

AGSF 20 May 2010, Minutes

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

20 May 2010

Chair:	Brian Pink, Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
Present:	Brian Pink, Dennis Farrell, Ian Ewing, Peter Harper, Garth Bode, Frank Yu, Jeanette Cotterill (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Milly Lubulwa (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Teresa Dickinson (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Mark Cully (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), Mark Cousins (Centrelink), Carol Ey (Dept of Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs), Peter Thomson (Medicare Australia), Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Ageing), Tony Hunter (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Richard Snabel (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Scott Wallace (Australian Government Information Management Office, Department of Finance and Deregulation), Sebastian Lang (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts), Victor Dobbs (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Kane Travers (Australian Taxation Office), Ben Searle (Australian Government Office of Spatial Data Management), Ann Steward (Australian Government Information Management Office)
Apologies:	Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services), Gary Dolman (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government),
Speakers:	Siu-Ming Tam, Simon Wall (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Ann Steward (Australian Government Information Management Office), Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Ageing)
Secretariat:	Marie Apostolou, Sarah Whelan, Narelle Sykes (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Record of Discussion and Actions arising

Meeting Summary

Actions Arising

1. ABS to circulate the Community Trust in Official Statistics collection instrument to AGSF representatives.
2. Simon Wall (ABS) to demonstrate Data Quality Online to the State Statistical Forum on Wednesday morning 26 May - Completed.
3. Ben Searle from Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM) and Simon Wall (ABS) to discuss the Data Quality Online tool and progress in data quality within the geospatial community.
4. Next meeting to include update from Greg Coombs on progress from the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSIC) meeting.

Record of Discussion

Agenda Item 1. Statistician's update

1. Mr Pink welcomed members and accepted the minutes from the meeting held 9 November 2009. He noted that the action items were completed.
2. As part of the Statisticians update, Mr Pink informed the group that The Economic Society of Australia and Department of Treasury are hosting Nobel economist Prof. Joseph E. Stiglitz (author of the Report of the commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress) who will visit Canberra for two days in August 2010. Professor Stiglitz will visit the Treasury and will conduct open seminars in Melbourne and Sydney.
3. Mr Pink informed the forum that Geoff Lee (ABS) is leading international collaboration in information standards with selected National Statistical Offices (NSOs). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will host a workshop in June 2010 bringing together experts to discuss statistical infrastructure and metadata standards. There are significant international (and national) opportunities if NSO's pool efforts, by committing to share the development costs of statistical infrastructure, tools and standards. The international benefits are expected to flow through to benefits within the Australian statistical environment.
4. Mr Pink mentioned the Moran Review in terms of reinforcing and supporting the work occurring in information sharing across the Australian Public Service (APS), for example the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee's (CPSIC) role in developing data integration principles. Other opportunities for statistical and information data sharing will emerge from the review.
5. Mr Pink highlighted the extension of the Australian Health Survey and media interest in this survey. Mr Pink noted that the biggest challenge for the ABS regarding the expanded work program is finding sufficient skilled staff to deliver on the new initiatives.

Agenda Item 2 Statistical Issues arising from Government Initiatives

a. NatStats 2010 Conference, Sydney 15-17 September

6. Ms Cotterill provided an update on the NatStats 2010 Conference <http://www.abs.gov.au/http://www.nss.gov.au/> and announced that registrations are now open. The overall theme for the conference is "Measuring what counts: economic development, well being and progress in 21st century Australia". The conference will explore drivers of economic and related social change that are shaping Australia's progress. Ms Cotterill advised that the conference will promote better use and sharing of resources. Some confirmed speakers include the Hon. Nick Sherry, Assistant Treasurer; Dr Ken Henry, AC, Secretary, Department of the Treasury; Hon. Dr Geoff Gallop, AC,

Professor and Director, Graduate School of Government, University of Sydney; and Paul Cheung, Director, Statistics Division, United Nations. For a full list of confirmed speakers, program and registration information, please visit <http://www.nss.gov.au/natstats2010> or email natstats@nss.gov.au.

