

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

1 May 2009

Record of Discussion and Actions arising

Chair: Brian Pink, Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Present: Brian Pink, Trevor Sutton, Ian Ewing, Paul Sullivan, Geoff Lee, Vince Lazzaro (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Milly Lubulwa (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Ken Tallis (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Mark Cully, Usha Arif (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), Gabrielle Davidson (Centrelink), Carol Ey (Dept of Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs), Peter Thomson (Medicare Australia), Premala Walsh (Department of Health and Ageing), Barry Cameron (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Richard Snabel (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services), Dr Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Ben Searle (Office of Spatial Data Management, Geoscience Australia), Brian Stonebridge (Australian Government Information Management Office), Geoff Richardson (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts), Wayne Calder (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Phil Potterton (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government)

Apologies: Matthew Maloney (Australian Taxation Office)

Presenters: Dr Merran Smith (Population Health Research Network), Andrea Grosvenor (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, accompanying Dr Merran Smith), Mary Ann O'Loughlin (COAG Reform Council), Dr Paul Jelfs (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Secretariat: Mark Lound, Jeanette Cotterill, Shelley Evans, Sue Spearritt (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Meeting Summary

The Australian Statistician, Brian Pink, introduced proceedings with the minutes being accepted from the meeting held on 10 October 2008. In this update, he noted that the results of the review of ABS funding will be announced as part of the budget on 12 May 2009. He also informed the meeting about recent discussions about the ABS work program with key stakeholders, the ABS and the Gershon Review, the success of the NatStats Conference held in November 2008 and a proposal to form a high level committee to look at statistical integration across government (Para 1-5).

In regard to statistical initiatives arising from government initiatives, there was a review of the NatStats08 Conference (Para 6-7) and updates on the Community Indicators Summit to be held in Brisbane in July 2009 (Para 8-10) and the Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration (CSDI) Pilot Project (Para 11-15).

Dr Merran Smith, Chief Executive of the Population Health Research Network, presented on "Building Data Linkage Infrastructure for Australia". The presentation covered the data linkage model, ethics and privacy issues as well as the project's governance and budget (Para 16-18).

Mary Ann O'Loughlin, Executive Councillor and Head of Secretariat, COAG Reform Council, delivered a presentation on "Assessing Performance under the National Agreements: Role of the COAG Reform Council". The presentation covered the role of the COAG Reform Council in regard to monitoring, assessing and reporting on the performance of governments in implementing nationally agreed reforms (Para 19-21).

Dr Paul Jelfs, Australian Bureau of Statistics, presented on "Developments in Measuring Australia's Progress (MAP)". He informed the meeting that the ABS is working on transforming MAP into a dynamic electronic publication with data visualisation tools, interactive graphs and user defined tables. While the final product will not be available until 2010, a prototype will be available for the third OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy" in South Korea in October 2009 (Para 22-23).

Members reported on a range of statistical work being undertaken in their agencies (Para 24-32). An update on ABS issues was provided by senior ABS staff (Para 33-36).

Actions Arising

1. Send members links to upcoming conferences: Community Indicators Summit, 22-23 July, Brisbane; [State of the Cities - Unlocking the Data, 27-29 May 2009, Melbourne](#); and [Spatial@gov Conference, 15-16 June 2009, Canberra](#).

Completed

Record of Discussion

Agenda Item 1. Statistician's Update Brian Pink. ABS

1. Mr Pink welcomed members and accepted the minutes from the meeting of 10 October 2008. He informed the meeting that in 2008-09 the ABS had made significant cutbacks in the work program in order to meet the budget shortfall. After a review with the Department of Finance and Deregulation and the Treasury, recommendations had been made to government for future funding and the result will be announced as part of the Budget on 12 May.
2. Mr Pink said that over the last few months there have been discussions about the ABS work program for future years with key stakeholders and users across Commonwealth and State Governments and key non government organisations. In general there was consistent feedback on user priorities and the discussions had proved useful in getting agencies to appreciate the variety of the competing interests in the work program of the ABS.
3. Mr Pink informed the meeting that ABS, along with other government agencies, has been participating in the Gershon Review. The ABS has a large Information Technology component in its budget. He noted that most of the strategies being proposed by agencies as part of the review to deliver efficiencies have already been implemented in the ABS.
4. Mr Pink also commented about the success of the Natstats Conference, which was held in November 2008 in Melbourne. There was strong support for a National Statistical Service and for the leadership role of the ABS in developing the initiative. He noted that after the conference, Geoff Allen, chair of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council, had written to Government ministers and State Premiers about the collection and use of statistics by Australian governments.
5. Mr Pink informed the meeting that Jane Halton (Secretary, Department of Health and Ageing) and himself gave a presentation to Australian Government Departmental Secretaries on "Statistical Integration across Government". There was a great deal of interest in the issues raised and a high level cross portfolio committee is being formed to look at the key principles of operation as well as the legal and institutional framework of data linkage and integration across government for statistical and related research purposes.

