

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

10 October 2008

Record of Discussion and Actions arising

- Chair:** Susan Linacre, Deputy Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
- Present:** Brian Pink, Susan Linacre, Ian Ewing, Peter Harper, Geoff Lee, Vince Lazzaro, Jenine Borowik (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Milly Lubulwa (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Julie Roediger (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Usha Arif (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), Greg Evans (Centrelink), Carol Ey (Dept of Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs), Peter Thomson (Medicare Australia), Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Ageing), Paul Balnaves (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Matthew Maloney (Australian Taxation Office), Nils de Jager (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), Dr Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Ben Searle (Office of Spatial Data Management, Geoscience Australia), Trevor Smallwood (Australian Government Information Management Office), Sebastian Lang, Jonathan Millard (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts), Tim Quinn (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism)
- Apologies:** Gary Dolman (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics)
- Presenters:** Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services), Trevor Smallwood (Australian Government Information Management Office), Rhys Francis (The Australian e Research Infrastructure Council), Brian Pink (Statistician's Update)
- Secretariat:** Mark Lound, Jeanette Cotterill, Sue Spearritt (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Meeting Summary

The Deputy Australian Statistician, Susan Linacre, introduced proceedings with the minutes being accepted from the meeting held on 23 April 2008 and the action items recorded as completed (Para 1).

In regard to statistical issues arising from government initiatives, there was an update on the NatStats08 Conference (Para 2-3) and a report on the completion of the National Data Network (NDN) Pilot Project (Para 4-7).

There were presentations from Mr Rhys Francis (Australian e research Infrastructure Council) on the Australian National Data Service (ANDS), Mr Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services) on the Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration Project (CSDIP), and Mr Trevor Smallwood (Australian Government Information Management Office) on the National Government Information Sharing Strategy (NGISS) (Para 8-18).

The Statistician's update noted that the ABS is currently reviewing its long term budget situation with the Department of Finance and Deregulation (DOFD) and the Treasury. He informed the meeting that he is preparing a paper to take to the next Departmental Secretaries meeting on data sharing and noted the completion of the NDN Pilot Project (Para 21-23).

Members reported on a range of statistical work being undertaken in their agencies (Para 23-36). An update on ABS issues was given by senior ABS staff (Para 37-40).

Actions Arising

1. Include agenda item on developing the National Statistical Service (NSS) for 2009 meeting (held over to October 2009 Meeting)

Record of Discussion

Agenda Item 1. Welcome Susan Linacre. ABS

1. Ms Linacre, Deputy Australian Statistician, welcomed members and advised that the Australian Statistician gave his apologies as he was unable to chair the meeting but would attend later to present the Statistician's Update. The minutes from the 23 April 2008 AGSF meeting were accepted. The action items from the last meeting were completed with Data Linking and Data Sharing Initiatives being discussed against Agenda Item 3 of this meeting.

Agenda Item 2. Statistical Issues Arising From Government Initiatives - briefings for information and comment

a. Update on NatStats 08 Conference

2. Mr Mark Lound informed the meeting that 280 registrations had been received for the NatStats 08 Conference with early bird registration closing on 10 October. The conference theme is " Working together for an informed Australian Society". One of the main objectives is to bring together key stakeholders from across government, business, academia and the community to discuss strategies across the three main themes of: Informing the Nation; Measuring the Progress of Societies; and Informing the Environmental Debate.

3. The organisation and coordination of the conference is proceeding satisfactorily with all the keynote and concurrent speakers in place. Public Sector Mapping Authority (PSMA) Australia are the major sponsors for the conference and there are other sponsors and exhibitors being arranged. Mr Enrico Giovannini, Chief Statistician of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), will be attending as one of the keynote speakers. His participation reflects the importance of the conference in providing regional input to the 3rd OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy" to be held in Korea in late 2009.

b. Completion of National Data Network Pilot Project

4. Mr Vince Lazzaro informed the meeting that the ABS had undertaken a review of the National Data Network (NDN) project. The review reports were discussed at meetings of the NDN Interim Governing Board and at senior ABS management meetings, which has resulted in the decision to close the pilot project and cease further development of the NDN. However, he noted that the NDN software has been retained for demonstration purposes and information learnt from the project will be shared with other agencies who are developing information sharing infrastructure.

