



---

**NATIONAL STATISTICS  
AGRICULTURE, FISHING AND FORESTRY THEME WORKING GROUP  
MINUTES OF MEETING 14 NOVEMBER 2001**

---

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT**

Peter Helm	DEFRA (Chair)	Simon Gillam	FC
Stuart Neil	NAW	Stuart Platt	DEFRA

**ALSO PRESENT**

Katie Medcalf	NAW (item 9)	Chris Hughes	NIDARD
---------------	--------------	--------------	--------

**SECRETARIAT**

David Canham	ONS	Graham Collett	DEFRA
--------------	-----	----------------	-------

**CIRCULATION**

All participants and committee members

Absent members

Sheila Magee	NIDARD	Venetia Radmore	SEERAD
--------------	--------	-----------------	--------

*Others for information:*

David Thompson	DEFRA		
John Custance	DTLR	Mike Day	FSA
Bill Hall	DEFRA	Jim Holding	DEFRA
David Lee	DEFRA	Peter McGill	SEERAD
Bruce Oelman	DTLR	Jonathan Price	NAW
Roger Price	DEFRA	Ian Webb	DEFRA

**Apologies and Announcements**

**Action:**

Apologies were received from Venetia Radmore of SEERAD and from Sheila Magee of NIDARD - replaced by Chris Hughes.

The Chair thanked Stuart Neil and NAW colleagues for hosting the meeting.

## 1. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

- a) The minutes of the July 2001 meeting were accepted as a true record. The following matters arising and actions from the last meeting were discussed.
- b) It was agreed that the ONS Secretary should arrange for previous Theme Working Group (TWG) minutes and appropriate papers to be placed on the National Statistics website as soon as possible, without reference to progress on other themes. **DC**
- c) The TWG was reminded to share information on clearing survey control reports with Ministers. **All**
- d) It was agreed that the next TWG meeting in March should include a presentation by DEFRA on using electronic forms to collect survey data. It was reported that progress was being made on this issue though teething problems remained. Simon Gillam registered Forestry Commission interest in progress on this and would seek advice from Ray Wilson in DEFRA. **SG**
- e) It was reported that TWG members had discussed environmental accounts for agriculture with both the Natural and Built Environment TWG and with ONS staff, and also there had been progress on this issue in Scotland.
- f) It was reported that more work was required on considering a UK wide scope for an Agricultural Census quality review. **All**
- g) The ONS Secretary reported that there were as yet no definite criteria to define “market sensitive data”, although a possible definition might be “macro-economic data with the potential to influence the financial markets”. It was agreed that TWG members should further consider their own outputs’ market sensitivity in relation to the forthcoming Release Practices Protocol. If any department considered that any of their outputs might be sensitive criteria, they should make a case to this effect to the TWG. The TWG would be looking for a common approach across the UK. **All**
- h) The TWG discussed the possible expansion of National Statistics scope to include indicators of Sustainable Agriculture and Sustainable Forestry. Further consideration was required by both DEFRA and FC. **PH, SG**

## 2. National Statistics Work Programme 2002/03 to 2004/05 (Paper NSTWG(AFF)(2001)8)

- a) It was reported that various departments had issued the theme consultation document and feedback had been received. The ONS Secretary outlined the timetable for producing theme chapters and the whole NS work programme, and was actioned to circulate details to the TWG. The TWG discussed the advantages and protocol for issuing a draft theme chapter to departmental colleagues and consultees before the NS work programme was placed in the public domain. The ONS secretary was asked to seek and circulate central guidance on these points. **DC**  
**DC**
- b) The TWG discussed the feedback received, making the following key points and agreeing the following actions.

