



Office for  
**Environmental  
Protection**

# Statement of voluntary compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Version 3.0

Published January 2026

To be revised by January 2027

The Office for Environmental Protection is a non-departmental public body, created in November 2021 under the Environment Act 2021. Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account. Our work covers England and Northern Ireland. We also cover reserved matters across the UK.

[www.theoep.org.uk/what-we-do](http://www.theoep.org.uk/what-we-do)



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## Foreword

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) was established with the principal objective of contributing to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment. We will achieve this mission by holding government and other public authorities to account. We aim to be a trusted voice and are committed to being an evidence-led organisation.

We must report every year on government's progress in improving the natural environment through delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plans in England and Northern Ireland. In our assessments of progress, we aim to use timely, accurate and robust data and evidence to inform our analysis. While we are not producers of official or National Statistics, we are committed to applying the same high-quality standards to all of our analysis and evidence as is required of the organisations that do.

For this reason, we have voluntarily adopted the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics. Our intention in adopting the Code is to signal that our assessments meet the three pillars of the Code – they are trustworthy, high quality and have public value.

This updated statement of compliance reflects developments to our assessment methodologies introduced in the past year as part of our commitment to the three pillars and complements our Environmental Improvement Plan progress reports and accompanying Methodological Statements.

We will continue to use the Code to guide our approach and will publish further updated statements on an annual basis, demonstrating our commitment to continuous improvement.



**Professor Robbie McDonald**

Chief Insights Officer and Chief Scientist, Office for Environmental Protection

## What is the Code of Practice for Statistics?

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) (the Code) sets the standards to which organisations that produce official and National Statistics should commit.<sup>1</sup> However, the standards of the Code can be applied on a voluntary basis to the evidence produced and used by any organisation, by following the Guide to Voluntary Application of the Code.<sup>2</sup>

The Code is formed of three main pillars, each with a set of defining principles:

- **Trustworthiness** – to build confidence in the people and organisations that publish statistics.
- **Quality** – to ensure the production of assured statistics, underpinned by sound methods and relevant data.
- **Value** – to ensure that statistics support society's needs for information.

## Why does the OEP apply the Code?

The Environment Act 2021 (the Act) requires the OEP to publish annual, independent assessments of progress in improving the natural environment in line with the Environmental Improvement Plans (EIPs) for both England and Northern Ireland. In these assessments, we must consider the respective Annual Progress Reports (APRs) for that reporting year, the data published by government that relates to the period, and any other reports, documents or information we consider appropriate.

We do not produce or publish official or National Statistics, but we do use them to develop our assessment of progress. We are voluntarily applying the Code to ensure that our assessments meet its three pillars, that they are trustworthy, high quality and have public value.

## How do we apply the Code?

This statement of compliance is intended to help users of our assessments understand how we have applied the Code and the processes and activities this involves.

### 1.1 Trustworthiness

The Methodological Statements published alongside our EIP progress reports set out in detail the data sources we have used, our assessment approach, and the stakeholder engagement we have undertaken. It contains metadata on the indicators used in the analysis and how we have developed or updated them.

#### T1) Honesty and integrity

We are an independent, evidence-led organisation that presents information impartially, objectively and free from conflict of interest. We are funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in England and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland. However, we pursue our objectives, implement our functions, and form our assessments independently and impartially.

We work transparently, openly and with integrity, guided by [the seven principles of public life](#).<sup>3</sup> Our [Annual Report and Accounts](#) reports on the Governance Framework and accountability within the OEP.<sup>4</sup> Our [Governance Framework](#) details the procedure for declaration of potential conflicts of interest.<sup>5</sup>

## **T2) Independent decision making and leadership**

Our Chief Insights Officer (CIO) leads the development of our EIP progress reports and upholds and advocates for the standards of the Code. In their wider role of Chief Scientist, the CIO is the OEP's lead for statistics and strives to improve our use of data and evidence for the public good.