5. In summarising the review, Mr Lazzaro said that the review saw an increasing demand for infrastructure to share and link data across governments. However the project report also concluded that:

- (a) Implementing the project was considerably more difficult than first envisaged;
- (b) A clear business benefit needs to be in place for participants to become involved;

- (c) Resources for the project had become a significant issue as the ABS was not funded to develop the NDN; and
- (d) There have been significant advances in technology and developments in this field since the project began which had not been able to be incorporated into the NDN infrastructure.

6. The ABS is still very interested in seeking opportunities to work with other agencies and Mr Lazzaro provided the following examples of current collaborative projects:

- (a) Development of a web service feed for Census data with the Western Australia Landgate - Shared Land Information Platform (SLIP);
- (b) Commonwealth Spatial Data Information Platform (CSDIP) with the Department of Human Services, the Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM) and the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) (see Agenda item 3(b));
- (c) Development of Metadata Management tools with the Qld Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research; and
- (d) Community Indicators Workshop involving most jurisdictions around the NatStats08 Conference in November 2008.

7. Mr Lazzaro proposed that a paper on the development of the National Statistical Service (NSS) be included on the agenda for the next AGSF meeting.

Agenda Item 3. Data Sharing Initiatives across Government Agencies

a. Australian National Data Service (ANDS)

8. Mr Rhys Francis, Executive Director of The Australian e Research Infrastructure Council delivered a presentation on the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS). NCRIS is an initiative which provides funding to bring greater strategic direction and coordination to national research infrastructure investments.

9. NCRIS investment has occurred in a range of scientific and health research topics as well as \$82 million for platforms for collaboration. One of the collaboration platforms is the Australia National Data Service (ANDS), which has been funded to develop user and owner frameworks for a data commons, develop and operate national registries and data sharing services, assist institutions connect repositories to the data commons, and help researchers publish, share and access data through the commons.

10. Some of the projects being undertaken include eResearch in terrestrial ecosystems, marine ecosystems, and population health data through the Population Health Research Network.

b. Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration Project

11. Peter Robertson from the Department of Human Services (DHS) presented an overview of the Commonwealth Spatial Data Information Platform (CSDIP). DHS is taking the lead in this project which is aimed at providing information to support decision making across portfolios. A working group has been established, chaired by DHS, with OSDM, ABS and AGIMO. There is also participation from Treasury, Finance, DEEWR, FAHCSIA, DOHA and the Dept of Infrastructure.

12. The main obstacle seen for the project is the preparedness of agencies to share information and the cost of surfacing the information. The working group has reached agreement that each agency will manage its own data that it makes available for sharing, while the project working group will focus on the standards, metadata, data management and security of the information. The project will utilise the DHS Geo-Demographic Interactive Simulation Tool (GIST) to web-enable development. The pilot project will involve the Child Support Program which supports children at risk strategies.

13. DHS will work closely with OSDM and Geosciences Australia to source technical solutions while the ABS will take the lead role in data management issues. Ben Searle (OSDM) added that Phase 2 of the project will be similar to the WA Landgate SLIP project, with the information shared in a black box environment, with machine to machine data transfer, and shared business processes. Phase 3 will open the network to jurisdictions, local government and eventually to some sectors of the community. Peter Harper (ABS) noted that the infrastructure being developed will in the long run be extensible to information across a range of program areas.

14. The discussion that followed noted:

- (a) The project would need to clearly define the benefit to participants and government;
- (b) The quality of data particularly at small area level will be a key issue. The meeting agreed that quality metadata will be important so there is clear understanding of the limitations of data sources.
- (c) Some participants were interested in how quickly the architecture would be transferable into other program areas. Peter Harper (ABS) explained that this is a long term goal and the initial focus will be on the social inclusion perspective.
- (d) There is likely to be concern from Ministers about control of data and confidentiality of information. Peter Harper said that the ABS will give consideration to these issues, but he acknowledged that one of the biggest risks was the political drive for information sharing to become a reality.

c. National Government Information Sharing Strategy (NGISS)

15. Mr Trevor Smallwood presented to the meeting on the National Government Information Sharing Strategy (NGISS). The Strategy is being managed by the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), in the Department of Finance and Deregulation. The project arose from the COAG Online and Communications Council (OCC) and it is planned that the strategy and implementation options will be presented to the December 2008 COAG meeting.

