

Quality Report:

Private Sector Softwood Removals Survey

Introduction

The private sector softwood removals survey (or 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 Forest Research (on behalf of the Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales and the Northern Ireland Forest Service) to collect data from harvesting companies in the UK.

The survey comprises a short questionnaire that is sent to around 40 harvesting companies.

The list of harvesting companies covered by the survey is maintained by Forest Research and is updated regularly, following consultations with the Expert Group on Timber and Trade Statistics and others, to add new companies and remove those that have ceased harvesting activity.

Relevance

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 from certified woodlands and the quantity sold to bioenergy. The survey also included a question on quantity harvested under plant health legislation in the 2013-2016 surveys.

Figures 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).

The main uses of the removals survey include:

- Trends in the supply of, and demand for, UK grown timber are monitored by the Forestry Commission, the UK timber industry and others;
- Removals data are used alongside growing stock and increment to compile natural capital accounts for inclusion in the UK Environmental Accounts produced by the Office for National Statistics;
- Data on actual removals are compared with softwood availability forecasts to analyse private sector marketing trends, which can be influenced by economic factors;

- Data on wood production in Scotland are used by the Scottish Government in the High Level Summary of Statistics and in Scottish Environment Statistics Online.
- Data on wood production in England are used annually in Forestry Commission England Corporate Plan Performance Indicators.
- Data on wood production in Wales are reported by the Welsh Government in Woodland for Wales Indicators.

The Expert Group on Timber and Trade Statistics (EGTTS), comprising representatives from the UK timber industry, the Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales and Forest Service are consulted regularly to ensure that UK wood production and trade statistics remain relevant to users (details on the EGTTS can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-5rabj3).

Accuracy

The survey is only sent to larger harvesting companies, believed to account for around 85% of all softwood harvested from private sector woodland. A large number of small companies, accounting for the remaining 15% of the softwood harvested from private sector woodland, are not covered by the survey. These smaller companies have never been surveyed, so this estimation is based on a historic comparison with figures for deliveries of softwood to wood processors and others.

There are also a number of non-sampling errors associated with this survey, related to errors of coverage, measurement, processing and non-response.

Unit response rate

The overall response rate to the survey of private sector softwood removals in 2017 was 68% (i.e. 28 of the 41 harvesting companies approached). The weighted response rate (taking account of the estimated softwood removals by each harvesting company covered by the survey) was 95%. The high weighted response rate indicates that non-response to the survey has a very small effect on the accuracy of the results.

Key item response rates

26 of the 28 respondents (93%) provided data for total removals in the current year.

Total contribution to key items from imputed values

In compiling results from the removals survey, values are imputed to estimate for non-response (either to specific questions or to the entire survey) and for companies not covered by the private sector softwood removals survey. Most values are imputed by using figures reported in the previous years. However, values for larger non-respondents may be modified to take account of advice from the Expert Group on Timber & Trade Statistics.

18% of the UK estimated total of 6.1 million green tonnes of softwood removals from private sector woodlands in 2017 was imputed (this includes imputation for businesses not covered by the survey).

Editing rate for key items

The responses received to the survey are checked to ensure that the values provided to questions are consistent with each other and with previous responses from the same company. Where there are clear inconsistencies that cannot be explained, values are revised to a more realistic level.

The editing rate for key items in the 2017 softwood removals survey was 0%.

Timeliness and punctuality

Provisional results from the private sector softwood removals survey are published in *UK Wood Production and Trade: provisional figures* in mid-May, 4.5 months after the end of the reference period (calendar year).

Final results are published in *Forestry Statistics* at end September, 9 months after the end of the reference period (calendar year).

Accessibility and clarity

The annual *Forestry Statistics* publication, available on the Forestry Commission website at www.forestry.gov.uk/statistics provides the most comprehensive results from the removals survey, including background information on the data collected, response rates, methodology, revisions and reporting. *Forestry Statistics* is published in line with the Forestry Commission's website accessibility statement.

Longer time series data, providing additional breakdowns for some statistics, are published in accompanying tables to *UK Wood Production and Trade: provisional figures*. Longer time series are also available for *Forestry Statistics*. Excel and PDF versions of all tables in *UK Wood Production and Trade: provisional figures* and *Forestry Statistics* are available to download from the Forestry Commission website.

Summary results are also published in *Forestry Facts & Figures*.

Comparability

The private sector softwood removals survey has been run annually by the Statistics team in the Forestry Commission since 1994. Results for a 10-year period are published in *Forestry Statistics*.

A number of refinements have been made to the survey, in response to consultation with the Expert Group on Timber and Trade Statistics and suggestions/issues raised by users and data providers. These include the addition of new data items on quantity from certified private sector woodlands (from the 2002 survey), quantity sold to bioenergy (from the 2008 survey) and removals under plant health legislation (from the 2013 survey).

A review of the methodology used to estimate the total private sector softwood removals was undertaken in 2011-2012. The *Methodology Review of Softwood Removals from Non-FC/ FS Woodland* paper presents the results from this review and the implications of the change in methodology. It can be found at: [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf/\\$FILE/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf/$FILE/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf)

The change in methodology resulted in a discontinuity between the figures produced under the previous methodology and the figures produced under the new methodology. A revised time series, including a transition period between 2002 and 2006, was produced to ensure that a consistent time series is available.

Coherence

Data on UK softwood removals (obtained from the Private Sector Softwood Removals Survey and from Forestry Commission/Natural Resources Wales/Forest Service administrative systems) are compared with estimates of UK softwood deliveries (obtained from Forestry Commission surveys and data requests), available in the annual *Forestry Statistics* publication. The comparison exercise led to a review of the removals survey in 2002 that resulted in improvements to the survey methodology to estimate for non-response. As mentioned above, a further methodology change took effect in 2012.

Data on GVA and employment for Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 02, covering forestry and logging, from the Annual Business Inquiry is presented in *Forestry Statistics*. However, this is not directly comparable to the results from the private sector softwood removals survey, as SIC 02 includes businesses that do not harvest softwood, which are excluded from the scope of the removals survey. In addition, businesses included in the private sector softwood removals survey whose main activity is assigned to another SIC code are not included in the Annual Business Inquiry results for SIC 02. The Office for National Statistics publication "UK Business: Activity, Size and Location" indicates that there were 4,050 businesses in SIC 02 in 2016.

Revisions

The Forestry Commission's Revisions Policy outlines our general approach to revisions.

The statistics for private sector softwood removals are subject to annual revision, as new information becomes available. These revisions are generally fairly small, but can be larger in some years.

Information on significant revisions made to published statistics is available in the Annex.

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Annex: Significant revisions to published statistics

The statistics for private sector softwood removals were substantially revised for *British Timber Statistics 2002*, because an improved methodology for estimating for non-respondents was introduced. This revision decreased the figures for earlier years by up to 800 thousand tonnes (10%).

The methodology change implemented from 2012 has resulted in a downward revision of up to 400 thousand green tonnes (11%) to the annual figures for UK softwood removals from private sector woodland between 2002 and 2010. Further details are provided in the *Methodology Review of Softwood Removals from Non-FC/ FS Woodland* paper at [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf/\\$FILE/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf/$FILE/rem_methodology_rev2011-12.pdf).