The CIO has ultimate authority for approving methods, standards and procedures used in production of our EIP progress reports. They ensure collaboration with other organisations, both across government and externally through engagement with key stakeholders, which include the UK Statistics Authority (and the Voluntary Application Community of Practice) and Office for National Statistics.

## **T3) Orderly release**

As we are not a data producer, our EIP progress reports are not covered by the orderly release principle required of official or National Statistics. However, a regular calendar of reporting is established under the Act; our EIP progress reports must be published within 6 months of government's England Annual Progress Report, and the equivalent report laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly. Key stakeholders are informed of the date of release prior to publication before a subsequent launch event. Our EIP progress reports, Methodological Statements and any underpinning commissioned research are published on the [OEP website](#).<sup>6</sup>

## **T4) Transparent processes and management**

We are clear and transparent about our priorities and objectives in our [Corporate Plan](#).<sup>7</sup> We have also published our [Governance Framework and Delegation Policy](#), which clearly defines the role of the [OEP Board](#), the corporate governance standards to which it must adhere, and our approach to quality management.<sup>5,8</sup> The Board has a permanent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to support them in their responsibilities. In line with our governance framework, development of our assessment approach is overseen by our Executive Committee and our Board.

To ensure our EIP progress reports are high quality, we regularly review our work programme and ensure sufficient resources are in place and are used in the best way. Our Methodological Statements provides transparency on our assessment approach. We engage with key stakeholders and experts and provide opportunities for input through calls for evidence. We also engage with our College of Experts and other stakeholders as part of our peer review process.<sup>9</sup> After we publish our EIP progress reports, we hold launch events and workshops with key stakeholders to disseminate findings and receive feedback on our approach and our findings.

## **T5) Professional capability**

OEP staff are recruited using the [Civil Service Success Profile framework](#).<sup>10</sup> All members of the EIP progress reporting team are qualified to degree level, with many holding doctorates or masters degrees, and/or are Chartered Environmentalists (or equivalent) through licensed professional bodies or are working towards that status.

We are a learning organisation. Our vision is that our people continually learn at individual, team and organisational level – supporting and sharing learning to achieve our organisational aims and employee career goals.

Research partners commissioned to produce outputs that inform our analysis and evidence base are subject to [our procurement processes](#) and are assessed to ensure their technical standards meet our requirements.<sup>11</sup>

## **T6) Data governance**

We have published our [Privacy Notice](#) and [Personal Information Charter](#) which commit to protecting the privacy and security of personal information which may be in the control of our organisation.<sup>12,13</sup> We have a Data Protection Officer who is responsible for overseeing our data protection policy. Our data protection policy is reviewed annually and ensures our organisation complies with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

We work to our Information Security Policy which applies to everyone who has access to OEP systems and equipment and reported in our Annual Report and Accounts. We are committed to being an open organisation that safeguards sensitive information, especially when it relates to personal data or issues of national security. Our objectives are to preserve confidentiality, integrity and availability.

All OEP employees undertake mandatory Civil Service data protection training and all statutory obligations governing the collection of data, confidentiality, data sharing and release are followed in the development of our EIP progress reports. Our Methodological Statements describe the collection, collation and processing of all data used.

### **1.2 Quality**

To ensure our assessments are of high quality, in line with our governance framework, our assessment approach is approved by the OEP Executive Committee and Board.

We regularly review our assessment approach to ensure the most appropriate data and methods are used. We apply rigorous internal quality assurance processes and carry out targeted peer review from key stakeholders to ensure the accuracy and relevance of our assessment.

## **Q1) Suitable data sources**

We use a wide range of data sources, reflecting the range of areas covered by the EIPs. Almost all the data underpinning the indicators we use to assess past trends are based on official or National Statistics. We supplement these indicators with

targeted information requests to central government and arms' length bodies to address data and information gaps.

