

Australian Government Statistical Forum (AGSF)

Summary Record

Wednesday 30 October 2013, ABS House, Canberra

Theme: **Statistical Data Integration**

Chair	Peter Harper, A/g Australian Statistician
Members	Jonathan Palmer, Bruce Hockman, Lewis Conn (ABS), Mark Cully (Industry), David Dennis (Health), Julia Neville (ATO), Sandra Pattison (NCVER), Janice Wykes (DIBP), Phil Anderson (AIHW, proxy for Teresa Dickinson), Beidar Cho (DSS, proxy for Judy Schneider), Godfrey Lubulwa (BITRE, proxy for Gary Dolman), Jason Reiner (DHS, proxy for Katy Balmaks).
Apologies	ABS - Brian Pink, Ian Ewing, Trevor Sutton Geoffrey Armitage (BREE), Katy Balmaks (DHS), Kathryn Collins (Environment), Teresa Dickinson (AIHW), Gary Dolman (BITRE), Stephen Kelly (DHS), Milly Lubulwa (ABARES), Scott Matheson (Employment), Louise Minty (BoM), Helen Owens (OSP), Judy Schneider (DSS), Walter Shafron (ABARES), Richard Snabel (Industry), Marc Vickers (AGIMO), Pia Waugh (Finance).
Presenters/ Observers/ Minutes	Matthew Squire (Industry), Jay Wilton (Industry) ABS - Christine Williams, Paul Jelfs, Bindi Kindermann, Michael Abbondante, Marie Apostolou, Katie Timmins, Caroline Blink.

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 also welcomed attendees and proxies, and noted member apologies. The summary record of the May 2013 meeting was accepted as a true record by members. Note, while the agenda was rearranged on the day, for ease of understanding the minutes reflect the original order.

Agenda Item 1 (b) - Statistician's Update

1.2 Mr Harper advised the meeting that the biomedical information on diagnosed and undiagnosed diabetes from the Australian Health Survey (AHS) had now been released. The AHS represents ground-breaking work for the ABS

including for the first time biomedical, pedometer data, adult sitting time and children's screen based activity and household rules. Another important component of the AHS had been a large-scale survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and Mr Harper noted that the first results from this component will be released on 27 November 2013.

1.3 Mr Harper highlighted that Measures of Australia's Progress would be published on 14 November 2013. This release was the result of one of the ABS's most extensive public consultation and expert reference group campaigns. The combined efforts of users and data providers ensured that Measures of Australia's Progress continues to position Australia as a world leader in providing a holistic framework for measuring what's important to a nation.

1.4 Mr Harper provided an update on the ABS's plans for Census 2016, noting the ABS is planning substantial changes to the way it will conduct the next Census. The 2016 Census will be the first predominantly digital Census for Australia, with the electronic form the primary mode of response. The new approach will involve a mail-out contact for the majority of Australians, rather than a Census collector knocking on the door. However, the ABS would still use the traditional methods of delivering forms to households in areas where mail-out had been identified as impractical or where another method would deliver better results. The enumeration of a test in August of 20,000 dwellings in Geelong was recently completed successfully. More tests are planned for 2014 and 2015 and the ABS is also talking with Canada and New Zealand to learn from their electronic Census experiences.

1.5 In preparation for the 2016 Census, the ABS had received close to one thousand submissions in response to the public consultation regarding the nature and content of the Census which is a very pleasing response. While the majority of current topics would be retained for the 2016 Census, a small number are being reviewed with a view to improving data quality. The ABS received many submissions suggesting new topics, although the capacity to satisfy these requests is limited by the available space on the paper form and whether they meet the criteria for suitability. Summaries of the content and themes emerging from the submissions were published on the ABS website in September 2013. The final topic recommendations will go to Government in mid-2014 for decision.

1.6 Mr Harper updated members on the ABS's Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia initiative. The ESA for Australia initiative, which has been previously discussed at this forum, has continued to progress since the last meeting, and is likely to continue to grow in importance and relevance as the ongoing fiscal environment for the public service continues to require agencies to prioritise their investment to those activities that deliver the greatest benefits for the community, that are critical in supporting government decision making and service delivery. Further details about ESA are provided under Agenda Item 6.

1.7 Mr Harper noted that the ABS, like most other government departments, is under significant budget pressures. The challenge of meeting these savings is made even harder with the ABS's ageing and increasingly fragile statistical infrastructure. Without further financial support, the ABS will need to reduce the statistical work program to match its appropriation. In implementing any changes to the work program, the ABS will be consulting with key stakeholders in order to find ways to prioritise these impacts.

