

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

8 November 2011

Summary of Discussion

Theme: "Statistical Developments and the Whole of Government Approach to the NSS"

Chair	Brian Pink, Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics);
Present	Peter Harper, Ian Ewing, Trevor Sutton, Jeanette Cotterill (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Katy Balmaks (Department of Human Services), Darrian Collins (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Aging), Mark Cully (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), Teresa Dickinson (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Alex Dolan (Department of Human Services), Leanne Johnson (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics), Julia Neville (Australian Taxation Office), Tony Rosling (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities), Judy Schneider (Department of Families and Housing, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs), Walter Shafron (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences), Brian Stonebridge (Australian Government Information Management Office), Louise Talbot (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), John Weaver (Office of Spatial Policy).
Apologies	Frank Yu (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Denise Carlton (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Gary Dolman (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics), David Kalisch (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Tom Karmel (National Centre of Vocational Education Research), Rory King (Department of Human Services), Scott Matheson (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Tim Quinn (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Geoff Richardson (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Populations and Communities), Richard Snabel (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research).
Speakers	Peter Harper, Siu-Ming Tam (Australian Bureau of Statistics) Paul Madden (Department of Health and Aging) Mark Cully (Department of Immigration and Citizenship)
Secretariat	Jenny Myers, Tammie Marion, Jennifer Marley (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
Observers	None

Actions Arising

1. ABS to arrange a meeting with Paul Madden (DoHA), OSP, and other interested agencies to meet to discuss opportunities for improving information leadership across the Commonwealth.

Agenda Item 1. Welcome

Mr Pink welcomed members and speakers.

a. Minutes and Actions from June 2011 meeting

Mr Pink called for comments on the minutes from the AGSF meeting held 29 June 2011. The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

There were no outstanding action items.

b. Statistician's update

Mr Pink provided members with the following updates:

- Following the retirement of Denis Farrell, from 10 November 2011 Trevor Sutton will act as Chief Operating Officer and Susan Linacre will lead as Deputy Statistician Social Statistics, pending action to fill the COO role permanently.
- At the ABS October Management Meeting (24-25 Oct 2011), executive and senior managers in ABS (including heads of regional offices) discussed key issues in the ABS, including strategic issues and environmental changes:
 - The undertaking of the 2011 Census. At this early stage of the processing period, the ABS is anticipating that the strategies put in place to address the challenges faced in the 2006 Census will have a positive impact on the results of the 2011 Census; including enumeration of subgroups such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders households, and people experiencing homelessness. The online enumeration eCensus target of 30% was met, which is an increase from 9% in 2006 Census.
 - Multi-modal collection methods were used in the 2011 Agricultural Census, with 12% of businesses completing their census online.
 - ABS executive have been meeting with a number of agency Secretaries and Deputies, in order to build ABS' understanding of key issues faced by agencies, to discuss high level strategic issues, and to discuss integrated approaches to improving the national statistical service. One key issue identified at these meetings is unlocking the strategic potential of administrative data.
 - A high level workshop was held in August by the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) and the COAG Reform Council (CRC), to discuss strategic issues for Australia's official statistical system over coming decades. The meeting was attended by senior members of business, academia and government. The group discussed challenges and opportunities for enduring improvement of the system's effectiveness and efficiency. It was noted that the COAG reform process may be useful to help focus efforts to address statistical issues such as the quality of data and measures.
 - Statistical Data Integration is an example of an effective whole of government approach to address systemic risk. Considerable progress has been made towards providing a safe and effective environment for statistical data integration involving Commonwealth data. The Secretaries Board endorsed a set of principles in 2010. The Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board (CPDIOB) met in August 2011 to consider the legal protections required of agencies seeking to undertake high risk projects; the board will consider interim accreditation criteria for integrating authorities.

- o Methodological improvements from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) review were published in the September quarter issue and were well received.
- o The methodological review of homelessness estimates has been robustly debated and will result in improved and robust statistical outputs.
- o The Australian Health Survey is a comprehensive study of the health of Australians, addressing key health information gaps in nutrition and physical activity. The survey includes a voluntary component to measure biomedical information, which is new for a major survey in Australia. While the survey has generally received high response rates, the response rate for the voluntary biomedical measures component is not as high as anticipated. The ABS is working on strategies to address these challenges. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wave of the survey begins in 2012.
- The ABS Enterprise Agreement 2011-14 has been voted in by majority of staff and will come into effect soon after formal approval by Fair Work Australia.
- The NatStats 2013 Conference will be held 12-14 March 2013 in Brisbane. Members were requested to pencil the date into their calendars and share news of the event with staff.