- c) The need for a comprehensive set of rural statistics had been stressed and the TWG agreed that it would attempt to lead on this issue in terms of National Statistics planning and that the Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry (AFF) chapter should reflect this. It was acknowledged that rural statistics was a relevant issue right across all National Statistics themes. **GC**
- d) The need for coherent theme data across the UK had been stressed and it was agreed that this should be covered in the chapter. **GC**
- e) It was noted that two of the “external influences and policy drivers” outlined in the draft theme chapter had been added as a result of consultation feedback and it was agreed that the chapter should make this clear. **GC**
- f) The ONS Secretary noted that the AFF TWG had achieved a good response to its consultation document and that it was evident that one of the reasons for this had been that different departments had issued the document directly to their key stakeholders, rather than relying on “central” DEFRA or ONS based consultation. The ONS Secretary would highlight this in the next common briefing note issued to all TWGs. **DC**
- g) The TWG discussed the draft theme chapter, and it was agreed that any further comments or gaps (with suitable drafting) should be notified to the editor by 24 November. The TWG also discussed the detailed annex to the chapter, making the following key points and agreeing actions.
- h) DEFRA proposed that the Farm Business Statistics quality review scheduled for 2002/03 should be delayed to 2003/04 in order to take account of the 2002/03 strategic review of the Agriculture Census and Food Statistics, and to link better with the scheduled 2003/04 review into Farm Accounts and Agriculture Income Prices. This was agreed by the TWG. (It was also noted and agreed that all reviews should be theme wide wherever possible).
- i) It was agreed that the Annex should give more emphasis to plans to develop rural statistics. **GC**
- j) NIDARD noted that the scheduled review into Horticulture Statistics would need to take into account planned developments in horticulture data in Northern Ireland.
- k) It was agreed that it would be necessary to hold a facilitated theme wide meeting on the strategic review of the Agriculture Census and Food Statistics. The DEFRA Secretary was actioned to arrange this. **GC**
- l) It was agreed that the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development should be included in the chapter as an external driver. Forestry Commission agreed to draft suitable text. **SG**
- m) Again any further comments or gaps in the Annex should be notified to Graham Collett by November 24. **All**

### **3. National Statistics Work Programme 2001/02: progress against plans (paper NSTWG(AFF)(2001)9)**

- a) The DEFRA Secretary presented the progress report which was based on completed progress proformas, concentrating on highlights and problems.
- b) Progress on the quality reviews of Cereals Statistics and Labour Statistics had been affected by difficulties caused by diverting resources to foot and mouth disease work. Nevertheless the aim was to complete both reviews by end March 2002.
- c) There had been practical problems with plans to make increased use of administrative data.
- d) It was noted that progress on developing a new Farm Survey System for England and Wales was critical to a number of endeavours.
- e) It was noted that plans for using electronic forms to collect survey data and to improve websites were crucial for data suppliers and users respectively.
- f) It was agreed that the DEFRA Secretary should pay particular attention to ensure that progress on the above issues was recorded and made available to the TWG.

GC

### **4(i). AFF theme quality reviews: Forestry Statistics (paper NSTWG(AFF)(2001)10)**

- a) Simon Gillam of the Forestry Commission presented this paper. The following points were made.
- b) Resource for this review would now be available with the appointment of a new FC Statistician in January 2002. If it were agreed that the scope of the review would cover Northern Ireland (whose forestry statistics are not FC's responsibility), then the Review Project Board would include NI representation. The FC was seeking appropriate external representation and methodological input.
- c) The review scope would focus on how those forestry statistics, which had recently been brought into National Statistics (NS) scope, complied with NS codes and practices. It was stressed that the additional items mentioned would involve an initial assessment only. The TWG discussed the review scope, agreeing that it would have to bear in mind the available resources.
- d) The ONS Secretary noted that he would be responsible for providing central support for this review and for other future theme reviews.

### **4ii. AFF theme reviews: progress on current / planned reviews**

- a) This item had mainly been covered by agenda items 2 and 3 above. However it was noted that users were being currently consulted on the Horticulture Statistics review, and further noted that the very diverse nature of this topic, and the great variance between the UK countries,

meant that it might not be possible to achieve a UK theme wide review.

