Australian Government Statistical Forum (AGSF)

Summary Record

Thursday 11 September 2014, ABS House, Canberra

Theme: Statistical Capability Development

Chair	Peter Harper, A/g Australian Statistician
Members	Ian Ewing (ABS), Chris Libreri (ABS), Trevor Sutton (ABS), Linda Fardell (ABS), Geoffrey Armitage (BREE), David Dennis (Social Services), Mike Maslen (Environment) Julie Neville (ATO), Helen Owens (Communications), John Roe (Health), Lace Wang (Employment), Janice Wykes (DIBP), Omar Elarif (DHS, proxy for Joe Burke), Sue Fergusson (NCVER, proxy for Rod Camm), Glen Malam (BITRE, proxy for Gary Dolman), John Sims (ABARES, proxy for Milly Lubulwa), David Whitelaw (AIHW, proxy for Justine Boland)
Apologies	Jonathan Palmer (ABS), Justine Boland (AIHW), Joe Burke (DHS), Rod Camm (NCVER), Gary Dolman (BITRE), Milly Lubulwa (ABARES), Louise Minty (BoM), Walter Shafron (ABARES), Pia Waugh (Finance)
Presenters	Helen Owens (Communications) Mark Jackson (ATO) AJ Lanyon (ABS) Peter Harper (ABS)
Observers	ABS – Jenine Borowik, Graeme Brown, Ric Clarke, Bruce Hockman, Alister Nairn ABR - Mano Georgopoulos
Minutes	ABS – Christine Sergi, Carolyn Verey

Agenda Item 1 (a) - Welcome

1.1   Mr Peter Harper (ABS), Acting Australian Statistician, opened the meeting, acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and paid respect to their elders, past and present. He welcomed attendees and noted member apologies. The summary record of the May 2014 meeting was accepted as a true record by members and the action items were reviewed. Note: while the agenda running order was changed on the day to suit speakers' availability, the usual running order is reflected in the minutes.

Agenda Item 1 (b) - Statistician's Update

1.2   Mr Harper highlighted the release of Data by Region in July 2014 which allows users to choose a region in Australia and find data for that region, through a map interface. This is the first step towards developing a single map-based navigator for finding any ABS data. While the first release of data contains

information from the National Regional Profile, the aim is to eventually enable users to find more data on any region within Australia, by migrating other online map-based data published by the ABS to this tool. He indicated that it could be used as a tool for the data of other agencies as well.

1.3   The ABS was delighted with the success of GovHack2014 and impressed by the number of innovative ideas using public government data. The ABS co-sponsored two award categories and received over 40 high quality entries.

1.4   Mr Harper advised preparations for the 2016 Census had been progressing well, with the Census major test conducted in August 2014 to trial new delivery and collection procedures to cater for increased online participation. The ABS anticipates more than 65 per cent of Australian households will complete the Census online in 2016. The major test also allows for final testing on Census content. The ABS will analyse the results and make a submission to the Australian Government outlining recommendations on the nature and content of the 2016 Census in October 2014. The content of the 2016 Census is expected to be known by the end of this year or early 2015.

1.5   Mr Harper provided an update on the Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board noting the initial implementation for data integration involving Commonwealth data for statistical and research purposes commenced on 1 July 2014. The priority has been to establish the arrangements for statistical and research projects involving Commonwealth data, where the data user is external to the Commonwealth (external projects). Therefore from 1 July 2014, the initial implementation of the Commonwealth arrangements for data integration will be for a select set of external projects. In addition, as part of the implementation, the Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board released a *Guide for Data Integration Projects Involving Commonwealth Data for Statistical and Research Purposes* which is available on the govspace website <www.govspace.gov.au>.

1.6   Mr Harper advised on the results of an independent review to assess the ABS's system of controls relating to the unauthorised disclosure of market sensitive information, commissioned by the ABS after an ABS staff member was arrested in May this year for allegedly leaking sensitive statistics. The review was released in August 2014 and found that generally, the ABS is comparable with other similar organisations and there are no significant weaknesses in the ABS's current system of controls. This confirms the strong value the ABS places in maintaining the security of information entrusted to the agency. However, the review identified four areas for improvement and made 11 recommendations. The four areas for improvement are: Access controls, Culture and training, Financial disclosures and IT monitoring and surveillance. The ABS will implement all the recommendations as soon as practicable. The review is available on the ABS website and Mr Harper encouraged members to use the review as a resource for their own agency, where relevant.

1.7   Mr Harper noted the ABS, like most other government departments, is under significant budget pressures and provided an update on the changes to the ABS Forward Work Program for 2014-15 which had been announced in early June. The highest priority had been to maintain activities that were critical to effective government decision making and delivered the most public benefit. He advised the Survey of Tourist Accommodation has been reinstated with the ABS receiving funding from the Australian Trade Commission for the survey to be conducted for the 2013-14 financial year.