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

a. Review of NatStats 08 Conference

6. Mr Lazzaro informed the meeting that the NatStats08 Conference held in Melbourne in November 2008 had been very successful. The ABS had been very pleased with the numbers of delegates, the high level of interest in sponsoring and exhibiting at the event, the number and quality of the presentations, and the very positive feedback received about the conference. Copies of the speaker's presentations have been placed on the National Statistical Service (NSS) website (nss.gov.au/natstats).

7. A NatStats08 DVD of the conference proceedings is being produced, and will be distributed to all conference delegates and speakers. A decision on whether another NatStats conference will be held in 2010 will be decided later this year, dependent on the ABS budget position and other issues. If the Conference proceeds, it would be linked to the launch of the 2011 Census.

b. Community Indicators Summit, July 2009

8. Mr Lazzaro noted that, immediately prior to the NatStats08 conference, a half day workshop was held for invited participants on Community Indicators. An outcome of that workshop was that there was considerable interest in holding another workshop/conference focussed specifically on this issue. The NSS Leadership Branch of the ABS is organising a Community Indicators Summit on 22 -23 July 2009 in Brisbane.

9. The Summit will be on a much smaller scale than NatStats08 and is targeted at those practitioners who develop community indicator frameworks and platforms. Attendees at today's meeting have been provided with an information package about the Summit including the current draft program.

10. In regards to other NSS work currently being undertaken:

a. The National Statistical Seminar series continues with a high level of external participation. A recent seminar on data management practices attracted over 60 external participants.

b. The NSS Newsletter, which covers key national statistical developments, has recently been reinstated.

c. The ABS is working with GeoScience Australia and the Department of Human Services on the Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration (CSDI) Pilot Project (see update in (c) below) and is continuing its involvement with the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System.

d. The ABS is consulting with a range of Commonwealth and State Government agencies about externalising ABS coding services.

e. Preliminary work has commenced on the development of a national statistical policy.

c. Update on Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration Project (CSDI)

11. Mr Robertson, of the Department of Human Services (DHS) provided an update on the CSDI project. A cross portfolio steering committee has been established, comprised of GeoScience Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Human Services (chair). He noted there are two sub working groups - one chaired by ABS on Information Policy and Governance which will be looking at issues related to data standards, data sharing, data governance and data management and a Technology Working Group, which is being chaired by GeoScience Australia.

12. Mr Robertson explained that for the technical pilot the DHS developed geospatial analytics capability (GIST) will be deployed to participating agencies in early June. Agencies involved in the technical pilot will have to be able to use GIST for accessing data from Centrelink, Department of Health and Ageing and the ABS.

13. Mr Robertson informed the meeting that a paper has been circulated to government

agencies on data sharing principles. While there has been agreement in principle, there have been concerns expressed by some agencies and consultation is continuing. He noted that the government has stated that agencies will support sharing of statistically aggregated data to support social inclusion unless prevented by privacy, or if the data is subject to explicit government exemption. Mr Pink noted that the work with DOHA on data integration referred to earlier is in relation to unit record data.

14. Mr Searle from GeoScience Australia added that they have commenced discussions with the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) in regard to a whole of government licencing framework for access to GNAF (Geocoded National Address File). This would enable Australian government agencies to access GNAF at a lower rate per licence.

15. Mr Pink commented that in some countries there has been a catalyst that promoted data sharing in government ie. the introduction of the GST in Canada. In Australia there are multiple tiers of government which makes agreement on the issue more complex. He agreed that a first step may be to obtain agreement at the Australian Government level.

Agenda Item 3. Data Sharing Initiatives across Government Agencies

National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy - Population Health Research Network

Dr Merran Smith, Chief Executive of the Population Health Research Network

16. Dr Smith presented on "Building data linkage infrastructure for Australia". The project was funded as part of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy for population health data linkage. She explained that the current focus of the project is health administrative data in all states and territories but not Commonwealth agencies at this stage.

17. Dr Smith provided information on the data linkage model, ethics and privacy issues, the project's governance and budget. Although in it's early stages she commented that staff are in place in most nodes and work has commenced on building the data linkage infrastructure. She noted that there are a number of issues to be faced, particularly in the areas of developing frameworks and principles, risk management and relationship management. The project could bring significant benefits in relation to expanded linked data resources, cost effective research and improved evidence based care.

18. There was some discussion about the similarity of this project with the National Data Network (NDN), which was led by the ABS. While it was noted that this project does pick up some elements of the NDN such as the federated environment, this project has the advantage of significant funding. Members also asked about the inclusion of Commonwealth data, which would make this project more powerful and whether there was a timeframe to include Australian Government agencies in the project. Dr Smith said that discussions were with the Department of Health and Ageing. There was also some discussion about the project using case studies to show where the network has made a difference to government services and policy.