16. The NGISS will provide a standardised approach to information sharing in support of the delivery of government services to the community. The project arose from the growing demand for sharing of data and information between government agencies across all portfolio areas. There are also a number of whole of government initiatives across areas such as water, health, education and security. It was noted that information sharing is a work item in most of the COAG Ministerial Councils.

17. AGIMO has conducted a number of workshops across government agencies which have examined barriers to information sharing. The main barriers identified by workshop participants were: obtaining political will - at both political and senior public service levels; the lack of a clear value proposition; varied information management practices; concerns about privacy and accountability; and a culture in government agencies that is resistant to change.

18. Mr Smallwood informed the meeting that another outcome from the workshops was a set of principles about the operation and governance of the strategy. The NGISS has proposed a set of pathways (which relate closely to the principles) that could be used in delivering and achieving the vision, which will be presented to the COAG OCC. These pathways include governance arrangements, frameworks, education programs, and a communications plan. AGIMO are planning to use the Cross Jurisdictional Chief Information Officers Committee (CJCIOC) for support in the adoption of the standards across Australian Government agencies.

Agenda Item 1 (b) Statistician's Update

19. The Statistician, Mr Brian Pink, informed the meeting that the ABS is currently discussing a review of its long-term budget funding with the Department of Finance and Deregulation (DOFD), and with the Department of Treasury. He noted that if the ABS receives no additional funds for 2009/10 there will be an impact on the ABS work program. Mr Pink also noted that the ABS may need to revisit its work program as there may be some areas where more information may be required because of the global financial situation.

20. In relation to the strong emphasis on the meeting's agenda about data sharing initiatives, Mr Pink reported that he had recently had conversations with the Secretary of the Department of Health and Ageing about the development of integrated data, and is preparing a joint paper with her to take to the next Departmental Secretaries meeting on this topic. The aim is to obtain agreement at the top levels of government on a coherent framework for data integration activities for statistical and associated research purposes. He noted that the ABS is also talking with agencies in a number of jurisdictions about data sharing possibilities.

21. Mr Pink also commented on the decision that ABS took in relation to the National Data Network pilot project. He noted that the ABS had not been resourced for this work and that since the Abs had first embarked on work to realise the NDN vision a number of other agencies undertaking similar projects which were funded had emerged. The ABS was now focussing its efforts on developing and improving the National Statistical Service (NSS) and in looking for opportunities to work with the agencies involved in these projects to deliver relevant NDN facilities.

Agenda Item 4. Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance - briefings for information and comment

22. Participants reported briefly (due to time restrictions) on key statistical work being undertaken in their respective agencies.

23. FaHCSIA reported that in regard to COAG they are looking at data quality issues

related to the "Closing the Gap" initiative in the Indigenous Reform Working Group and homelessness on the Housing Working Group.

24. ABARE reported that they are focusing on obtaining quality data to measure productivity in the agricultural sector.

25. ATO advised that they are preparing a new version of their Taxation Statistics publication that will incorporate recommendations from a number of departmental working groups

26. DIISR reported that their main focus has been the Innovation Review which was released in August 2008. The Government is considering the Review's recommendations in the preparation of a White Paper in early 2009.

27. Centrelink reported that they are also involved in the CSDIP Project (see Agenda Item 3(b)). They have also been improving their address management with 99.5% of addresses now matched to a locality.

28. The delegate from DEEWR reported on their work in building Indigenous Performance Indicators for the COAG Working Group on Indigenous Reform.

29. DOHA reported on their work in building a national framework for data linkage and the associated project risks.

30. Medicare Australia reported that they recently won an award at the Australian Privacy Awards. They have also been working on improving the standardisation of their address information.

31. DIMIAC reported that the department is working on:

- (a) the location of immigrants for the effective delivery of services;
- (b) the next wave of the Longitudinal Survey of Migrants to Australia; and
- (c) data sharing arrangements with the ABS and DEEWR.

32. The delegate from DHS reported that their main focus is the CSDI project (see Agenda Item 3(b)).

33. AGIMO advised the meeting that they are working with the National Archives of Australia on improving archival and preservation strategies across government agencies.