Agenda Item 2. Essential Statistics for Australia (ESA)

Mr Harper (ABS) provided members with background and rationale for the Essential Statistics for Australia (ESA) initiative (previously called Nationally Important Statistics and Datasets). A recommendation from the Allen Report (2004) was to focus on the statistical assets that are critically important to the nation. The ESA initiative aims to identify these official data assets in a highly consultative way, and use this to focus efforts towards addressing data gaps and quality issues. A framework and illustrative list of these statistics and their underlying datasets is being developed to facilitate this consultation. After the preliminary list is finalised the ABS will commence a broad and consultative process with stakeholders, including a public consultation paper and consultation with user-groups and government-led fora (Commonwealth and state/territory). In Nov 2010, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) endorsed the use of the Measures of Australia's Progress (MAP) framework as the basis of this framework; an update will be provided to the Nov 2011 and May 2012 ASAC meetings. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

Mr Coombs (DoHA) noted that the ESA initiative is very timely from a health perspective; a group is currently rationalising existing and future health data collections in order to address the concerns of state and territory governments regarding respondent burden and inefficiency of data collection. Mr Harper noted that while ESA is not explicitly for this purpose, it would be useful to guide decisions on spending efficiency.

Ms Schneider (FaHCSIA) noted the high quality and high level of the paper; and asked about the value-add to justify the commitment of resources, and the implications for users and producers of data and statistics on the list. Mr Harper agreed that the initiative is still progressing and the ABS is currently aiming to provide a systematic framework for the upcoming consultation. The ABS would like to work in partnership with agencies to help improve the quality and use of statistics in Australia.

Ms Talbot (DIISR) noted strong support from DIISR for this initiative, and reiterated the importance of demonstrating value.

Mr Cully (DIAC) noted the importance of including both producers and users of data in the process; Mr Harper agreed this was very important.

Mr Cully also noted the importance of leveraging existing whole of government initiatives including the COAG process. Mr Sutton (ABS) noted the alignment of the aims of this initiative with those of the ASAC/CRC Workshop, to effectively and efficiently invest in nationally enduring datasets. Mr Pink (ABS) noted that statistical information assets need to be considered in the same way as other assets. An agreed strategic and systematic approach would enable future investment in these assets to be prioritised to realise maximum benefit. For example, the cost of using and integrating administrative datasets for research purposes could be minimised by using a strategic and coordinated approach. Mr Pink noted that the initiative had received high level general support, and was intended to also be raised with the Minister.

Ms Dickinson (AIHW) noted AIHW support and involvement in the engagement process.

Agenda Item 3. Transforming Information Management: Opportunities and Challenges

Dr Tam (ABS) provided members with an overview of the Information Management Transformation initiative in the ABS; discussing the issues the program aims to resolve, the vision and broad goals of the program, and the upcoming opportunities and challenges. The program is about industrialising, modernising, transforming, improving the management and future-proofing of Australia's statistical systems to support the provision of more timely, comprehensive and richer answers to more complex questions. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

Mr Pink (ABS) noted that the aim of the project is not to change information systems in other agencies, but rather to improve interoperability with other agencies through standards that better enable sharing and "plug-and-play" functionality. Agencies want to cost-effectively meet user's information expectations -- there is a compelling business case to collaborate to achieve this cost-effectively.

It was noted that demand and support will grow once agencies gain an understanding of the project and start to realise the potential. Mr Pink noted the TableBuilder product as an example of functionality that potentially could be used by agencies in future. Agencies are already working collaboratively to standardise classifications and improve methodologies -- proposing to leverage these efforts to standardise information infrastructure.

