



Accessing ABS Microdata for Enhanced Policy Development - ABS Perspective

Australian Government
Statistical Forum
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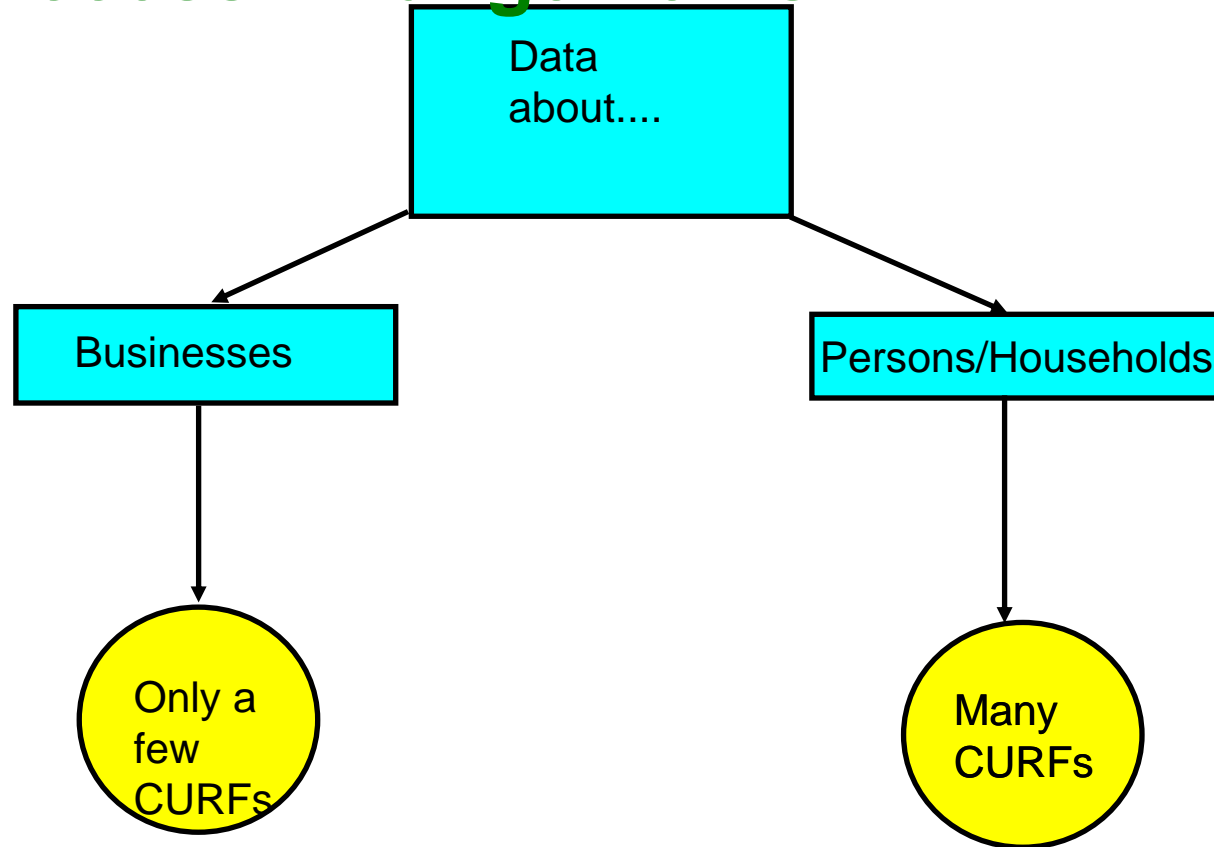
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Some General Principles

- The ABS must, by necessity, apply a conservative approach to releasing microdata
 - it is critically important to the ABS' mission that it maintain the trust of providers of statistical information by treating the information they supply in confidence
 - otherwise, the quality and rate of response to our surveys will suffer immensely
 - for these reasons, access to microdata is only granted on a very limited and restricted basis
- Nevertheless, the ABS recognises the importance of microdata to debate on some areas of public policy
- The challenge is to strike the right balance between these opposing tensions

