



Data access – DBRC position statement

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Introduction

This paper provides an introduction to, and sets out DBRC's current position on the topic of data access, dealing specifically with the free / open data movement in relation to our current operating model. This is specifically relevant since the launch of the NBN Atlas, its introduction of Creative Commons licensing and the removal of access controls. Access controls within its predecessor 'the NBN Gateway' meant DBRC could allow different audiences access to the data we published at varying resolutions, depending on a range of protocols agreed by our partnership. This ensured the security of that data and allowed DBRC to manage the many sensitivities over data ownership, and the location of protected/rare/vulnerable species within the public domain.

At this time DBRC's partnership is working constructively with local and national organisations, and the NBN Trust, to find an appropriate way forward. The return of access controls, and the adoption of the principles set out within the spectrum of 'Open' data (ie shared data), and the development of delivery mechanisms within the Atlas that are useful to LERCs, is crucial to DBRC being able to share data through this national portal.

Calls for 'free' or 'open' data

The terms 'free' or 'open' data originated to drive the mobilisation of information which had been gathered predominately by governments or large organisations. This is particularly relevant to governments and statutory agencies where public money had been used to gather that data, and where organisations have no further need to retain commercial sensitivity over it, and by making it freely available would be in the public interest. Importantly many of these datasets are not dynamic, they are historic and are not subject to the cost of ongoing management or improvement.

Current agendas for streamlining the biodiversity data industry have national and international influence, in many cases this is from organisations which have not funded the acquisition or management of the data concerned. At present the terminologies used can be misunderstood by both data users and providers, this can create confusion where a request for better or free access is made.

Definitions

'Free data' can be defined in two ways: **Gratis versus libre** is the distinction between two meanings of the English adjective "free"; namely, "for zero price" (gratis) and "with little or no restriction" (libre). The ambiguity of "free" can cause issues where the distinction is



important, as it often is in dealing with laws concerning the use of information, such as copyright and patents.

'Open data' is defined as: information that is available for anyone to use, for any purpose, at no cost. Open data has to have a licence that says it is open data. Without a licence, the data can't be reused. The licence might also say:

- that people who use the data must credit whoever is publishing it (this is called **attribution**)
- that people who mix the data with other data have to also release the results as open data (this is called **share-alike**) *Open Data Institute*

In line with DBRC's core aims and objectives we consider a move to greater levels of open data as a broadly positive one, with the natural environment ultimately benefiting from improved access to information and related services.

However, there is generally an understanding that data is not 'free' - someone, somewhere has incurred cost to collate and manage that data. The National Biodiversity Network within which DBRC sits as a local node, clarifies this in the following way.

"biodiversity data suppliers should try to arrange resourcing of information provision so that charges for not-for-profit uses are minimal and charges for commercial uses are realistic but do not prevent the use of biodiversity data. Biodiversity data users should expect to contribute to sustaining the provision of biodiversity data through contributing either in kind or financially to the collection, collation and management of biodiversity data, or at the point of use".

In line with the above, and with the support of its partnership, to ensure appropriate resources are in place within DBRC to carry out its core functions (collation, validation, verification, management and dissemination of biodiversity data), data cannot be provided 'Gratis' in all but a limited number of scenarios.

Therefore DBRC's position on providing access to data is:

1. Charges will be made for the time required to disseminate data, these charges will acknowledge the difference between commercial and non-commercial users and will be set accordingly.

And/or

2. Charges will be made which contribute towards the ongoing management of dynamic datasets, supporting the continued improvement of our knowledge of Devon's species, sites and habitats.

These rates are set out within our charging policy and are subject to annual review.

Importantly, DBRC is committed to maintaining and developing products and services through which access to data remains in the spirit of 'Libre', with as few restrictions possible, including cost. It is through this approach that DBRC can ensure this data remains as



accessible as is practically possible, is fit for purpose, informs and educates, and can be used to protect and enhance biodiversity in Devon.

DBRC will also maintain a watching brief alongside input from its wide partnership on the subject, and engage in the debate on data access locally, regionally and nationally for the long term benefit of biodiversity.