7. NatStats 2010 will aim to build on the work done at NatStats08. The conference will produce a set of Conference Recommendations, which will lead to practical actions that can be taken by participants to shape the future National Statistical Service (NSS). Poster sessions will also be held to allow wider participation in the conference, with presenters showcasing areas of research or work that are aligned with the themes of the conference. Ms Cotterill advised that the NatStats board members are: Ian Ewing (ABS), Denis Farrell (ABS), Jeanette Cotterill (ABS), Chris Libreri (ABS), Tony McDonald (Federal Treasury), Peter Horn (NSW Treasury), James Holloway (Reserve Bank) and Mike Salvaris (RMIT).

8. Ms Cotterill noted that the ABS is hoping for strong representation from all sectors including Commonwealth agencies. Ms Cotterill also highlighted that agency support could be provided through taking advantage of NatStats 2010 sponsorship opportunities. Mr Pink endorsed the conference as being focused on policy and not just statistics.

b. Community Trust in ABS Statistics

9. Dr Siu-Ming Tam provided an overview of the OECD initiative in measuring Community Trust in Official Statistics. The ABS has led and supported this work by developing a trust framework and undertaking a cognitive pilot of the international instrument in Australia to measure community trust in ABS statistics. AGSF discussed and expressed interest in adopting the questionnaire developed for the international survey for measuring trust in official statistics across Commonwealth agencies as well as measuring trust in government service delivery.

10. The survey is intended to be an international instrument with many countries to participate. Comments were shared regarding the UK situation and mistrust of statistics which has developed over a long period. It was discussed that trust is difficult to build and when trust is lost it takes a long time to rebuild. The results of the Australian survey are to be submitted to the OECD Statistics Committee by November 2010. They are to be tabled and discussed at the 2011 meeting, which will look at the outcomes and plan a way forward. The committee may change the survey to try to suit the context to fit the majority of countries.

11. Dr Tam suggested that if the instrument is being developed for the ABS to pilot then perhaps it may be made available for other agencies. An external consultant has been engaged to undertake the survey to ensure independence of the process. Dr Tam agreed to make available the survey instrument to the AGSF. (Action Item 1)

c. Demonstration of Data Quality Online Tool

12. Mr Simon Wall demonstrated the Data Quality Online tool now publicly available

through the National Statistical Service website. AGSF was interested in the potential for use of the Data Quality Framework and (online) tool across the APS. The Data Quality Online tool was developed to assist data collectors, suppliers and users in drafting data quality statements. The tool applies the ABS Data Quality Framework by guiding the user through a range of questions and providing an opportunity to download progress at any stage, via XML or PDF format. The tool also provides a range of useful resources and further information on the ABS Data Quality Framework to assist users. The online tool assists users to make informed decisions that are fit for purpose.

13. The tool has two main streams; general purpose and COAG for Information Performance Indicators within the National Reporting Framework. The COAG stream is available publicly now; the general purpose stream is to move through another phase of user consultation and feedback prior to release at the end of the financial year.

14. The tool is currently being tested and refined prior to the next release. Mr Wall demonstrated features of the tool and displayed the Data Quality statement completed by using the tool. The tool enables the user to seek assistance from Data Quality experts. It was noted that published ABS statistics include a data quality declaration.

15. Some agencies have established data quality teams to improve data quality, however, it was noted that the main area for improvement was in the quality of administrative data. Agencies are working on this to ensure that administrative data is also fit for statistical or analytical purpose. Ben Searle (Office of Spatial Data Management, OSDM) and Simon Wall (ABS) agreed to arrange a meeting to discuss the approach adopted by OSDM and the ABS to ensure a complementary and aligned approach. It was noted that many State government agencies are also establishing data quality teams.

16. Action Items arising:

- Simon Wall (ABS) to demonstrate Data Quality Online to the State Statistical Forum on Wednesday morning 26 May - Completed. (Action item 2)
- Ben Searle from Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM) and Simon Wall (ABS) to discuss the Data Quality Online tool and progress in data quality within the geospatial community. (Action item 3)

d. Update on Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration (CSDI) Pilot Project

17. Mr Peter Robertson, Department of Human Services (DHS) was unable to attend the meeting, and provided a statement that was read out by Mr Pink at the end of the meeting:

18. The Strategic Priorities and Budget Committee of Cabinet has decided that the CSDI Program must be fully offset. There were a number of options that were considered. The most expensive option was \$35 million over four years, that would be rolled out in a partnership arrangement with ABS, GeoScience Australia (GA) and Dept of Human Services (DHS).

