedures for the bovine TB statistics.
- 3.7 *Bovine TB* presents statistics for GB. Defra does not publish any information about the availability of related statistics in Northern Ireland, or internationally, and told us that it has not explored the extent to which the GB statistics can be

²¹ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 4 and Protocol 1, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

²² See footnote 11

²³ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁵ A total of 2,030 cases of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) were confirmed in GB between February and September 2001 (Defra), one of the largest outbreaks in history

²⁶ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

compared with statistics for other countries. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should signpost similar statistics for Northern Ireland in the releases²⁷ (Requirement 7). We suggest that Defra work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland to identify and document differences in the methods used to produce bovine TB statistics.

3.8 A range of 'other TB statistics' is published on Defra's website²⁸ – for example, AHVLA produces quarterly statistics about TB pre-movement testing monitoring for England and Wales. Defra told us that these are not official statistics but said that the TB Statistics Working Group will compile a register during 2012 of all statistics published about bovine TB in GB. The group will collect information about who produces the statistics, how they are used and whether the non-official status of these statistics is appropriate. We suggest that Defra publish the outcomes of its review of the range of bovine TB statistics available in GB.

3.9 *Bovine TB* includes only some key points about the GB statistics and does not present any commentary about the regional and county statistics. As part of this assessment, one user told us that they would welcome a narrative that draws together the GB, regional and county statistics; others expressed interest in examining local trends within the wider GB context. The releases contain no maps to illustrate the geographic spread of bovine TB and TB testing and it is not clear from the commentary whether the statistics are appropriate for use as a measure of the extent of bovine TB or (simply) to monitor the TB testing programme. During the course of this assessment, Defra acknowledged that improvements to the commentary are needed, most notably to include information to help users understand how these statistics are used and to place them within a broader operational context. Defra told us that the statistics team will be reviewing the commentary, and the technical language used in the release, with the TB Statistics Working Group, with a view to making improvements during the second half of 2012. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics²⁹ (Requirement 8). We suggest that in meeting this requirement Defra should consider the points detailed in annex 2.

3.10 The latest bovine TB statistics are accessible via a single page on Defra's website³⁰. However, during the course of this assessment users identified a range of issues that restrict the use of the statistics:

- county statistics are published only in PDF format;
- complete monthly time series are not presented in one place;
- regional cumulative 'year to date' statistics are unhelpful – users would like monthly statistics; and
- previously published statistics are difficult to locate.

Defra told us that it expects to be able to resolve all of these issues during 2012. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should

²⁷ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁸ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/landuselivestock/cattletb/other/>

²⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/landuselivestock/cattletb/>

disseminate the bovine TB statistics in forms that enable and encourage analysis and re-use³¹ (Requirement 9).

- 3.11 The statistics team extracts all the data used to produce the bovine statistics directly from Sam³², which is administered by AHVLA. Defra has published a Statement of Administrative Sources³³ which includes information about Sam. The Statement does not provide any information about how the quality of the data in the administrative systems is audited in the light of their statistical use, but says that a full statement is pending. The Assessment team considered that, given the four month suspension of *Bovine TB* while Defra and AHVLA addressed quality concerns with Sam identified by the statistics team, it is important that audit arrangements are formalised and transparent. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Defra should a) provide details in the Statement of Administrative Sources about the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used to produce the bovine TB statistics; and b) investigate how the statistics team can ensure that statistical requirements are considered when changes to Sam are designed and implemented³⁴ (Requirement 10).
- 3.12 During this Assessment, Defra requested an exemption from Protocol 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*. Defra will not publish the contact details of the responsible statistician in *Bovine TB*, for security reasons. The Authority has confirmed³⁵ that in these specific circumstances it is acceptable, instead, to provide the email address of the team.