1.8 Mr Harper noted that, 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 Harper noted that one of the ABS's activities around the 2013 International Year of Statistics, which encourages the recognition of the importance of statistics on all aspects of our society, included a debate where Jonathan Palmer and he would argue *Are data scientists the new rock stars*. This will be a humorous debate, but one which also celebrates the importance of statistics, statisticians and statistical organisations in informing the nation. Mr Harper hoped that other members' organisations had found a way to acknowledge and celebrate the International Year of Statistics.

1.10 AGSF Members discussed the new ABS Minister and the Commission of Audit, noting the need to promote the message around the value of good statistical systems and metrics of government expenditure. Mr Harper confirmed the ABS Minister was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, the Hon Mr Steven Ciobo MP. Mr Harper noted that the Commission of Audit was a useful way of promoting the need for good metrics and that the ABS had been discussing the need for Whole of Government coordination to ensure the effectiveness of the statistical system, which was a focus of ASAC and the ABS's Crisp Revisited work. The Commission of Audit was also discussed under Agenda Item 8.

Agenda Item 2 - Big and Open Data

2.1 Due to unforeseen circumstances Ms Pia Waugh (Department of Finance) could not attend the meeting. Her presentation has been held over for the next AGSF meeting (Action Item 1).

Agenda Item 3 - Data Integration at the AIHW

3.1 Dr Phil Anderson (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)) provided information on AIHW's role and experience as one of the two Accredited Integrating Authorities (ABS being the other) within Australia. AIHW has been involved in data integration since the mid-1990s and has noticed an

increasing pressure for data integration projects, which are becoming more complex within the health and welfare space.

3.2 Dr Anderson noted that AIHW had set up a new separate computer system, secure area and data laboratory for data integration work using. The security of this new environment will enable AIHW to work on larger linkage projects, although there have been challenges during the transition period. Mr Anderson also highlighted a range of recent linkage projects that had been approved and provided details of a number of data integration projects AIHW is currently involved with, such as the Hospital Dementia Services Project and the Diabetes Care Pilot.

3.3 AGSF Members noted that AIHW offers data integration as a service and asked how AIHW provides data back to its clients. Mr Anderson noted that for high risk data integration projects, access to data is provided within a secure environment, so clients can either access this data onsite or view the results through SURE (Secure Unified Research Environment, developed and managed by the Sax Institute). If a project is not high risk, then data can be provided to clients, if that is agreed by the data custodians.

Agenda Item 4 - Evaluating the Impact of Enterprise Connect Core Services

4.1 Mark Cully (Department of Industry) presented on its Enterprise Connect project, which involves a support program by the Commonwealth to lift business performance for small and medium established businesses. Working with the ABS, Industry officers are currently evaluating the impact of this program on recipient businesses' financial performance using linked data from its project, the ABS and Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Mr Cully noted that there were a few limitations with its study, specifically the difficulty of evaluating what would have happened to the business in the absence of intervention as well as selection bias as firms opt into the project.

4.2 Mr Cully highlighted the results, which indicated that businesses receiving a Business Review (BR), on average, increased their performance by more than otherwise similar firms that did not receive assistance. In addition, clients that received further support through Tailored Advisory Services grants increased their performance by more than those that received just the BR.

4.3 In response to questions, Mr Cully noted the Department of Industry were running a separate project to try and identify the impact of the selection bias on the results, specifically comparing the profile of enterprises involved in the project compared to all in scope organisations. Mr Cully commented that determining how much of the improvement seen in businesses that was directly due to involvement in the Enterprise Connect project would require a different study. A paper describing the results of the analyses run by the ABS on Industry's behalf held additional details regarding distribution but this paper was

not publically available. The ABS noted it would look into whether this paper could be made available under the terms of the agreement (Action Item 2).

Agenda Item 5 - Unlocking the Full Potential of Nationally-Important Datasets

5.1 Christine Williams (ABS) presented on ABS data integration projects (such as Census Data Enhancement projects and the Migrant Personal Income Tax Project), as well as the challenges and opportunities of integrating data within a framework of strict confidentiality protocols. Ms Williams also spoke about the policy benefits of data integration, particularly when linking data over time, such as with the Statistical Census Longitudinal Dataset which allows comparison of changes in people's lives over time, as well as changes in policies.