19. In effect, there has been no decision to fund the ongoing program and the DHS Minister is considering other options for funding the program.

20. Together with GeoScience Australia, the Dept of Human Services is finalising the second pass Business case, which will be lodged with the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) and will form the basis of any future program.

21. The Minister is considering alternative funding options, but he has already indicated that it will be brought forward again when the fiscal environment improves.

Agenda Item 3. Update on Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee - Principles for Statistical Integration across Australian Government Agencies

22. Mr Greg Coombs (DOHA) outlined that there is an increased demand for statistical integration to assist with evidence-based policy, program monitoring, evaluation and capacity building under the Population Health Research Network (PHRN). To meet policy challenges, the Commonwealth Government is seeking to meet demand for high quality data through the integration of information from several administrative and statistical sources. Greater statistical data integration will enable significant cost reductions in evidence-based advice and the development of a new range of official statistics. The integration is required for tracking effectiveness and improving precision around COAG indicators. Health has started developing integration frameworks with the University and Education sectors also showing interest in the framework. These groups see integration as a great opportunity for improving research. It is imperative that the states invest in this and there has been a high level of interest in the Health data linkage initiative.

23. Recognising that many challenges do not fit neatly within individual portfolios and the importance of establishing a common framework for statistical integration, the Commonwealth Portfolio Secretaries established the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSIC) in April 2009. The committee is jointly chaired by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

24. The first stage of the Committee's work involved the development of seven high level principles for statistical data integration across the Australian Government. These principles provide a framework for data integration for statistical and research purposes, while recognising information as a strategic resource and the accountability of data custodians. The framework also nominates an integrating authority to be responsible for each statistical integration proposal and recognised, that integration provides significant benefits. The need to minimise risk and implement appropriate governance mechanisms is also highlighted.

25. The Commonwealth Portfolio Secretaries endorsed this set of principles on 3 February 2010. The next stage of work is currently underway with consideration of appropriate institutional and governance arrangements in line with these principles with recommendations to be presented to Portfolio Secretaries in August 2010. Consultation with a range of stakeholders is ongoing and a communications plan is also being prepared.

Principle 1:

Responsible agencies should treat data as a strategic resource and design and manage administrative data to support their wider statistical research use.

Principle 2:

Agencies responsible for source data used in statistical data integration remain individually accountable for their security and confidentiality.

Principle 3:

A responsible 'integrating authority' will be nominated for each data integration proposal.

Principle 4:

Statistical integration should only occur when it provides significant overall benefit to public.

Principle 5:

Statistical data integration must be used for statistical and research purposes only.

Principle 6:

Policies and procedures used in data integration must minimise any potential impact on privacy and confidentiality.

Principle 7:

Statistical data integration will be conducted in an open and accountable way.

26. The biggest risk lies in potential breaches of security. This is a low probability but would have a high impact, which leads to lowered public trust. The data custodians (agencies) will be responsible for confidentiality.

27. There was discussion regarding the integration authority. It was noted that there may be a small number of integrating authorities based on key agency or organisation expertise. At the next AGSF meeting an agenda item will be to discuss outcomes of the upcoming Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee meeting (CPSIC). (Action 4)

Agenda Item 4. Government 2.0 Taskforce - Next Steps

28. Ms Ann Steward from AGIMO presented outcomes from the Government 2.0 Taskforce. The Government response to the Report of the Web 2.0 Taskforce report was released on 3 May 2010 and accepted 12 of the 13 recommendations with some modifications. The recommendations represent a significant cultural change and challenge for the APS, in particular around greater engagement with the public. The Taskforce looked at ways that government agencies are starting to communicate with the public, and noted that the Department of Finance and Deregulation has deployed Facebook and Twitter to staff to improve understanding and capability within their staff and to understand how and where it can be used. Ms Steward noted the importance of giving clear guidelines to staff, but also recognising the importance of trialling some new initiatives and managing risk.

