

Australian Government Statistical Forum (AGSF)

Summary Record

Friday 30 May 2014, ABS House, Canberra

Theme: Statistical Information Management

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| Chair | Jonathan Palmer, Acting Australian Statistician. |
| Members | Peter Harper (ABS), Ian Ewing (ABS), Jenine Borowik (ABS, proxy for Trevor Sutton), Lewis Conn (ABS), Milly Lubulwa (ABARES), Justine Boland (AIHW), Matt Power (ATO, proxy for Julie Neville), Glen Malam (BITRE, proxy for Gary Dolman), Andre Zerger (BOM, proxy for Louise Minty), Jason Ferris (Environment, proxy for Kathryn Collins), Scott Matheson (Employment), Pia Waugh (Finance), John Roe (Health), Katy Balmaks (Human Services), Janice Wykes (Immigration), Tim Neal (OSP, proxy for Helen Owens), Rod Camm (NCVER), David Dennis (Social Services). |
| Apologies | Trevor Sutton (ABS), Chris Libreri (ABS), Louise Minty (BoM), Gary Dolman (BITRE), Julia Neville (ATO), Helen Owens (OSP), Kathryn Collins (Environment), Marc Vickers (AGIMO), Geoffrey Armitage (BREE), Richard Snabel (Industry). |
| Presenters | Pia Waugh (Finance), Adrian Burton (ANDS), Jenine Borowik (ABS), Peter Harper (ABS). |
| Observers | Bindi Kindermann (ABS), Michael Davies (ABS). |
| Minutes | Cassy Short (ABS), Carolyn Verey (ABS). |

Agenda Item 1 (a) - Welcome

1.1 Mr Jonathan Palmer (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 proxies, and noted member apologies. The summary record of the October 2013 meeting was accepted as a true record by members and the action items were reviewed.

Agenda Item 1 (b) - Statistician's Update

1.2 Mr Palmer advised members of the retirement of Mr Brian Pink as Australian Statistician earlier this year and the interim acting arrangements until the new Statistician is appointed.

1.3 Mr Palmer highlighted a range of major achievements since the previous meeting including the release of a refreshed version of *Measures of Australia's Progress* at the end of last year, which was the result of an extensive public and expert consultation. The refreshed version added a fourth domain 'Governance' to the existing domains of economic, societal and environmental progress. It also significantly expanded the Environment domain and contains an enlarged dashboard which reflects the changing attitudes of Australians about what aspects of life are important to them.

1.4 Two new Census related linked statistical datasets have been recently released, the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset and the Australian Census

and Migrants Integrated Dataset and mentioned the work the ABS has been doing to make more datasets available in Survey TableBuilder. TableBuilder enables users to construct their own tables using the data variables they select, with the data subjected to a confidentiality process before release, and has become increasingly popular with nearly 700 new clients registering to use TableBuilder in the financial year to date.

1.5 Plans for the 2016 Census to be the first predominantly digital Census for Australia are progressing well, with the completion of an extensive public consultation regarding the nature and content of the Census. The ABS will discuss its final topic recommendations with the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) in mid-June, after which the final topic recommendations will be taken to the Government for decision.

1.6 Another highlight for the Census was the recent award won by the Census 'Run that Town' app which won the Government 2.0 category in the Australian Government's Excellence in eGovernment Awards, which are administered by the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO). Run That Town was judged to be 'an incredibly innovative project that uses game technology to achieve government objectives in an engaging and effective way'.

1.7 Mr Palmer advised the ABS was facing significant budget pressures needing to make savings of \$7m in 2014-15 and the ABS had been consulting at a high level with key Australian Government stakeholders to assist in shaping the ABS Forward Work Program for 2014-15. While the decision to reduce the work program will not be easy, the decision making will be aided by a strategic framework that maps ABS work to four tiers and articulates how the ABS assesses the relative priorities of the work it undertakes. The ABS expects to be in a position to announce reductions to the work program prior to the end of the financial year in order to give stakeholders as much notice as possible.

1.8 He also noted that, while the ABS did not receive funding in the recent Federal Budget for its Critical Statistical Infrastructure Program (CSIP), there was strong support for the program and the new Australian Statistician will bring forward the ABS proposal for Government reconsideration in the context of its future work program. As had been raised at past AGSF meetings, the ABS is undertaking a transformation program to ensure its sustainability, which involves seeking support from government. Transforming the way the ABS does business will enable the ABS to make better use of existing data assets and support the statistical system with an ability to standardise, integrate and disseminate data at a much lower cost.