We also use a wide range of analytical methodologies to assess past trends, progress in the reporting period and overall prospects of meeting ambitions, targets and commitments. Environmental indicators form a core part of our evidence base. We regularly review our selection of indicators, informed by stakeholder engagement. When we amend, add or remove an indicator, we set out the rationale for doing so in our Methodological Statements.

## **Q2) Sound methods**

The methods and data we use in our assessments of progress are tested with topic and methods experts and other producers of related data and statistics. Our assessment approach is informed by published examples of good practice from other organisations, such as the [Climate Change Committee](#) and [European Environment Agency](#).<sup>14,15</sup> Our methodologies have been tested with key stakeholders, including producers of data and statistics. Any changes to methodologies and data sources between assessments are detailed in our Methodological Statements.

## **Q3) Assured quality**

Most of the indicators used in our assessments are based on published government data, mainly official or National Statistics, and are therefore underpinned by the Code on a statutory basis. Other evidence used in our assessment includes calls for evidence and commissioned work. Our EIP progress reports are peer reviewed by members of our College of Experts and wider subject area experts. All data are held and processed in line with OEP procedures and undergo a rigorous quality assurance process.

## **1.3 Value**

Our assessments of progress synthesise evidence across a broad range of topics and areas relevant to the natural environment. This integrated assessment ensures we provide insight across past, present, and future timeframes, in order to identify opportunities and make recommendations to improve progress

## **V1) Relevance to users**

Our assessments are aimed at a wide-ranging audience, including parliamentarians and policy makers, policy influencers, the media and the public. In addition to assessing government's overall progress, we also carry out more in-depth assessments into areas of high policy relevance and stakeholder interest. We actively seek feedback from report users, other key stakeholders and our College of Experts to ensure our assessments are relevant and effectively communicated.

## **V2) Accessibility**

All OEP reports are published on our website and on [GOV.uk](#), as are the OEP's [Corporate Plan](#) and other relevant strategies and documents.<sup>16,7</sup> All data used in our annual assessments are publicly available and detailed in our Methodological



Statements. We endeavour to ensure our reports meet all accessibility standards in line with our [Accessibility statement](#).<sup>17</sup>

### **V3) Clarity and insight**

The OEP is committed to providing an objective assessment and adding insightful analysis. The purpose of our EIP progress assessments is clearly stated. We use summary assessments and appropriate visualisations to clearly present our findings in a concise and accessible way. We also provide a link to our website contact page for enquiries or comments.

### **V4) Innovation and improvement**

Our commitment to continuous improvement broadly follows the [plan-do-check-act cycle](#) and we have initiated both pre- and post- publication reviews of our assessment approach.<sup>18</sup> Stakeholder workshops have been used to elicit feedback and share examples of good practice, alongside internal post-publication lessons learned sessions.

This year, we have further expanded our use of indicator reference tables to provide greater transparency to our methods for all the indicators we use for our past trends assessment, rather than publishing reference tables only for indicators that deviate from government's approach.

For our 'Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2024/2025' report, we introduced a measure of the statistical significance of the change observed in indicators over time. The outputs of the t-test are used descriptively to supplement the past trends narrative for each goal area, allowing both the OEP and report users to more confidently assess whether changes are meaningful (that is, sizeable and statistically distinguishable). Our approach is described in detail in the accompanying Methodological Statement.

We will use future voluntary compliance statements and Methodological Statements to communicate where and how we have developed our approaches.

### **V5) Efficiency and proportionality**

Almost all the data used in our EIP progress reports are publicly available (see Methodological Statements). Regarding the supporting evidence we commission from external suppliers, we undertake a thorough and competitive procurement process in line with our procurement principles.

## **Summary**

We have developed this statement of compliance to demonstrate how we apply the Code and its underlying principles in the development of our EIP progress assessments.

We will continue to use the Code and transition to the [updated edition 3.0](#) to guide our approach, and publish an updated statement on an annual basis to demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement.<sup>1</sup>



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