Agenda Item 4. Development of Performance Measures for COAG

Mary Ann O'Loughlin, Executive Councillor and Head of Secretariat, COAG Reform

Council

19. Ms O'Loughlin presented on "Assessing Performance under the National Agreements: Role of the COAG Reform Council". She explained that the COAG Reform Council (CRC) was established by COAG as an independent organisation to monitor, assess and report on the performance of governments in implementing nationally agreed reforms. The CRC reports on progress under the three forms of agreements including: National Agreements, National Partnerships and Water Management Partnerships.

20. Ms O'Loughlin explained that for each National Agreement the Council is tasked with the publication and analysis of performance information. This includes highlighting contextual differences between jurisdictions, providing examples of good practice and performance and outlining the contributions of both levels of government to achieving the outcomes. She noted that one outcome has been that governments have agreed to prioritise the national performance reporting framework. As part of this existing data collections will be reviewed for duplication and inconsistency, data gaps will be identified and addressed and strategies employed for improving the timeliness of data.

21. In the discussion that followed, Mr Pink noted that the presentation highlights the role the CRC can play in improving the use of data to measure outcomes and outputs. He added that this is an opportunity for agencies producing statistics, which normally struggle to attain funding to improve data quality, to obtain better awareness and visibility. There was also some discussion about the process for deciding changes to indicators when they were considered no longer appropriate.

Agenda Item 5. Developments in "Measuring Australia's Progress" ***Dr Paul Jelfs, Australian Bureau of Statistics***

22. Dr Jelfs presented on "Developments in Measuring Australia's Progress (MAP)". MAP is an ABS publication that uses a suite of indicators to provide statistical evidence about whether life in Australia is getting better. He informed the group that there had been a website version of the publication released on 30 April 2009.

23. Dr Jelfs noted that MAP involves social, economic and environmental dimensions, all of which are linked. Work is currently underway to transform MAP into a dynamic electronic product with data visualisation tools, interactive graphs, user defined tables and State/Territory and sub state data. He also noted that there is a Reference Group that is looking at refining the existing MAP concepts and identifying conceptual areas for further development. While the final dynamic MAP product will not be released until early 2010, a prototype will be available for the third OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy" in South Korea in October 2009.

Dr Jelfs encouraged AGSF members to contribute ideas and concepts to the redevelopment of MAP. These contributions can be forwarded to the AGSF Secretariat.

Agenda Item 6. Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance - briefings for information and comment

24. Participants reported briefly on key statistical work being undertaken in their respective agencies.

25. Mr Ben Searle - Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM) distributed a brochure for a conference on enhancing Government business through increased spatial capability. Further information is available from the web site <www.spatialgov2009.com>.

26. Ms Carol Ey - Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) informed the meeting that the data from Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), which covered 1850 Indigenous households, is due for release shortly. FaHCSIA are currently looking at how the results from the survey can be used in the COAG agenda.

27. Mr Geoff Richardson - Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) said that they were currently meeting with stakeholders across jurisdictions seeking information on their environmental issues. The information collected will be collated and analysed to determine priorities and be used as input into the development of a national environmental information system.

28. Mr Mark Cully - Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) noted that the 3 year partnership with the ABS for national migration statistics unit was about to end. He also said that the department was working with the ABS on a project that is linking people granted permanent residency with 2006 Census records.

29. Mr Phillip Potterton - Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (DITRDLG) informed the meeting that the department has established a Major Cities unit, which is hosting a conference at the end of May in Melbourne "State of the Cities - unlocking the data." He added that the department are working on a National Transport strategy with assistance from the ABS. He noted that there has been a good degree of cooperation across jurisdictions with this project and that this work has demonstrated the strategic importance of quality data.

30. Mr Wayne Calder - Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism (DRET) said that a study is underway with assistance from the ABS evaluating data sources for tourism policy analysis. An Inter Departmental Committee is meeting in May to establish a process for this work to go forward. He also noted, with recent discussions about the ABS work program, the importance of the Survey of Tourism Accommodation for the work of his agency.

31. Mr Tom Karmel - National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) said that they are working on a strategy with Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to ensure that statistical data keeps up with program changes. He also noted that there are major issues in the collection of vocational statistics in regard to the timeliness of data and respondent burden.

32. Mr Peter Thomson - Medicare Australia informed the meeting that in response to the Victorian bushfires the Emergency Provisions around providing information to the Victorian and Commonwealth governments were declared. He noted that this highlighted the lack of flexibility around release of information in critical situations. Mr Thomson also commented that next week is Privacy Awareness Week and that good privacy practices go hand in hand with good information management practices.