Agenda Item 2 – Data Policy Directions

2.1   Ms Helen Owens (Dept of Communications) provided an update on the foundation spatial data framework, noting work on the ten themes has been progressing with 35 datasets available on the ANZLIC website <www.anzlic.gov.au>, with some of the information attracting charges. She highlighted some of the difficulties with the geocoded addressing theme.

2.2   Ms Owens outlined the National Map initiative <www.nationalmap.nicta.com.au/>, which gives users access to a single platform for Government (at all levels) geospatial datasets. The beta concept was launched on 9 July 2014 and geospatial data is visually presented in a map format, enabling users to see the data that they extract. Currently available datasets cover information on land, water, infrastructure, broadband access, boundaries and population, with more to come. The National Map embraces Open Data principles, providing an open framework of geospatial data services. There are a range of system design goals including for it to be open source and a platform for commercial and community innovation. National Map integrates with data.gov.au and can also direct access from data custodians.

2.3   Ms Owens indicated there are a number of changes occurring in government with a taskforce being created in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to look at the Government's e-Gov agenda and data related directions (such as open data and big data). The scope of the taskforce is yet to be determined, although staff from the Department of Finance and from the Australian Taxation Office will be part of the taskforce.

2.4   AGSF members discussed the quality of metadata on the National Map and how the exposure of poor quality metadata has motivated data custodians to improve the quality. Members asked about the user experience with National Map and while there has been limited feedback to date, there are plans to improve functionality in the future.

Agenda Item 3 – Building Statistical Capability State/Territory Initiatives

3.1   Dr AJ Lanyon (ABS) presented on the collaborative program of work with the States and Territories that the ABS has been progressing around building statistical capability. The State Statistical Forum (SSF) is one of the key governance mechanisms through which the states and territories can progress the National Statistical Service in partnership with the ABS. SSF members have been concerned about the extent to which statistical capability is valued and supported by key stakeholders within jurisdictions. They have agreed to a program of work to raise the profile and value of statistical capability, as well as to develop resources to strengthen and sustain statistical capability in jurisdictions.

3.2   The work program is being treated as a priority over the next four years and consists of four projects: a communication strategy to raise the profile and value of statistical capability to state and territory governments, local reviews to understand local resources and identify potential gaps, case studies to share good practice, and the creation of a best practice guide to enable the development of the most appropriate strategies in jurisdictions.

3.3   AGSF members discussed the decline in statistical capability in the Australian Government, as well as stakeholders outside of government. Dr Lanyon advised the project aimed to develop the best practice resources electronically so that they would be discoverable and widely available to other interested parties.

3.4   Mr Chris Libreri (ABS) noted the ABS had been investing in building statistical capability and suggested the ABS would circulate more information about its Statistical Capability Framework in the minutes (Action item 1). The ABS's Statistical Capability Framework is available on the ABS website (link below) and the contact for more information is Andrea McIntyre <andrea.mcintyre@abs.gov.au>.
http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/a3121120.nsf/home/ABS+Statistical+Capability+Framework

3.5   Mr Harper (ABS) also noted AGSF members could use the State Statistical Forum to consult with states or territories on issues and the contact for the SSF secretariat was Linda Fardell <linda.fardell@abs.gov.au>.

Agenda Item 4 – *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* Update

4.1   Mr Harper (ABS) provided a progress update on the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative. The *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative aims to guide government's investment in official statistics and has identified 74 statistics which are critically important to the nation. Phase 2 of the initiative is currently underway assessing the quality of the 74 essential statistics. The aim is to assess the quality of the essential statistics to understand how well the currently produced information meets the critical needs of users, highlighting areas for investment within existing statistics. Mr Harper indicated a multi-agency forum would be held in October 2014 for data custodian agencies to discuss the quality assessment results. The ABS aims to publish the results of the quality assessments in December 2014.

Agenda Item 5 – Update on Australian Business Register Spatial and Online Developments

5.1   Mr Mark Jackson (ATO) noted the purpose of the Australian Business Register (ABR) was originally a way of getting businesses registered and now it provides four services (Australian Business Number (ABN), AUSkey, Standard Business Reporting and the Australian Reporting Dictionary). Currently the ABR contains 7.6 million registered ABNs and there has been an increasing growth in searches and use of ABR data by both the public and government agencies.

5.2   Recent improvements to the ABR include adding: geocoding functionality using the Geocoded National Address File (G-NAF) owned by the Public Sector Mapping Authority, branch information to capture the location of branch offices for businesses with more than one location, and associates details to capture company directors, company secretaries etc. Work has also been undertaken to improve data quality with improvements to the registration process, such as drop down prompt boxes for address entry, and the use of a new ANZSIC coder, co-developed with the ABS, to improve the quality of industry information captured. In addition, audit reviews are undertaken to review the accuracy of ABNs and remove unused ABNs from the Register.

5.3   AGSF members raised questions on the geocoding ability of the ABR data and also discussed the complexities of using ABR data to gain information on Indigenous businesses.