Overview of Past ABS Microdata Access Arrangements

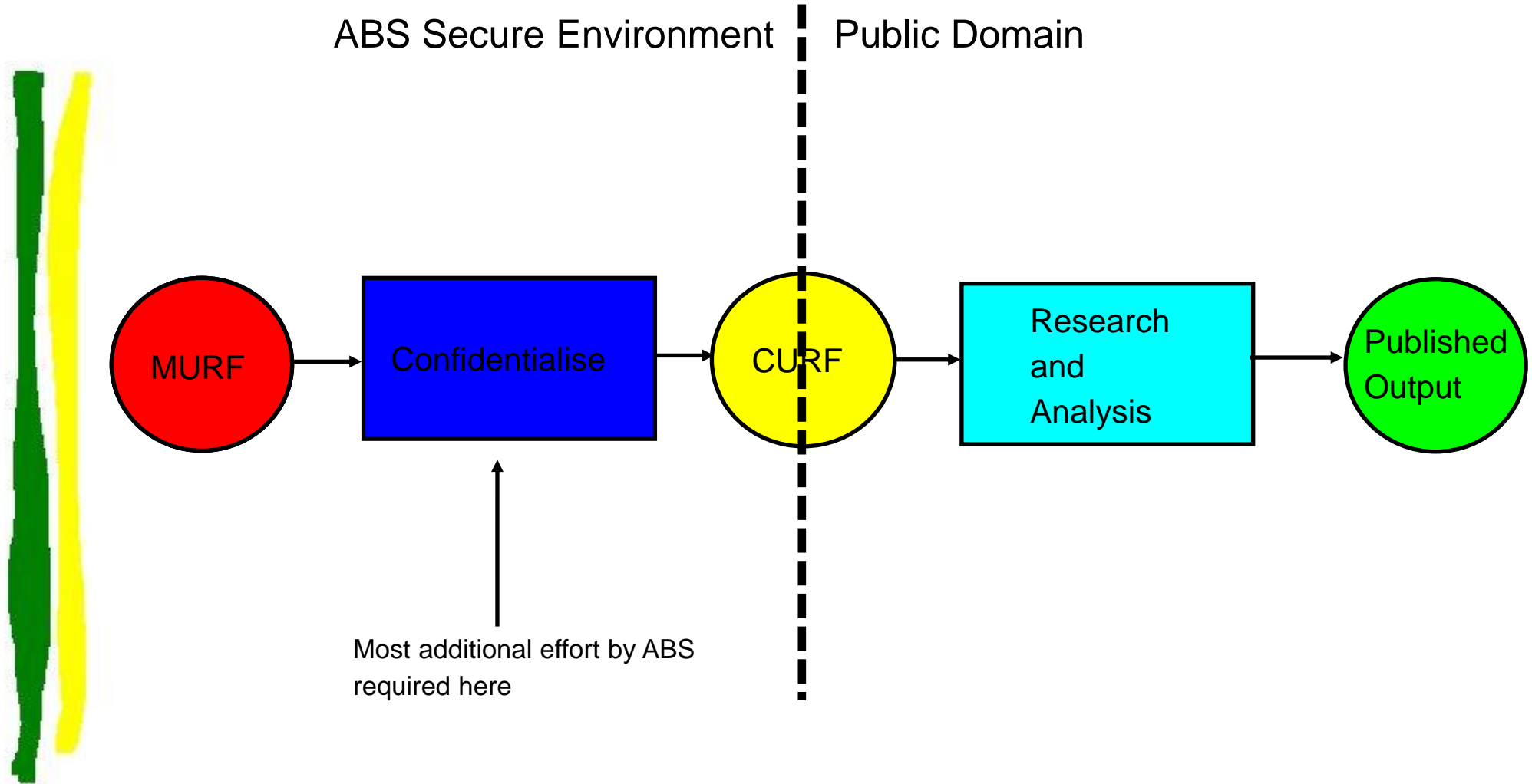


Most output is in the form of aggregated data
Rare examples = BLS, Innovation, BLD