1.9 In closing, Mr Palmer spoke of the positive recommendations for data in the report from the National Commission of Audit, with the recognition of the importance of open data, data sharing across government, big data and the need for a data strategy. He noted AGSF members had raised the idea of holding a separate meeting to discuss the impact of the Commission of Audit, and the Government's reduction of red tape through deregulation, on the collection of administrative datasets and that the ABS was waiting on the Government's response to the Commission of Audit before progressing this action item.

Agenda Item 2 - Big and Open Data

2.1 Ms Pia Waugh (Department of Finance) provided a brief history of Open Data in Australia with The Gov2.0 Taskforce Report in 2009 leading to the declaration of Open Government, the data.gov.au portal and a range of other

initiatives. She highlighted the benefits of open data to the government (e.g. greater efficiencies and improved service delivery) as well as to the community (e.g. participatory democracy and opportunities for innovation) and noted that five state and territory governments have open data policies and portals.

2.2 The Department of Finance is responsible for open/big data policy in the Commonwealth. Currently, a range of initiatives are being developed. A single open data policy statement is being taken to Cabinet shortly and will provide a single point of consistent advice on agencies obligations. In addition, an open data tool kit will be available soon which will contain, among other things, 'how to' guides, case studies, and policy explanation. She noted that future systems should plan for Open Data from the start and encouraged involving data experts early.

2.3 There is also lot of communities of interest engaging with Open Data such as the Open Data Community Forum, the Centre of Excellence in Data Analytics, the Australian Government Linked Data Working Group, and the APS Policy Visualisation Network, as well as a blog run by the Department of Finance. Ms Waugh encouraged AGSF members to contact her < pia.waugh@finance.gov.au > if they were interested in belonging to any of these networks (Action item 1).

2.4 Members discussed some of the barriers to open data and Ms Waugh encouraged use of data.gov.au as a first step, noting that open data was not necessarily about unit record data but rather administrative or processed data. She suggested it was an incremental process and after the data was made available then work could start on further refinements, such as providing metadata, data visualisation facilities or an Application Program Interface (API).

Agenda Item 3 – Information Strategies and the Australian National Data Service (ANDS)

3.1 Dr Adrian Burton from the Australian National Data Service (ANDS) spoke from a researcher's perspective and examined trends in research data and the need to manage data including partnerships with the public sector. ANDS is an organisation formed in partnership with Monash University, the Australian National University and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and aims to transform Australia's research data environment to: make Australian research data collections more valuable by managing, connecting, enabling discovery and supporting the reuse of this data. The goal of ANDS is to enable richer and more accountable research, to make more efficient use of research data and to improve provision of data to support policy development. He acknowledged the Australian Government was a key stakeholder both as a generator of a lot of the data which was used by researchers and user of the findings.

3.2 He noted publishing research that has data connected to it is more compelling, gives more weight to the research and generates new research. Infrastructure is needed to support the volume of data available and an institutional approach to data leads to greater research efficiency. Dr Burton provided an example of the Hubble Space Telescope research with a large up front fixed cost, but only available to a limited number of scientists. However, with an additional 1% of the original budget invested to create information infrastructure, including a data library and a data archive, double the amount of research was generated.

3.3 Dr Burton broadly outlined some of ANDS infrastructure, including a national research data portal (similar to data.gov.au), standard vocabularies, and digital object identifiers. He concluded by mentioning some of the partnerships developed with Australian Government agencies and requested that when agencies are planning their infrastructure they think about long-term collaboration with ANDS.

3.4 Members discussed the challenges of making data more available, the infrastructure required to do this, the benefits of planning and involving IT experts in the beginning and building systems that make it easy to repurpose. Open data was raised as being a catalyst for improvements and the open data tool kit will provide guidance on eGovernment and digital service standards and design.

Agenda Item 4 – ABS Information Transformation

4.1 Ms Jenine Borowik (ABS) provided context for the ABS information transformation program citing the increasing sophistication of data users, the rapid changes in technology, increasing costs and the difficulty of acquiring data, as well as the ABS's ageing infrastructure as some of the reasons for the transformation program. The transformation program will change how the ABS operates moving from statistical collection to information management. The program goals are: reducing the time and cost of doing business, making a sustainable future for the ABS, and growing the business with new products and services. The program will also deliver the first digital Census in 2016.

