

Survey Review: UK Private Sector Softwood Removals Survey

Introduction

Summary reviews are undertaken each year for our regular surveys. These consist of:

- Establishing the continuing need for the survey;
- Reviewing the questionnaire to be used; and
- Updating the distribution list of businesses to be approached.

A programme of full reviews of annual surveys has been introduced from 2012, with each survey to be reviewed every 5 years. These are more detailed than the summary reviews. In 2015, the UK private sector softwood removals survey (removals survey) has been reviewed, and the findings are summarised here.

There is a parallel process for methodology and outputs reviews.

Softwood removals can be divided into two categories; (1) Industrial roundwood removals; the wood removed (volume of roundwood over bark) for production of goods and services other than energy production (woodfuel). (2) Woodfuel removals; the wood removed for energy production purposes, regardless whether for industrial, commercial or domestic use.

The removals survey is one of a series of annual surveys and data requests used to produce statistics on the UK timber industry. The survey is run by the Forestry Commission (in association with the Forest Service in Northern Ireland) to collect data from harvesting companies in the UK, in order to monitor trends in softwood removal from private sector woodland.

The removals survey requests data annually from around 40 companies in the UK that harvest softwood from private sector woodland. It asks for data relating to the most recent calendar year (the current year) and the previous year on the quantity of softwood harvested, the quantity harvested under plant health legislation, the quantity harvested from certified woodlands and the quantity sold to bioenergy.

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The list of harvesting companies covered by the survey is maintained by the Forestry Commission and is updated regularly, following consultations with the Expert Group on Timber and Trade Statistics (EGTTS; <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-5rabj3>) and others, to add new companies and remove those that have ceased harvesting activity.

Data on all softwood removals from private woodlands from the removals survey are then combined with data from Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales and Forest Service administrative systems to produce estimates of total softwood removals in the UK and by country (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

More information on the survey, including a quality report, copies of the questionnaires sent to businesses, and a review of methodology for estimating UK totals from the survey results (including details on changes made), are available at; <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-94ujw2>

Methodology

The review was conducted using the Quality, Methods and Harmonisation Tool (QMHT), a self-assessment questionnaire developed by the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/harmonisation/index.html

The questionnaire covers the entire surveying process and helps identify potential issues and suggest improvements. The following areas were examined in this review:

- Establishing user requirements (QMHT Section 3)
- Design of survey data collection (QMHT Section 6)
- Editing and imputation (QMHT Section 8)
- Confidentiality (QMHT Section 14)
- Triennial and quinquennial reviews (QMHT Section 19)

Other areas (that are also relevant to this review) are covered in the 2012 methodology review for UK wood production, available at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/ahen-589ddl :

- Regular analysis in the production of statistical outputs (QMHT Section 10)
- Regular or repeated statistics (time series) (QMHT Section 12)

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- Confidentiality (QMHT Section 14)
- Dissemination (QMHT Section 15)

The Expert Group on Timber and Trade Statistics (EGTTS) was consulted as part of the review process. More information on the EGTTS can be found at: www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-5rabj3 .

The review also considered feedback from the 2013 User Engagement Survey (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7zejnv), which did not suggest making changes to the removals survey.

Conclusions

The review concluded that the survey continues to be required and is fit for purpose.

No major issues were identified, but the following improvements were suggested:

Survey data collection design (QMHT Section 6)

1. Documentation on the justification for every question asked in the survey questionnaire should be published, to provide data providers and users with an understanding of why the information is required and how it will be used.
2. Documentation on the methods and processes involved in data collection should be published, to help data users assess the quality and limitations of the statistics.

Editing and imputation (QMHT Section 8)

3. Documentation on the editing and imputation performed on the survey data should be published, to help data users assess the quality and limitations of the statistics.

Confidentiality (QMHT Section 14)

4. Documentation on the methods and processes used to ensure confidentiality should be published.

Action plan

We plan to address these areas for action as follows:

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Point 1 will be addressed by December 2016.

Points 2, 3 and 4 will be addressed by December 2016.

Sheila Ward / Penelope Donohue
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