29. AGSF discussed the issue of privacy and preserving the confidentiality of government data. The importance of mitigation of confidentiality risks was discussed and it was noted that this was an ongoing issue for the taskforce. The issue of accessibility was also raised, noting that not all websites are suitable for users with sight or hearing disabilities.

30. Ms Steward explained that the Government 2.0 taskforce has strong synergy with the work of the CPSIC presented by Greg Coombs. It was noted that a more open form of copyright to facilitate information sharing was advocated by the taskforce and that the ABS was the first government agency to adopt Creative Commons licensing. It was recommended that data needs to be released quickly so it is still current and relevant. Development of common standards for metadata was a strong component to facilitate increased sharing of information across government. It was suggested that the CIO forum steering committee would discuss the sharing of metadata and creative commons issues.

31. Ms Steward thanked Mr Brian Pink & Mr Peter Harper for their contributions to the Taskforce.

Agenda Item 5. ABS Implementation of Web 2.0 and 3.0 Technologies

32. Dr Siu-Ming Tam demonstrated and outlined an overview of several ABS initiatives using Web 2.0 and 3.0 Technologies.

33. Dr Tam noted that in 2005 ABS was the first statistical agency to provide free statistics on the web. The ABS website now has over 1.6 million web pages - the challenge is that there is such a wealth of information that it is difficult to find the required information. The ABS is now investing in tools to improve discoverability and communicate statistics by telling engaging statistical stories via data visualisation. Some examples include Betaworks, and training via online media. Dr Tam also noted the importance of metadata standards such as Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) to improve discoverability of data. Dr Tam demonstrated examples of varying data media to tell statistical stories. Many can be found on Betaworks that are linked through the ABS website. Dr Tam focused on StatVideos@ABS, Pyramidisation, Visploration and also demonstrated Betaworks Topics@ a glance.

Agenda Item 6. Statistical matters of significance

34. Mr Denis Farrell highlighted the Census 2011 dress rehearsals. There were only 447 nights until 2011 Census night from the date of the AGSF meeting. The ABS is conducting dress rehearsals in various parts of Australia testing in particular indigenous engagement strategies and issues with secure apartment buildings highlighted in the 2006 Census.

35. The ABS is hoping that 25% of households use e-Census in 2011. E-census will be using a faster browser to overcome response time issues experienced in the 2006 Census. Commencing February 2011, ABS will commence recruitment of 40,000 people for the Census. Mr Farrell will provide more information at the next meeting. Census night will

be 9 August 2011.

36. Ian Ewing highlighted two reviews underway in the ABS, the review of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Report on Observation of Standards and Codes (ROSC) review. The final meeting of the CPI Review advisory committee will occur in September 2010 where discussions and feedback will be looked at. Some suggestions from the review include moving the CPI frequency to monthly, conducting the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) more frequently, and developing a spatial price index.

37. The IMF ROSC will release its findings for Australia in May 2010 and aims to improve economic statistics by ensuring compliance with internationally recognised economic standards and codes. National Accounts Branch are investigating areas for improvement arising from the ROSC review.

38. Garth Bode highlighted that the ABS has commenced work on conducting the largest health survey undertaken in Australia. The Australian Health Survey will commence in 2011 and be completed in 2013, surveying approximately 50,000 people (children and adults, Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and measure health status, health conditions, health risk factors (with particular emphasis on physical activity), health related actions and medications, nutrition, physical measures and facilitate biomedical testing. Collection of this unique combination of health-related components has not been undertaken in Australia on this scale, although it has been implemented in other countries.

39. One of the unique components of this survey is that the ABS will receive results from respondents that accurately measure health indicators based on blood and urine samples provided on a voluntary basis through a pathology collection arrangement. The respondents will be able to choose if they would like access to their pathology test results.

40. This health information investment has been a result of collaboration between the ABS, the Department of Health and Ageing and the Heart Foundation of Australia. The survey results will meet the needs of a wide range of organisations; government, non-government, community and academics. Information will support policy and program development and evaluation, research into health issues and support community education.

Agenda Item 7. Other Business

41. There was no other business.

Agenda Item 8. Arrangements for next meeting

42. The next meeting date was proposed as 11 November 2010.

Agenda Item 9. Close and lunch

43. Mr Pink thanked members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting at 12.40pm.