5.2 Ms Williams also reported on an ABS methodological study which explored the quality of data produced by probabilistic matching of records compared to name and address matched records, which raise the most privacy concerns. The results indicated that all methods produce data which is fit for the purpose of policy analysis. Ms Williams also noted that the ABS has a large number of data integration projects underway and planned, and that a revised list of projects would be disseminated to AGSF members when it is available (Action Item 3).

5.3 In response to AGSF Members questions, both ABS and AIHW noted that they are working in different fields, have different expertise and offer different products, so the choice of Integrating Authority would depend on the nature of the data integration project. The ABS has access to a wide variety of datasets that AIHW does not and has staff with expertise in a broad range of subject areas, whereas AIHW has considerable expertise in health, community services and housing data and research, and is able to provide access to deidentified data, which may or may not be confidentialised as required by the data custodians.

5.4 AGSF Members also commented on the difficulty of gaining access to data held and integrated by the ABS in a timely fashion. Mr Harper noted that ABS legislation made the restrictions on access necessary to ensure privacy and confidentiality but noted that if ABS administrative processes were unduly difficult then the ABS was happy to review these with clients. Ms Williams noted the investment being made by the ABS in developing microdata access products such as Survey TableBuilder and Data Analyser. Mr Harper also noted that finite resources limited the ABS's ability to progress data integration projects but if additional funding was made available, the ABS was happy to discuss additional projects.

5.5 AGSF Members asked whether data integration projects were duplicating the efforts of some of the ongoing Australian longitudinal survey studies. Both ABS and AIHW noted that while longitudinal survey studies have their place, over time both cost and maintaining sample size will become more of a problem

for these studies, and that data integration has the potential to build a picture of Australian society over time based on multiple data sources.

Agenda Item 6 - Essential Statistical Assets for Australia

6.1 Lewis Conn (ABS) spoke about Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia, outlining the different phases and progress made on the initiative. Mr Conn noted that Phase 1 was completed in March 2013 with the release of the 2013 list of [Essential Statistical Assets for Australia](#) (Cat. No. 1395.0) and phases 2, 3 and 4 are currently underway. Phase 2 aims to assess the quality of the essential statistics on the 2013 list, while Phase 3 aims to produce a list of underlying essential statistical infrastructure. Phase 4 is being progressed through Crisp Revisited, a program being led by ASAC and the ABS, which aims to enhance the statistical governance across the statistical system.

6.2 Mr Conn noted that the Quality Assessments being undertaken would focus on an assessing the quality of each dataset associated with an Essential Statistical Asset based on the ABS's Data Quality Framework. These assessments would then be combined to create a traffic light indicator of the overall quality of the Asset itself. For phase 3, Mr Conn noted that the first cut of the Essential Statistical Infrastructure list would be presented to ASAC in November 2013. He noted that after this, the ABS would be happy to circulate this paper to interested AGSF members for comment (Action Item 4).

6.3 In response to AGSF Members comments, Mr Conn noted that there were plans to provide a commentary on each traffic light indicator produced that would provide context to the ratings given. It was noted that the assessment was being kept at the Asset level to overcome some of the challenges noted by AGSF Members and it would be made clear that these reflect a moment in time. Information about data quality at the dataset level would stay with the data custodians and provide them with information about the quality of their data. Mr Conn also noted that the list would cover all aspects of the statistical cycle and that the ESA initiative was a proactive strategy to bring out the issues within the statistical system and find ways of resolving them in a consultative way. It also enabled the provision of support across the National Statistical System for data quality improvements.

Agenda Item 7 - Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance

7.1 Mr Harper invited members to share statistical updates:

- Ms Julia Neville (ATO) noted that the ATO was about to start pulling data together for Taxation Statistics (<http://www.ato.gov.au/About-ATO/Research-and-statistics/Our-statistics/Taxation-statistics/>). If any AGSF Members had any questions they were interested in being included in the next release to contact her. Ms Neville also noted the ATO was facing some legislative changes as there was a new rule requiring the

publication of turnover data for multinational offshore income as well as rules for publishing small datasets. There is also a push to remove some people from the tax system, where individuals are no longer lodging tax returns, which would make a break in the Personal Income Tax (PIT) data series.