4.2 Foundation infrastructure is being developed such as a Metadata Registry & Repository and a Statistical Workflow Management System to reengineer statistical processes. Work on the first digital Census in Australia is also providing enterprise wide capabilities, such as the implementation of electronic forms in ABS business surveys and the development of Survey TableBuilder.

4.3 The ABS is also working collaboratively with other national statistical organisations internationally to develop common components of the statistical process which could be used on a 'plug and play' basis. In order to enable this collaboration, a Generic Statistical Infrastructure Model has been developed which provides a common language to describe information that supports the statistical production process. The lack of a common language has been a major barrier to effective international collaboration in the past.

4.4 Members discussed how this work will be useful to other government agencies and while different industries have their own information management models these common approaches were important. It was suggested the expert UN group looking at 'data revolution' as part of the sustainable development goals might be an opportunity for data standards to be recognised internationally. Ms Waugh requested that documentation on the plug and play components be placed on the open data tool kit when available (Action item 2). Ms Waugh also requested a copy of the paper on the international collaboration work the ABS is undertaking on modernisation activities which was mentioned in discussions (Action item 3).

Agenda Item 5 – Identifying Australia's Essential Statistical Infrastructure

5.1 Mr Peter Harper (ABS) provided a recap to AGSF members on the purpose of the *Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* initiative, which was to guide

government's investment in official statistics which were critically important to the nation, and updated members on the progress of Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the initiative. Phase 1 has already been completed with 74 statistical assets identified in the release of the 2013 list of Essential Statistical Assets last year.

5.2 Phase 2 of the initiative aims to assess the quality of the essential statistics on the 2013 list to understand how well the currently produced information meets the critical needs of users, highlighting areas for investment within existing statistics. The ABS has been working collaboratively with data custodians to help them assess their data quality. Overall data custodians have been highly supportive and good progress has been made in completing assessments. However it has taken more time than anticipated due to the need to follow-up with data custodians at times to clarify responses. The ABS plans to release the quality assessments for all 74 essential statistics at the end of this year and will work with data custodians in order to achieve this.

5.3 Phase 3 is being undertaken at the same time and aims to produce a list of underlying essential statistical infrastructure which enables the production, dissemination and use of the statistical assets. A discussion paper was released for consultation in February with feedback received from a good cross-section including Australian Government, State and Territory governments and other National Statistics Organisations. The feedback recognised that infrastructure was a harder topic to understand and that further refinement of the framework, the tiered approach and the criteria was required. The ABS is taking the feedback into account and is working on the more tangible elements and will build up the information base to expose the range of infrastructure available.

5.4 Members asked if a spreadsheet of assets was available so that a more interactive presentation could be developed such as a dashboard, Ms Waugh advised she could provide assistance in developing an interactive presentation (Action item 4). Members also suggested the list of Essential Statistical Assets be taken to the Data Efficiency Working Group as an example of work which is important and of high value for government (Action item 5).

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

6.1 The Chair invited members to share statistical updates:

- Ms Justine Boland (AIHW) advised AIHW has been working collaboratively with the Department of Health on a single data access portal.
- Mr Glen Malam (BITRE) noted their agency had been undertaking a lot of work on statistical standards for aviation.
- Ms Jenine Borowik (ABS) advised the ABS has reengaged with Standard Business Reporting and is interested in their plans on moving information securely from point A to point B.
- Mr Andre Zerger (BOM) advised of the Bureau's restructure including creating a new Information Systems and Services Division, he also advised a new CIO had been appointed. He noted the recent release of the National Environmental Information Infrastructure (NEII) Reference Architecture. The NEII proposes a network of standards-based IT components, supported by a network of collaborators working together to improve discovery, access and use of environmental data. Mr Zerger also promoted the Australian Government Environmental Information Advisory

Group which might be of interest to AGSF members and suggested AGSF members check the BOM website for more information.

