

**Australian Government Statistical Forum
Summary Record
Tuesday 1 November 2012, ABS House, Canberra**

Theme: ***“Statistical Capability and Literacy”***

Chair Mr Brian Pink, Australian Statistician.

Members Mr Jonathan Palmer, Mr Trevor Sutton, Mr Peter Harper, Mr Ian Ewing, Mr Lewis Conn (ABS),
Mr David Dennis (DoHA),
Dr Scott Matheson (DEEWR),
Dr Judy Schneider (FaHCSIA),
Ms Teresa Dickinson (AIHW),
Ms Katy Balmaks (DHS),
Ms Helen Owens (OSP),
Ms Milly Lubulwa (ABARES),
Ms Therese Thompson (ABARES, proxy for Mr Walter Shafron),
Mr David Smith (DIAC, proxy for Ms Janice Wykes),
Mr Matt Power (ATO, proxy for Ms Julia Neville),
Ms Alison Anlezark (NCVER, proxy for Dr Tom Karmel),
Mr Marc Vickers (AGIMO, proxy for Ms Lorraine Watt),
Dr Godfrey Lubulwa (BITRE, proxy for Dr Gary Dolman),
Mr Mark Cully (DIISRTE, proxy for Mr Richard Snabel),
Mr Sebastian Lang (DSEWPaC, proxy for Dr Kathryn Collins).

Apologies Mr Tim Quinn (DRET), Mr Richard Snabel (DIISRTE), Mr Walter Shafron (ABARES), Ms Julia Neville (ATO), Dr Kathryn Collins (DSEWPaC), Ms Janice Wykes (DIAC), Mr David Kalisch (AIHW), Dr Tom Karmel (NCVER), Ms Lorraine Watt (AGIMO), Dr Gary Dolman (BITRE), Mr Warwick McDonald (BoM), Mr Rory King (DHS), Mr Geoff Armitage (BREE).

Presenters/
Observers/
Minutes ABS - Ms Melissa Gare, Ms Marie Apostolou, Ms Carolyn Verey, Ms Madeleine Shuey, Dr Caroline Blink.

Agenda Item 1 (a) – Welcome

1.1 Mr Brian Pink opened the meeting, acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land and paid respect to their elders, past and present. He also welcomed attendees and proxies, and noted member apologies. The summary record of the June 2012 meeting was accepted as a true record by members.

Agenda Item 1 (b) – Statistician's update

1.2 Mr Pink noted the second tranche of 2011 Census data had just been released. This release contained the more complex census variables such as industry, occupation and journey to work which require more detailed processing. He also noted the 2011 Census produced the highest ever quality counts and population estimates, with improvements in the undercount over previous Censuses.

1.3 Mr Pink highlighted the online engagement tool used in the Census campaign, Spotlight (www.spotlight.abs.gov.au), won Best in Show award at the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Australia Awards and went on to compete in international awards. The IAB is the peak trade association for online advertising in Australia. Mr Pink said this showcases the Australian Government's world class ability to take advantage of the digital world.

1.4 Mr Pink noted the first results from the Australian Health Survey had just been released earlier in the week, launched by the Minister for Health, Ms Tanya Plibersek MP and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Ageing, Ms Jane Halton. Over the next 12 months more detailed data will be progressively released from the survey, including the largest sample of biomedical measures ever collected in Australia becoming available to policy makers and researchers.

1.5 Mr Pink noted the ABS, along with the broader APS, continued to face significant fiscal challenges which is putting increased pressure on the ability to deliver on the work program.

1.6 Mr Pink also provided the following updates to members:

- ABS Basic Address Register – The ABS is looking at a new model for the 2016 Census and is setting up a basic address register drawing items from the Geocoded National Address File (G-NAF). The ABS is on track to meet the first milestone of having the basic address register implemented in time to support the August 2014 Census major test. The final goal will be to have the address register in place to support the enumeration of the 2016 Census.
- The Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia consultation phase is drawing to a close. The preliminary list and consultation paper were released on 29 May 2012 via the National Statistical Service (NSS) website. The closing date for the submissions was the 14th September 2012. To date the ABS has received strong engagement with this initiative with almost 90 submissions being received across all sectors.
- A Commonwealth Interdepartmental Meeting took place on 9 October to develop a Commonwealth viewpoint on the ESA initiative. This group has agreed to reconvene in January 2013 to discuss the revised ESA list and next steps.
- In February 2013, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) members will receive a list for endorsement and it is intended that the final list will be launched at NatStats in March 2013.
- NatStats 2013 – The key statistical conference for users and producers of statistics registrations are now open (<http://www.nss.gov.au/blog/natstats.nsf>). The conference will be held on March 12-14, 2013 in Brisbane. Mr Pink encouraged people to look at the program and to register early. The conference theme is 'A Better informed Australia: the role of statistics in building a nation' with Big Data as the conference sub-theme. Secured

speakers include: Jane Halton (DoHA), Clive Whincup (Westpac), Serena Wilson (FaHCSIA), Lin Hatfield Dodds (UnitingCare), Alan Smith (ONS), Ross Gittins (Sydney Morning Herald), Mary Ann O’Laughlin (CRC), Geoff Allen (Chair ASAC), Dan Gregory (The Pitch), Prof. Barry McGaw and Chief Scientist Ian Chubb.