- Ms Janice Wykes (Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP)) noted that *Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Survey of Humanitarian Migrants* (<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lsrcm/>) had just gone into the field. DIBP are also working on a citizenship survey and are looking into updating their sample frame to take deaths into consideration, possibly by using the National Death Index held by AIHW.
- Mr Bruce Hockman (ABS) noted that the Economic and Environment Statistics Group would be undertaking a review of their standard work program shortly and would be consulting with key clients about this in the next few months.
- Ms Beidar Cho (Department of Social Services (DSS)) noted that DSS is currently working to improve the collection and dissemination of both payments data from Centrelink administrative data and programs data collected from service providers. A major development in the payments space is the ongoing development of the Longitudinal Data Capability. This links information about a client longitudinally within the Centrelink database allowing views of how people move through the welfare system. DSS is also undertaking a review of the type and consistency of programs data to improve the quality of collected information. Improving this data will potentially allow it to be linked to the payments information to create a rich source of knowledge about the interaction between programs and payments.
- Ms Sandra Pattison (National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research (NCVER)) noted there would be regulatory changes regarding vocational data collection to allow collection of data from all programs and not just those that are government funded. NCVER had also been in discussion with government regarding the introduction of a unique student identifier nationally. However, these discussions had been impacted by Machinery of Government changes and the tabling of new privacy legislation.
- Mr Phil Anderson (AIHW) noted that AIHW has released Australia's Health (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422172>) and *Australia's Welfare* (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129543825>). AIHW has increased the number of reports being released in various formats as web pages on their website. AIHW is also rolling out its data validator to include more national data collections

enabling data providers to lodge their data securely with AIHW and receive automated reports indicating if the data meets agreed standards and formats.

- Dr Godfrey Lubulwa (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE)) reported that BITRE released *Yearbook 2013 - Australian Infrastructure Statistics* (http://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/2013/yearbook_2013.aspx) in October. This publication provides a comprehensive evidence base to inform policy development and regulatory reform in the transport, energy, water and communications sector, which includes 300 pages of statistical tables. Dr Lubulwa noted that BITRE would be consulting with stakeholders about the information included within the yearbook to determine additional content for future releases.
- Mr David Dennis (Department of Health) noted the transfer of Ageing to DSS and that Health would be gifting DSS with a spatially enabled database of aged care facilities that it had built up over a number of years, which comes with some responsibilities for the ABS's Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC). Health now has a fully operational Enterprise Data Warehouse which has been populated with a number of health collections for use by regulatory agencies. Health is developing the capability for integrating these collections for statistical purposes. Health was also undergoing a number of structural changes, including consolidating data collection functions which will help improve synergies with data. Mr Dennis also noted that all data custodians should be interested in developing internal protocols around data release and sharing.

Agenda Item 8 - Other Business

8.1 Mr Harper called for any other business.

8.2 Discussion by AGSF Members touched on a number of issues, including the impact of machinery of government changes on data custodianship, as well as the challenges and opportunities for data sharing while developing protocols with new departments.

8.3 AGSF Members also discussed the impact of the Commission of Audit, as well as the new Government's commitment to reduce red tape by \$1 billion through deregulation, on the collection of administrative datasets. As much of administrative data is a by-product of regulation, AGSF Members noted the importance of emphasising to providers and Government the value and importance of administrative data as part of the evidence base for policy development and program delivery, as well as noting how deregulation may impact upon these data sources. AGSF Members suggested a separate meeting be held to further discuss these issues (Action Item 5).

Agenda Item 9 - Arrangements for Next Meeting

9.1 In closing, Mr Harper noted the value of the information shared by Members about the statistical priorities of their agencies and the work they are currently undertaking. As such, the ABS would like to implement some governance changes to ensure AGSF meetings remain relevant and focussed on the key issues.

9.2 Mr Harper noted that the ABS would also like to rotate the chairing of these meetings between the Deputy Australian Statisticians, envisaging that ABS membership at these meetings would align with the topic under discussion but with continuity ensured through the secretariat. Mr Harper also indicated that the Australian Statistician would still be presenting the Statistician's Report at these meetings.

9.3 AGSF Members agreed with the proposed changes.

9.4 Mr Harper noted the meeting dates for next year would be confirmed shortly and the proposed theme for the next meeting was "Information Management Strategies".

Meeting Close

Action Items

Action Item	Description	Responsibility	Time-frame	Minute reference
1	Pia Waugh's (Finance) presentation held over till next meeting.	AGSF Secretariat	2014	2.1
2	ABS to confirm whether Industry report can be made available to AGSF Members.	Bruce Hockman, ABS	2014	4.3
3	ABS to disseminate list of data integration projects to AGSF Members.	Cassandra Elliott, ABS	Dec 2013	5.2
4	ABS to circulate ESA ASAC paper to AGSF Members.	AGSF Secretariat	Dec 2013	6.2
5	AGSF Members to hold a meeting to discuss Commission of Audit and reductions to red tape.	AGSF Secretariat	2014	8.3