Agenda Item 4. Statistical Developments and the Whole of Government approach to the NSS: Opportunities and challenges

4A. DoHA: Designing for Better Outcomes - the Use of Standards

Mr Madden (DoHA) provided members with insights and experiences about information and knowledge management in the Department of Health and Ageing from his position as Chief Information and Knowledge Officer. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.] Mr Madden summarised the current information environment of DoHA, such as distributed collection and storage, and his plans for improving efficiency by taking an enterprise approach. Mr Madden noted that a defined outcome was important to drive and unify the successful use of standards. Mr Madden noted the role of standards to facilitate the interoperability across the systems of the information environment.

Mr Pink (ABS) noted that the presentation illustrated lessons for agencies trying to bring order to a complex information environment. Mr Pink noted the strategic value of well managed information, and the senior management role to drive the development of these corporate resources as reflected in this presentation.

A number of members noted that their agencies are facing similar challenges and would appreciate any learnings, information or documentation that Mr Madden could share. Mr Madden was happy to share project management plans and information management principles, however noted that this documentation has been developed for DoHA systems, and that it was the process itself for developing these plans that was important for bringing

everyone onboard.

Mr Weaver (OSP) chairs a group charged with investigating issues around the spatial context of scheduled land information (termed "spatial data"), and would like to discuss and work with other agencies on shared issues. Mr Harper (ABS) asked how the group promoted shared best-practice and whole-of-government approaches and solutions. Mr Weaver noted that, once fully established, the group was intending to engage with the ABS regarding spatial context of data. Further discussion between OSP, DoHA, ABS, AGIMO and other interested agencies was proposed to progress issues around the interoperability of the spatial context of location data.

4B. DSEWPaC

Deferred to next meeting.

4C. DIAC: On the move: the statistical challenges posed by migration, why they are getting harder, and what might be done about it

Mr Cully (DIAC) provided members with an overview of the great level of migration that occurs in Australia, the challenges in managing the vast amounts of data related to migration, and the challenges and future directions for measuring the related stocks and flows. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.] Mr Cully noted important collaborations between DIAC and ABS such as linking the Settlement Database with Census; and are looking to explore with agencies the potential of using administrative data to improve statistics.

Mr Coombs (DoHA) noted that DoHA is interested in understanding the health status of migrants, and looking into possible longer term solutions.

Mr Harper (ABS) noted that ABS is at the concept stage of exploring alternative ways to resolve issues around the measurement of populations. Mr Harper also noted that the ABS releases community level demographic information, the National Regional Profile (NRP), which in future may include information from other sources such as administrative data.

Agenda Item 5. Around the table: Statistical matters of significance

Mr Pink invited members to share statistical updates.

Mr Stonebridge (AGIMO) noted the Govshare tool is available (www.govshare.gov.au), an online repository that helps agencies to share and reuse ICT artefacts across agency and jurisdictional boundaries. Feedback on the online tool is welcome.

Ms Collins (DRET) noted that the Bureau of Resources and Energy Economics (BREE) was formed July 2011 under DRET. The Executive Director / Chief Economist of BREE is Prof. Quentin Grafton.

Ms Cotterill (ABS) noted the publication and online release of a Statistical Data Integration brochure, that outlines the government's data integration framework; and Confidentiality Information sheets that build awareness and understanding of how to confidentialise data. Copies of the brochure and information sheets were made available to AGSF members at the meeting. We hope to have a large number of Commonwealth and State Agencies partner with us, as we did last time, in actively supporting NatStats, and will be contacting agencies in coming months seeking support. Ms Cotterill noted that the Statistical Clearing House recently tabled their 2010-11 annual report and highlighted increasing positive engagement between the ABS and agencies running business surveys.

Ms Johnson (BITRE) noted the recent release of the State of Australian Cities 2011 report on the progress of cities towards improved productivity, sustainability and liveability.

Ms Schneider (FaHCSIA) noted a two day conference being held next week (15-16 Nov 2011) to discuss research using data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC).

Mr Coombs (DoHA) noted an upcoming statistical data integration meeting with The SAX Institute, Curtin University Centre for Data Linkage, and SA-NT Datalink (University of South Australia).

Agenda Item 6. Other Business

There was no other business.

Agenda Item 7. Arrangements for next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 29 June 2012; members were requested to note this date in calendars.

Agenda Item 8. Close

Mr Pink thanked the members for their attendance and contributions, and closed the meeting at 12.30 pm.