- Next year, 2013, has been nominated as the International Year of Statistics. While NatStats will leverage off this event, Mr Pink encouraged other government agencies to think how they could showcase the importance of statistics.
- The ABS has recently release an app for ABS statistics with key data available including a range of economic indicators and Census data.

1.7 Mr Pink concluded by updating members on the Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board which oversees the use of data in the Commonwealth involving data integration from different sources. He advised members the ABS and the AIHW had received accreditation as Interim Integrating Authorities. He also provided feedback regarding two proposals which had been taken to the board recently. A state government department sought advice from the Board about their proposal and the Board considered the state legislative framework was not consistent with Commonwealth legislative requirements and therefore could not accept the proposal. The Board was also approached by a private company seeking endorsement. The Board considered that, as endorsement was not within the terms of reference of the Board, it was not appropriate to provide an endorsement.

Agenda Item 2 – Building Statistical Capability

2.1 Mr Jonathan Palmer (ABS) spoke of ABS future directions to build statistical capability. Mr Palmer explained the ABS viewed statistical capability as the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to effectively perform statistical tasks, both as data producers and also as policy developers. He acknowledged that this approach will allow the ABS to take a more strategic approach to meet the high level external demand for statistical skills.

2.2 Mr Palmer indicated ABS long term future directions included building partnerships with external bodies such as universities and other national statistical organisations, accrediting material as part of formal education, and establishing a statistical institute in Australia.

2.3 Mr Pink commented that no individual organisation can do this on its own and that must be a collaborative effort, where collectively we own the problem and find solutions. He indicated this was a long journey which had to be started now as while the volume of sophisticated data available is growing exponentially, the people with the skills to make use of this data and to interpret the data correctly is decreasing.

2.4 Members noted that this was a topic of interest to this forum and spoke of leverage points which might help in growing this initiative, such as the work Ian Chubb is doing as Chief Scientist and the work COAG is doing in increasing statistical understanding.

Agenda Item 3 – Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia: an update

3.1 Mr Peter Harper (ABS) outlined the purpose of the ESA for Australia initiative, noting the aim of the project was to identify the essential indicators of the state of the nation, identify information and quality gaps, and identify duplication or underutilisation. Mr Harper described the consultation process to date noting the positive interest from data custodians and the extension of the consultation period to December 2012 due to strong interest. He noted the ABS had received almost 90 submissions from Commonwealth, State government, industry and non-government organisations and other user groups.

3.2 Mr Harper discussed the key issues arising from consultation which included:

- the impact of statistics not on the list (Mr Harper stressed the list was about critical statistics and absence from the list did not suggest the data was unimportant).
- Governance of the list (Mr Harper noted the ABS' strong view that the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) is the most appropriate existing forum to endorse the list).
- the relative importance of the individual criterion used to develop the list and the use of the criteria and
- the need to understand future statistical requirements.

3.3 Mr Harper indicated the ABS was currently reviewing feedback prior to developing a revised list which would be discussed at a Commonwealth Interdepartmental Meeting in January 2013 before being taken to the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for endorsement. It is intended that the final list will be launched at NatStats 2013 in March 2013.

3.4 Mr Harper indicated the future phases of this initiative included quality assessment using the ABS data quality framework in collaboration with data custodians; identification of essential statistical infrastructure such as frames, registers, standards and classifications, etc.; and the identification of investment priorities.

3.5 Members were pleased with the serious approach the ABS was taking with the consultation process and raised questions on whether the ESA process would address future data needs. Mr Harper noted the process was a step in the right direction and would assist determining future data needs.

Agenda 4 – The power of longitudinal data for policy analysis

4.1 Dr Judy Schneider (FaHCSIA) showcased the benefits of longitudinal data analysis and how it can be used as a rich source of evidence for policy development. Dr Schneider outlined how longitudinal data shows the dynamics of causes and consequences, and can be used to evaluate policy programs. She also discussed some of the barriers to using longitudinal data including its resource intensive nature.

4.2 Dr Schneider raised the plans of the Longitudinal Studies Advisory Group to publish a handbook promoting longitudinal analysis and sought comments and examples of longitudinal studies from AGSF members.

4.3 Members discussed including advice on difficulties in running longitudinal studies in the handbook. These could include quality issues, sample size and attrition rate and costs, as well as the difficulties of analysis.