³¹ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 4 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

³² See footnote 8

³³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/national-statistics/adminsources/>

³⁴ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/exemption-request---defra---240912.html>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to Defra's bovine TB statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

Suggestion 1	Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> when documenting use (para 3.1).
Suggestion 2	Publish information about the TB Statistics Working Group, including its membership, terms of reference and minutes of meetings (para 3.1).
Suggestion 3	Publish information about the quality assurance procedures for the bovine TB statistics (para 3.6).
Suggestion 4	Work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland to identify and document differences in the methods used to produce bovine TB statistics (para 3.7).
Suggestion 5	Publish the outcomes of Defra's review of the range of bovine TB statistics available in GB (para 3.8).
Suggestion 6	Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.9).

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*³⁶. While this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with Defra's bovine TB Statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 The title of *Bovine TB* describes the coverage of the release but the time period to which the statistics relate, and their frequency, is made clear only within the release itself. Defra does not explain clearly the time period covered by the supplementary tables or how often the tables are updated. For example, *Regional Statistics for 2012*³⁷ presents statistics for the 'year to date' and Defra has not announced the date of the next planned update for the county statistics.
- A2.4 Defra uses appropriate headings and logos for a National Statistics product in *Bovine TB* and contact details are given for the Statistical Head of Profession. However, the supplementary tables do not include the National Statistics logo.

Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English

- A2.5 *Bovine TB* includes a summary at the start which outlines the source of the statistics, explains the provisional nature of the latest statistics, and presents the key points. However, the content and structure of the release are not described, so it is not clear what the headline incidence rate represents or how it should be interpreted. The commentary only discusses the GB statistics and is limited to some key points. Two helpful charts are presented to help users interpret trends in the incidence of TB in herds in GB but the release would benefit from maps, for example to show where tests were carried out and where new incidents were confirmed. The release does not include contextual information, for example about the total numbers of herds and cattle in GB and the percentage tested.
- A2.6 *Bovine TB* uses technical terms which should be avoided, or explained when they are first used, and the release would benefit from the inclusion of a glossary of terms. However, Defra explains in the release that the terminology is in line with that used in EU regulations and provides a link to information about recent changes to this terminology.

³⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

³⁷ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-tb-regional2012-120718.xls>

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

A2.7 The text used in the releases is impartial and evidence based.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.8 The release provides a link to information about TB in cattle and the testing programme. However, the release does not include any information about the policy and operational context of the statistics, or about how the statistics are used, and does not discuss their quality and reliability in relation to the range of potential uses.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.9 The release includes some information about the source of the statistics and how the incidence rate and trend are calculated. The release also cautions users about some factors which may affect their interpretation of the statistics, such as seasonality. However the release contains little information about the methods that Defra uses to produce the statistics.

A2.10 The release does not include any links to comparative statistics for Northern Ireland or present any international comparisons.

A2.11 At the time of the transition from VetNet to Sam, a number of methodological improvements were implemented and Defra published an additional release in April 2012 that detailed the resulting revisions to the statistics. However, whilst Defra clearly states that the statistics are subject to revision, the nature and extent of routine revisions are not presented as standard in the monthly releases.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from May to September 2012.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Gary Wainman, Emily Gleeson and Donna Livesey – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of Defra in May. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 6 July. The Assessment team subsequently met Defra during July to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 4 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Devolved administrations	2
Professional body	1
Independent union	1

A3.5 Users confirmed the importance of the bovine TB statistics, particularly the regional and county statistics, and were positive about their engagement with the producer team. Two users said that they had attended group meetings with Defra aimed at improving the statistics. Points raised included:

- Users said that they would welcome improved commentary, which encompasses the national and regional statistics, to provide a coherent story and operational context;
- Accessibility and presentation of the statistics could be improved by using Excel spreadsheets and maps and presenting time series in a way that allows trends to be easily monitored;
- Two users said that the classification of regions and counties used is not appropriate for their use, and that they would welcome more local detail;
- More information would be welcomed about definitions, the methodology used to produce the statistics, and the likelihood of any revisions; and
- Users also expressed interest in more timely statistics and one user stressed the importance of continuity of supply, following recent problems.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