Agenda Item 6 - Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance

6.1   The Chair invited members to share statistical updates:

- Ms Sue Fergusson (NCVER) advised all vocational training activity data, including private fee for service, will be counted in their data collection, further work supporting the unique student identifier has been progressed and NCVER has received funding to finish building its data warehouse.

- Ms Janice Wykes (DIBP) advised the Department is working on the merger of Customs and Immigration and noted data governance would be important.

- Mr David Dennis (DSS) noted the Department is working with the Department of Human Services to realise the benefits of its Enterprise Data Warehouse. Also, the Department has been developing a release schedule for data to be released to data.gov.au and social media will be used to alert followers when new data is released.

- Ms Julie Neville (ATO) advised the Tax Office has recently released its annual Taxation Statistics publication for 2011-12. The Tax Office is reviewing its data analytics, risk and intelligence with a focus on whole of government. Ms Neville also advised there is a new institute at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University, the Tax and Transfer Policy Institute, which focuses on the social aspects of taxation.

- Mr Mike Maslen (Dept of Environment) advised the Department is progressing open data, working with the ABS on the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative, and has been seeking agreement with multiple providers to carry creative commons licensing.

- Mr Glen Malam (BITRE) advised BITRE is running a fact checking service for their minister and senior executive to ensure statistics are being used correctly, in addition BITRE have expanded their aviation collection to include helicopter charter.

- Mr Geoff Armitage (BREE) advised BREE is holding discussions with ATO and Customs to increase data sharing arrangements to improve data coverage and quality and hopes to have MOUs signed by the end of the year.

- Ms Lace Wang (Dept of Employment) noted some of their data sets were about to move into production mode on the Dept of Human Services Enterprise Data Warehouse.

- Dr John Sims (ABARES) advised ABARES is working with the Department of Agriculture's data enterprise warehouse. He noted the work with the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative has helped improve data quality and advised ABARES has been going through a data renewal process.

- Mr Chris Libreri (ABS) advised he was happy to discuss the learnings from the independent review to assess the ABS's system of controls relating to

the unauthorised disclosure of market sensitive information, and suggested interested members could email him at <chris.libreri@abs.gov.au>.

- Mr David Whitelaw (AIHW) advised AIHW was working with the Department of Human Services on a data access portal.

- Mr Omar Elarif (Dept of Human Services) advised the Department was working on a de-identification program and how it impacts on their datasets, he also noted more datasets were being placed on data.gov.au.

Agenda Item 7 – Arrangements for Next Year

7.1   AGSF members suggested a number of topics they would like to discuss at future meetings (see table below).

7.2   Mr Harper requested members prioritise the list of topics below indicating if they could contribute to the discussion and send their comments to the AGSF secretariat via Cassy Short <cassy.short@abs.gov.au> (Action item 2).

Future meeting topics suggested by AGSF members	Priority ranking (please rank these topics according to your interest i.e. 1,2,3 etc.)	Can you contribute to the discussion Yes/No
Data Governance		
Data Infrastructure		
Confidentialisation Guidance		
Longitudinal Data		
Data Integration		
Data Sharing		
Commission of Audit Recommendations		

Agenda Item 8 - Other Business

8.1   Mr Trevor Sutton (ABS) raised the work the ABS has been doing to make more detailed datasets available without breaching confidentiality through products such as Census TableBuilder and Survey TableBuilder. These products enable users to construct their own tables using the data variables they select, with the data subjected to a confidentiality process before being released. He indicated the ABS was looking into the future on how to integrate these confidentiality processes as a holistic service and had been talking with SAS about inserting the ABS confidentiality processes into their code. Mr Sutton suggested the ABS could provide an update on this at the next AGSF meeting (Action item 3).

Meeting Close

Action items from 11 September 2014 meeting

Action Item	Description	Responsibility	Time-frame	Minute reference
1	ABS to circulate its Statistical Capability Framework to members.	AGSF Secretariat	October 2014	3.4
2	AGSF members to prioritise the suggested list of discussion topics for next year's meetings and send their comments to Cassy Short <cassy.short@abs.gov.au> by 7 November 2014.	AGSF members	Due 7 November 2014	7.2
3	ABS to provide an update on the integration of confidentiality processes at the next AGSF meeting.	Mr Trevor Sutton (ABS)	2015	8.1

Action items from previous meetings

Action Item	Description	Responsibility	Time-frame	Minute reference
1	ABS to place documentation on the statistical process 'plug and play' components available on the open data tool kit once they are developed.	Ms Borowik (ABS)	As soon as practicable	May 2014 4.4
2	ABS to collaborate with Ms Waugh to develop an interactive presentation of essential statistical assets.	Mr Harper (ABS)	As soon as practicable	May 2014 5.4
3	ABS to take the list of Essential Statistical Assets to the Data Efficiency Working Group as an example of work which is important and of high value for government.	Mr Harper (ABS)	As soon as practicable	May 2014 5.4
4	AGSF Members to hold a meeting to discuss the Commission of Audit and reductions to red tape.	AGSF Secretariat	When the Government response is released	October 2013 8.3