4.4 Members discussed examples of longitudinal studies in their own organisations and agreed to provide case study information (Action item 1). Members also noted the value of highlighting the importance of administrative data and data integration in providing richness to existing data sets, further supporting the case for longitudinal studies.

4.5 Members also raised ways of creating demand by policy makers for longitudinal studies, such as demonstrating how longitudinal studies can show how likely it is that new policy proposals will be effective or by providing policy makers with assurance they are asking the right questions to provide the right advice.

Agenda Item 5 – Confidentialisation of data

5.1 Ms Melissa Gare (ABS) updated members about the importance of confidentiality of data including the legal and ethical obligations of agencies. She outlined how confidentiality was more than just removing name and address information, but rather involved looking at other underlying features which may be used to identify an individual or organisation. Confidentiality was a balancing act to ensure useful information was released publically in such a way that people could not be identified.

5.2 Ms Gare highlighted the new way of working the ABS is developing for accessing and analysing microdata. Previously, the ABS had created a single file which had been confidentialised and then released to researchers (a Confidentialised Unit Record File or CURF). The ABS is now developing a Remote Execution Environment for Microdata (REEM) with new confidentialising procedures which allow a less skilled user to create on demand tabulation, using easy to use interfaces in products such as Survey Tablebuilder, which is then confidentialised at the output stage. This is a shift away from one confidentiality process and means confidentiality is tailored for each output.

Agenda Item 6 – Around the table: Statistical matters of significance

6.1 Mr Pink invited members to share statistical updates:

- Mr Sebastian Lang (DSEWPaC) informed members Minister Burke announced the National Sustainability Council and the Sustainability Indicators. The Council will be chaired by Mr John Thwaites with Mr Peter Harper from the ABS an ex-officio member.
- Mr Mark Cully (DIISTRE) mentioned DIISTRE is working with the ABS to improve the collection and coordination of firm level data. In support of this the department has asked The Melbourne Institute to produce a report which will be released soon.
- Mr David Smith (DIAC) mentioned DIAC is working on a longitudinal study of refugees, which uses administrative data, in consultation with stakeholders.
- Ms Helen Owens (OSP) informed members that negotiations with PSMA on the G-NAF are progressing well. The funding model is complex as while it is a small amount of money, the appropriation is whole of government and will come from across the Commonwealth.
- Ms Teresa Dickinson (AIHW) mentioned AIHW had gained their accreditation as an Interim Integrating Authority and were working with DoHA to get some projects off the ground quickly which linked jurisdictional data and Commonwealth data. Also, AIHW has recently released its flagship publication, *Australia's health 2012*.
- Ms Milly Lubulwa (ABARES) indicated that ABARES was working with the ABS on benchmarks for farm subsidies and also on the finalisation of the Wine Survey.
- Mr Matt Power (ATO) mentioned the Tax office is looking to build something similar to the ABS's table builder for tax data.
- Ms Alison Anlezark (NCVER) indicated NCVER is moving to collect more frequent data sets from annually to quarterly and is further developing data for the Commonwealth's My Skills website. NCVER is building a data portal. NCVER is also focussing on geocoding to enable better analysis of students in rural and regional Australia and more accurate measurement of socio-economic status. Finally, NCVER has been assisting the Commonwealth in developing a unique student identifier for vocational education and training.
- Mr Marc Vickers (AGIMO) mentioned a new strategy has been released and the focus has been on supporting the implementation and use of evidence based policy development. AGIMO is looking at how it can provide practical support and where the ICT blockages are.
- Mr David Dennis (DoHA) congratulated the ABS on the launch of the Australian Health Survey results and mentioned DoHA is working collaboratively to realise the full benefits of the data especially the biometrics. He noted that DoHA were transitioning data into an

enterprise data warehouse to manage the consolidation of health data. He mentioned that DoHA have engaged a consultant to develop a spatial strategy to geospatially enable administrative data sets.

- Dr Scott Matheson (DEEWR) noted the collaboration with the ABS on the PIAAC (Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies) survey, an OECD survey with 25 countries participating. Dr Matheson explained the survey looked at adult competencies around literacy, numeracy, problem solving and ICT usage with a major international report to be released in October 2013.

Agenda Item 7 – Other business

7.1 No other business was raised by members.

7.2 Mr Pink advised members that the proposed topic of the next meeting in 2013, was "*Spatially enabling data*". Mr Pink advised meeting dates for 2013 are to be confirmed, and a placemaker will be emailed to members.

Meeting close

Action Items

Action Item	Description	Responsibility	Time-frame	Minute reference
1	Members to provide case study information and examples of longitudinal studies in their own organisations to Dr Judy Schneider judy.schneider@fahcsia.gov.au .	AGSF members	As soon as practicable	Para 4.4