Agenda Item 7. ABS Issues of Interest - briefings for information and comments

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

33. Mr Ewing outlined key projects in the Macroeconomics Integration Group (MIG):

- (a) Recent user consultation with Commonwealth and State agencies has provided feedback on macroeconomic statistics. Foremost among this was the importance to users of statistics for retail trade, state accounts and the housing price index.
- (b) The ABS presented a paper to the UN Statistical Division on the global financial crisis. There was some discussion at the meeting about the need for more timely information such as "flash" estimates. While these are used in other countries, the ABS has generally been sceptical of their value because they are mainly forecasts.
- (c) The ABS has been invited to be a member of the Australian Business Register (ABR) Advisory Board. The ABR is used to develop frames for ABS business surveys.
- (d) ABS economic surveys are introducing new international standards in relation to the System of National Accounts and the classification of industries. Australia will be the first country to introduce these standards and he noted that all major measures will be made available backcasted on the new methodologies.
- (e) The Business Longitudinal Dataset (BLD) Confidentialised Unit Record File (CURF) will be released shortly.
- (f) Work is also underway on producing a satellite account for the non-profit sector and incorporating the emissions trading scheme into national accounts.

b. PLIES Group Issues - for information and comments: Paul Sullivan (ABS)

34. Mr Paul Sullivan outlined key projects in the Population, Labour, Industry and Environment Statistics (PLIES) Group.

- (a) Experimental Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2005-2007, will be released on 25 May 2009.
- (b) Tourism Satellite Accounts, 2007-08, were released on 16 April 2009.
- (c) A Census confidentialised unit record file using a 5% sample of the Census will be released later in the year.
- (d) The ABS is reviewing the output and sample design methodology of the Labour Force Survey. A discussion paper on the review will be circulated to key stakeholders.
- (e) For the 2011 Census of Population and Housing a small test (5,000 households) was conducted during March and early April 2009 in selected areas of Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast.
- (g) The ABS is hosting the 14th meeting of a UNSC City Group (the London Group) on Environmental Accounting this week in Canberra.

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

35. Trevor Sutton outlined key projects in the Social Statistics Group (SSG):

- (a) The results from the 2007-8 National Health Survey results are due for release 11 May. For the first time they will include measured height and weight for adults and children which will be used in understanding trends in obesity. Consultation has commenced for content of the next National Health Survey, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Health Survey (2010-11)

(b) The Confidentialised Unit Record File (CURF) for the 2007 Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing was recently released.

(c) A strategic review of the National Education and Training Statistics Unit is being undertaken by Peter Grant (former Deputy Secretary, DEEWR). The role and strategic positioning of the unit in providing coordination and cross sector statistics is being examined in light of the new COAG reporting environment for schools, training and early childhood education.

(d) There was a second joint meeting of the Boards of Management for Crime, Criminal Courts and Corrective Services Statistics. Three areas of common interest for the development of statistics in the sector were identified: measures of criminal justice system performance and outcomes; measures of recidivism and re-contact with the justice system; and improved Indigenous identification in administrative data systems.

(e) A project is being jointly undertaken by ABS and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) for the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to develop national standards for the collection of data on early childhood education and care, particularly with reference to the data required for the COAG National Agreement.

(f) Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2008 is scheduled for release in late June 2009.

(h) Household Income and Income Distribution, 2007-08, will be released in late June 2009. These results include new content on childcare which will be used to support the analysis of the costs of children.

(i) In July 2009 the ABS will be releasing 2 census thematic publications on Older Australians and Children and Youth.

(j) Updating of the Canberra Group Handbook. The ABS has joined an international task force, established under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians. The task force will have its first teleconference in early May, and is expected to complete its work, including an update of the handbook within 18 months.

(k) The ABS is developing a new conceptual framework for assessing the economic wellbeing of Australian households, particularly those households considered most at risk of experiencing economic hardship. The draft framework documents will be circulated for discussion and advice from the ABS Household Income and Expenditure Statistics User Advisory Group early in the new financial year. Depending on comments and advice, ABS expects to publish the framework by late 2009.

(l) The ABS has completed an Australia-wide consultation on developing a Housing Information Development Plan, which is expected to be published in the second half of 2009.

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

36. Mr Geoff Lee highlighted two projects being undertaken by the Integrated Collection and Dissemination Services (ICDS) and Methodology and Data Management Division (MDMD). He informed the meeting that the ABS is attending a workshop in Paris on Remote Access Data Laboratories. The workshop will look at microdata practices and their future across a number of National Statistical Offices. He also said that the ABS will be publishing on 4 May 2009 a public version of the Data Quality Framework, which can assist agencies in determining the "fitness for purpose" of data.

Agenda Item 8. Other Business

37. There was no other business.

Agenda Item 9. Arrangements for next meeting

38. The next meeting date will be confirmed with members but it is expected to be 9 November 2009.

Agenda Item 10. Close and Lunch

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