Nearly every household survey produces a CURF as part of its standard outputs



Traditional CURF Arrangement



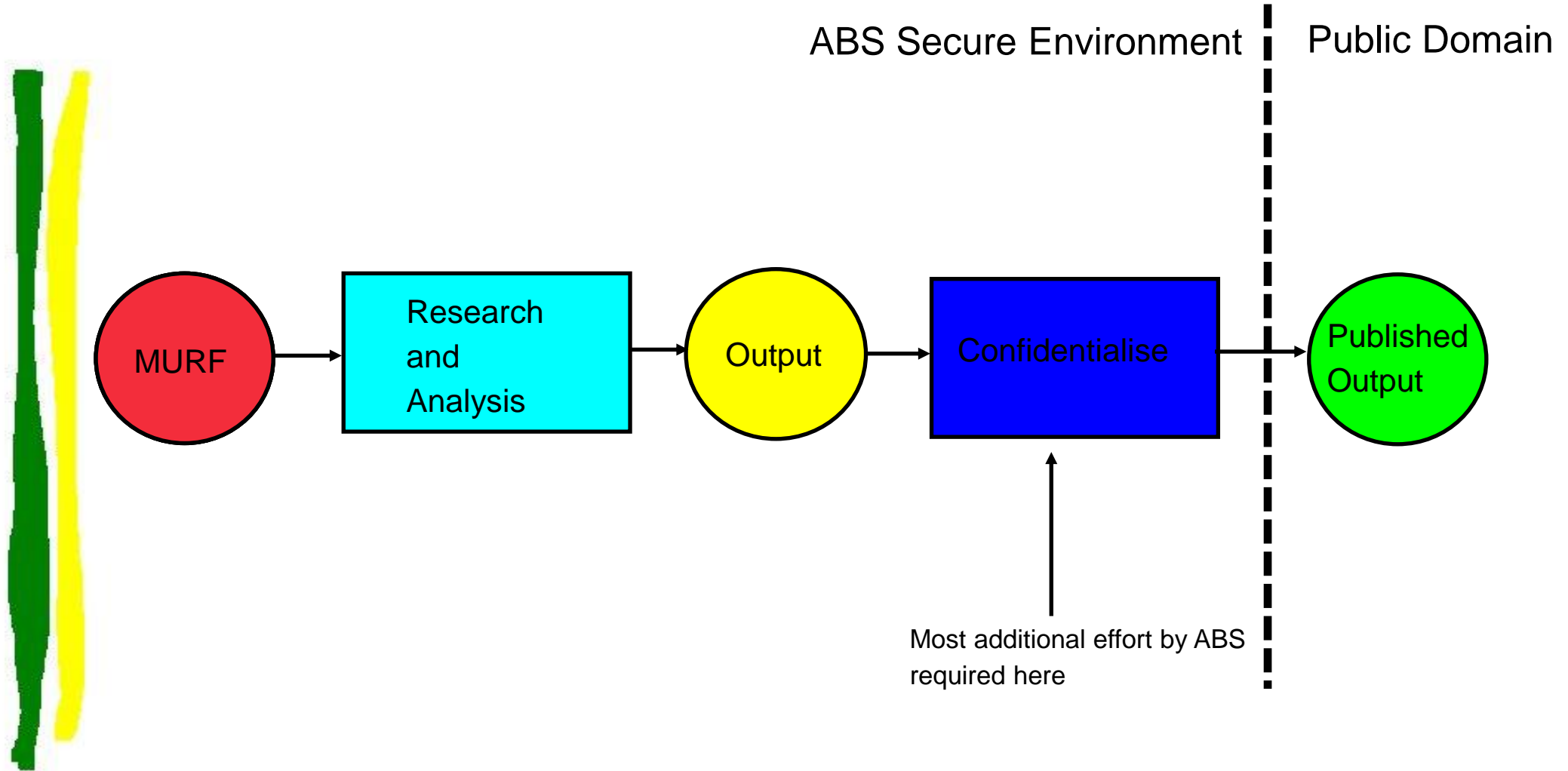


Recent Developments with Business Microdata

- The ABS has recently embarked upon five pilot projects
 - they provide access to selected business microdata
 - to researchers in government agencies (or who work on behalf of government agencies)
 - we call them 'Analytical Collaboration' projects
 - they are fundamentally different to the arrangements for access to microdata which have been used in the past



Under an Analytical Collaboration





The Five Pilot Analytical Collaborations

Agency	Dataset	Purpose
ABARE	Agriculture Census/Survey	Changes in farm management behaviour as a result of the drought
BTRE	Motor Vehicle Usage	Investigate disparities in data compared to other sources
Productivity Commission	Agriculture Census Water Survey Land Management & Salinity	Examine the link between water use, salinity, land management and farm performance
DITR	Innovation 2003	Analysis of innovation behaviour in Australian Business, and feedback on survey
UNISA (on behalf of SA govt)	Innovation 2003	Identify causes of innovation, recommend changes for future surveys





Legislative Authority

- Section 16(a) of the ABS Act enables secondment of government officials "to assist in the carrying out of the functions of the Statistician."
- Statistics Determination Clause 7(a) allows for the disclosure of identifiable business information to anyone "to assist the Statistician".



Conditions for Microdata Access via an Analytical Collaboration

- Each case must be formally approved by the Australian Statistician
- All main identifiable information (ie name and address) is removed
- Must clearly demonstrate that the results of the project will assist the Statistician in carrying out his functions eg
 - informing debate about public policy
 - improving design of future surveys.



Conditions (cont'd)

- People granted access are required to sign legally enforceable undertakings
 - not to use data for any other purposes (including linking with other datasets) or
 - disclose confidential information to anyone else
 - severe penalties apply.
- The number of projects is limited by ABS capacity to support them (costs of support are relatively high)
- May involve recovery of some of the costs of providing the access
- If results the work are to be published, this is usually as a joint publication in the first instance



Impressions So Far

- Still early days for all projects, ie impacts on policy yet to be realised
- some initial problems with costs, timing, procedures and facilities => being improved gradually
- generally been a positive experience for the ABS staff involved
- very much improved client engagement
- greater understanding of the complexity of ABS data structures and importance of meaningful metadata
- greater appreciation of the cultural differences between agencies, especilly at publication stage
- very useful feedback for the design of future surveys.