- Ms Milly Lubulwa (ABARES) advised of the work ABARES has been doing with the ABS on the National Agricultural Statistics Review. The review is considering all aspects of the Australian agricultural statistical information system and the system's ability to inform decision making. It seeks to identify opportunities to improve the system and develop a framework for ongoing assessment, coordination and governance of information needs into the future.
- Mr Jason Ferris (Dept of Environment) advised the Department was working on the 2016 Australian State of the Environment Report. He also noted the Department had identified opportunities to reduce green tape with environmental assessments and would be collaborating with state and territory governments on bilateral agreements to progress initiatives.
- Mr Tim Neal (OSP) promoted GovHack 2014 on 11-13 July, noting it was becoming a key focus for government. GovHack is an event that draws together people from government, industry, academia and the general public to mashup, reuse, and remix government data. GovHack is about finding new ways to do great things with data and any statistical data could be released for it.
- Ms Pia Waugh (Dept of Finance) advised the Department had provided feedback on a Freedom of Information (FOI) review and had recommended that FOI disclosure logs be made machine readable.
- Ms Katy Balmaks (Dept of Human Services) advised the Australian Government Indigenous Programs & Policy Locations (AGIL) dataset had been made available on data.gov.au. It is an authoritative source of indigenous location names across Australia designed to support the accurate positioning, consistent reporting, and effective delivery of Australian Government programs and services to indigenous locations.
- Mr John Roe (Dept of Health) expanded on earlier comments about the collaborative work that had been undertaken with AIHW to make data more accessible, including providing a register of datasets and the formats they are available in.
- Mr Matt Power (ATO) advised the tax office was changing the way it is releasing taxation statistics on data.gov.au.
- Mr Scott Matheson (Dept of Employment) advised the Department was looking at issues surrounding hosting data on data.gov.au to determine how the portal could be utilised.

Agenda Item 7 - Other Business

7.1 No other business was raised.

Agenda Item 8 - Arrangements for Next Meeting

8.1 The next meeting is on Thursday 11 September and the proposed theme is "Statistical Capability Development". Members should contact Ms Cassy Short at the ABS <cassy.short@abs.gov.au> if they would like to present on this topic (Action item 6).

8.2 Members were also encouraged to provide feedback to Ms Short about these meetings and any future themes they would be interested in discussing (Action item 7).

Meeting Close

Action Items from this meeting

| Action Item | Description | Responsibility | Time-frame | Minute reference |
|-------------|---|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | AGSF members to contact Ms Pia Waugh if they are interested in belonging to any communities of interest the Department of Finance coordinates. Ms Waugh's contact details: < pia.waugh@finance.gov.au >. | AGSF members | As soon as practicable | 2.3 |
| 2 | 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 | As soon as practicable | 4.4 |
| 3 | Ms Borowik to send Ms Waugh a copy of the paper on the international collaboration work the ABS is undertaking on modernisation activities. | AGSF secretariat | As soon as practicable | 4.4 |
| 4 | ABS to collaborate with Ms Waugh to develop an interactive presentation of essential statistical assets. | Mr Harper | 2014 | 5.4 |
| 5 | 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 | 2014 | 5.4 |
| 6 | AGSF members to contact Ms Cassy Short < cassy.short@abs.gov.au > if they would like to present on "Statistical Capability Development" at the next AGSF meeting on Thursday 11 September 2014. | AGSF members | 1 August 2014 | 8.1 |
| 7 | AGSF members to provide feedback to Ms Short about these meetings and any future themes they would be interested in discussing. Ms Short's contact details: < cassy.short@abs.gov.au > or ph (03) 9615 7016. | AGSF members | As soon as practicable | 8.2 |

Action items from previous meetings

| Action Item | Description | Responsibility | Time-frame | Status |
|-------------|---|------------------------|------------|---|
| 1 | Mr Jackson to be invited to provide AGSF members with an update on ABR spatial and online developments in 2014. | AGSF secretariat | 2014 | To be arranged for Sept 2014 meeting |
| 2 | Pia Waugh's (Finance) presentation held over till next meeting. | AGSF Secretariat | 2014 | Completed |
| 3 | ABS to confirm whether the ABS report for the Department of Industry on Enterprise Connect could be made available to AGSF Members. | Bruce Hockman, ABS | 2014 | Anyone interested can contact Michael Beahan at the ABS for further information Email: <michael.beahan@abs.gov.au> Ph: (02) 6252 7007 |
| 4 | ABS to disseminate list of data integration projects to AGSF Members. | Cassandra Elliott, ABS | Dec 2013 | Completed |
| 5 | ABS to circulate ESA ASAC paper to AGSF Members. | AGSF Secretariat | Dec 2013 | Completed |
| 6 | AGSF Members to hold a meeting to discuss Commission of Audit and reductions to red tape. | AGSF Secretariat | 2014 | Waiting for the Government Response to the Commission of Audit |