34. AIHW reported that in regard to COAG they have been working on key performance indicators across a number of working groups. They also informed the meeting that following the release of a Green Paper on Homelessness in May 2008 the government has been receiving submissions for development of a White Paper. AIHW made a submission which promoted the use of data and statistics collected through their agency and other mainstream housing and support services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

35. DRET reported that they are working with the ABS on the development of new Tourism Satellite Accounts and noted that new international compilation standards in

this area will reduce the value of the industry to GDP by around 20%.

36. DEWHA noted the improvement in the coordination of environmental data. The Department has commenced work on the 2011 State of the Environment Report which will shape policies and programs.

Agenda Item 5. ABS Issues of Interest - briefings for information and comments

a. MIG Issues - for information and comments: Ian Ewing (ABS)

37. Mr Ewing outlined key projects in the Macroeconomics Integration Group (MIG):
- (a) Analysing the impact of an Emissions Trading Scheme on ABS statistics.
 - (b) Provided advice to the government on the statistical implications arising from the Australia 2020 Summit.
 - (c) Provided input to the Review of the Taxation System being undertaken by the Secretary of the Treasury Ken Henry.

b. PLIES Group Issues - for information and comments: Peter Harper (ABS)

38. Mr Harper outlined key projects in the Population, Labour, Industry and Environment Statistics (PLIES) Group:
- (a) National Environmental Information System. The Natural Resources Policy and Programs Committee requested that the DEWHA lead, in consultation with all jurisdictions, further progress on the development of a system to coordinate the collection, analysis, synthesis and delivery of environmental information. ABS has been invited to be a member of an IDC and two working groups established by the IDC.
 - (b) Climate Change Statistical Needs Assessment. The ABS has held a round table discussion with stakeholders to discuss an initial assessment of the statistical needs arising from climate change and the Government's climate change agenda. The round table discussion identified a number of priority statistical information needs and these are being progressed within the Treasury portfolio in close consultation with stakeholders.
 - (c) The ABS has been developing, in consultation with key stakeholders, a strategic plan for transport statistics that involves a mix of ABS surveys and more effective use of information held in administration systems, particularly those of State Governments. The plan has strong support, but is dependent on a significant increase in funding for transport statistics.

c. SSG Issues - for information and comments: Susan Linacre (ABS)

39. Ms Linacre noted that she has been very involved with COAG data development requirements. She outlined key projects in the Social Statistics Group (SSG):
- (a) Results of the first ABS survey of consumer fraud were released on 27 June 2008.
 - (b) 2006-07 Family characteristics and Transitions Survey was released in June 2008.
 - (c) A new publication, *A Profile of Carers in Australia* (cat. No. 4448.0) is being released on 14 October 2008. This publication was produced with funding

from FaHCSIA. It examines the characteristics of carers, using information from a number of ABS surveys and the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

- (d) 2007 Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing is due for release 23 October 2008. This survey was funded by DoHA, and is the first survey of its kind since 1997.
- (e) An Information paper: on disability data sources will be released on 16 December 2008.
- (f) ABS hosted a workshop on the gender wage gap to provide a wider understanding of the measurement and analytical issues in gender comparisons of earnings data.
- (g) There has been a change to the ABS publication of Cause of Death to incorporate late Coroner certified cause of death reports. This will particularly improve data for suicides.
- (h) A joint meeting of the boards of management of the crime, criminal courts and corrective services units will be held in November, to discuss issues of interest in data development across the sectors.

d. Methodology Division Issues - for information and comments: Geoff Lee (ABS)

40. Mr Lee outlined key projects in the Methodology and Data Management Division:

- (a) Metadata Management Project which aims to improve the understanding of the relevance and value of metadata management and of metadata management principles.
- (b) NatStats conference. He informed the meeting that a small "Community Indicators" practitioners workshop will be held during Natstats which will focus on the platforms, the broad frameworks and the commonalities amongst the different indicator systems.
- (c) The ABS is planning to introduce Creative Commons onto the ABS web site
- (d) The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) has recently released a comprehensive review on Australian Privacy Law and Practice.
- (e) The Australian Government has commissioned an ALRC review about secrecy laws - an issues paper will be released in October 2008.

Agenda Item 6. Other Business

41. There was no other business.

Agenda Item 7. Arrangements for next meeting

42. The next meeting date will be sent to members but it is expected it will be in early May 2009.

Agenda Item 8. Close and Lunch

43. Ms Linacre thanked members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting at 12.45pm.