## **5. Rural Statistics**

- a) This topic had also been covered in agenda item 2 above. Peter Helm updated the TWG with a progress report, making the following points.
- b) There was considerable Ministerial interest in the rural statistics agenda in DEFRA. The Neighbourhood Statistics initiative, led by ONS but mirrored by similar developments in devolved administrations, would be crucial for creating and disseminating the required data. It was noted that definitions of rural differed across the UK. DEFRA had appointed a consultant to take this work forward and the focus was currently on working with ONS to filling information gaps by developing indicators which can be measured at a detailed local level.
- c) It was agreed that the extent of rural statistics was wider than the coverage of the AFF theme, but it was stated that DEFRA was expecting to play a co-ordinating role. The similar role played by the then DETR in co-ordinating the Sustainable Development indicators was referred to as a model.
- d) The TWG discussed further, making the following points.
- e) It would be necessary to take into account the work done by the Countryside Agency on “The State of the Countryside” and to avoid duplication with this and other initiatives.
- f) It was noted that rural statistics should incorporate a forestry dimension to enhance data on the commercial and recreational use of land. It was noted that agriculture was not the most important aspect of the rural economy and that this should be fully reflected in the data.
- g) There were differences between administrations in the extent to which it was considered possible to use administrative data to fill gaps. Northern Ireland DARD stated that they had had positive experiences of using admin data for rural areas and expressed the view that efforts should be made in this direction. There were also concerns about the accuracy and reliability of data for small areas where sample survey data were used.
- h) The DEFRA and ONS Secretaries were asked to liaise to lobby for appropriate material on rural statistics to be included in the Work Programme introductory chapters. The TWG were urged to continue to share thoughts and developments on this topic.

**GC, DC**

**All**

## **6. Theme web developments**

- a) Stuart Platt reported on this topic, making the following points.
- b) More links between departmental websites were required to help meet the demand for UK data comparisons. More thought needs to be given to developing web based outputs (as opposed to purely making available paper based data on the web). DEFRA were developing the statistical part of their website with the view to making it easier for users to search and find what they require and for staff to provide and maintain data.
- c) Other departments reported on developments making the following points.
- d) The Forestry Commission website was now database driven which allowed

it to be more statistics driven. Their current priority is to make sure that their publications are available on the web but their aim is to make available more statistics on the web by topic and by country.

- e) The National Assembly for Wales noted that all their statistical publications were available on the web but they endorsed the DEFRA point of more links to other sites being required. Northern Ireland DARD echoed this view.
- f) The ONS Secretary reported on some developments within ONS and with the National Statistics website. The medium to long term nature of some of these developments caused concern to some members of the AFF TWG and David Canham was asked to feed this view back to ONS, noting that technological and web progress was very fast moving, causing greater user expectation. **DC**
- g) Peter Helm stated that TWG members needed to lead on ensuring proper links between departmental sites. Further to this Graham Collett asked for departmental contacts to help him improve the AFF theme content on the National Statistics website. Contact names were provided at the meeting. **All**

#### **7. Any other business and Date of next meeting**

- a) The next meeting would be held at the DEFRA office in York in March 2002. The DEFRA and ONS Secretariat to liaise and arrange. Presentations on the use of e-forms and website developments were proposed. **GC, DC**
- b) The Chair thanked the TWG for their contributions.

#### **8. Presentation on Wales Agriculture GIS**

- a) Katie Medcalf from the National Assembly for Wales gave a presentation on this topic. Stuart Neil provided some background to this development, noting that the intention was to make available a range of different data at different geographical levels in order to create an overall statistical picture.
- b) The presentation of rural and agricultural data at a visual level for a variety of geographies had proved to be very helpful in briefing policy colleagues and Ministers, and in aiding decision making.
- c) Katie demonstrated the different facilities and features of the system. Katie and Stuart Neil both commented on data weaknesses and warned against assumptions being made about data quality and people ignoring statistician's warnings in this respect.
- d) Peter and the Group discussed the issues arising from the presentation and thanked Katie and Stuart for the presentation.

**David Canham**  
**ONS Secretary**  
**November 2001**