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From:
Dr Mike Walker
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Rachel Merelie
Senior Director, Office for the Internal
Market

By email

12 October 2023

Dear Philip,

Response to NISRA Outputs Consultation

We are writing to you regarding NISRA's consultation on proposed changes to its statistical outputs. This letter provides brief background on the role of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), including functions for which NISRA outputs discussed in the consultation document are particularly important. We outline the importance of NISRA's data to our work, with specific examples. We welcome the intention to ensure that the proposed changes do not affect underlying data collection. We also highlight the risks associated with scaling back publications analysing this data.

We also intend to submit the information about specific outputs via the Outputs Consultation online questionnaire.

Background on the CMA, OIM and MU

The CMA is the UK's lead competition and consumer enforcement authority and works to promote competition for the benefit of consumers.

In September 2021, the Office for the Internal Market (OIM) was established within the CMA. The OIM's objective is to support the effective operation of the UK internal market, ie, the flow of goods and services between the four nations of the UK. Our role includes monitoring the functioning of the UK internal market via published reports, which draw on a range of data, including statistics published by NISRA. Our [first statutory reports](#) were published in March 2023. Alongside those reports we published a [Data Strategy](#)

[Roadmap](#), which aims to catalyse efforts to improve the data on trade between the nations by highlighting relevant initiatives and tracking the resulting improvements on an annual basis. We engage regularly with data producers on Data Strategy Roadmap initiatives and value the contribution your colleagues make to this work.

The Microeconomics Unit (MU) was launched in late 2022 to lead and expand the CMA's economic research function. The team undertakes a range of economic research and is responsible for producing the CMA's regular State of UK Competition report.¹ The CMA's Economic Research Strategy, published on 8 March 2023, sets out both what areas of interest will guide CMA research and how the MU will engage with data providers and researchers.

Importance of NISRA outputs to our work

We welcome NISRA's decision to maintain existing underlying data collections. This data is invaluable to the OIM and the wider CMA, helping us to understand how competition and the UK internal market are operating in Northern Ireland and the UK more broadly. It may also help us to identify trends that are worthy of further examination, to encourage effective competition in UK industries and the effective functioning of the internal market.

However, we do have concerns about analytical outputs being scaled back. Analytical outputs play an important role in interpreting data and making it more accessible to non-specialists. Reducing these publications risks reducing demand for the underlying data.

Timeliness is also important to the OIM, as we have a statutory requirement to prepare a report on the operation of the UK internal market by 31 March each year. This report draws extensively on the Northern Ireland Economic Trade Statistics (NIETS). We were very grateful for NISRA's work in 2022 to bring forward publication of some 2021 data into a consolidated December 2022 NIETS release, and we note that there is no proposal to delay the NIETS. However, the report is also informed by other outputs including input-output tables and supply-use tables for each nation. A delay that pushes publication of any relevant output closer to March, or beyond March, makes it difficult or impossible for the OIM to use this data in its annual report.

We wish to emphasise the importance of NISRA's data to our work, and we have identified below specific outputs that we use, with an explanation of how they are relevant to our work.

Output	Proposal	How we use the output
Northern Ireland Economic Trade Statistics (NIETS)	Statistical bulletin to be scaled back; publication of data to continue.	The OIM's annual reports include an overview of the evidence of how the internal market is operating, which we update each year to meet our statutory

¹ [State of UK competition report 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/state-of-uk-competition-report-2022)

		<p>duties to report on the internal market. Our analysis draws extensively on the NIETS to quantify the volume of intra-UK trade and identify the sectors that see the most trade between UK nations.</p> <p>We also appreciate the close working between NISRA and the ONS to develop a consistent dataset on intra-UK trade, for which the NIETS is a key input.</p> <p>We are required to prepare our annual report by 31 March, so it is important to us that the NIETS continues to be published in December each year (or earlier).</p> <p>More broadly, the NIETS helps the OIM to build a picture of how effectively the UK internal market is operating over time, enabling us to identify trends that we may wish to monitor further and draw to the attention of policymakers, parliamentarians and other stakeholders.</p>
<p>Input-Output Analytical Tables & Multipliers report & associated tables (IOT)</p> <p>Structure of the Northern Ireland Economy – Supply-Use Tables and associated publication (SUT)</p>	<p>Publication for 2020 ref year to be published in Q2 2024 rather than Dec 2023</p>	<p>The OIM has an interest in understanding the economic fabric of the UK and in particular supply chains that span two or more UK nations. These outputs help us to understand the economic structure of NI and its linkages with the rest of the UK. Supply chains across the UK's nations are a valuable indicator of integration within the UK internal market, and this is an area that we expect to monitor and report on over time. The proposed delay means that the IOT and SUT for the 2020 reference year will not be able to inform the OIM's annual report due in March 2024.</p>
<p>Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry (NIABI)</p>	<p>Statistical bulletin for 2022 ref year to be delayed until Jan 2024 and content reduced.</p> <p>High-level ABI results will be published in Dec 23.</p>	<p>The NIABI is an important source for the State of Competition report. It is also very important to the OIM as the source of data for the NIETS, particularly so because of its high response rate compared to the equivalent data for other nations.</p> <p>Across its portfolio of research, the MU is interested in exploring competition at</p>

	Approx GVA figures will be published in Jan 24.	the subnational level. High-quality data on firm location, input and output choices and product portfolio are therefore paramount. The MU supports any efforts to improve NIABI and business demography statistics, and to ensure alignment between firm data between NI and the rest of the UK.
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We would welcome a discussion about the points we have raised in this letter, and we look forward to continuing our productive engagement with NISRA.

Yours sincerely

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