

# AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

9 November 2009

## Record of Discussion and Actions arising

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

**Present:** Brian Pink, Trevor Sutton, Peter Harper, Jason Russo, Geoff Lee, Jeanette Cotterill (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Walter Shafron (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Robyn Kingham-Edwards (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Mark Cully (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), Barry Cameron (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Richard Snabel (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services), Francesca Beddie (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Scott Wallace (Australian Government Information Management Office), Geoff Richardson (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts), Tim Quinn (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Gary Dolman (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government), Kane Travers (Australian Taxation Office)

**Apologies:** Ben Searle (Geoscience Australia)

**Presenters:** Gary Dolman (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government), Judy Schneider (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), Kane Travers (Australian Taxation Office)

**Secretariat:** Mark Lound, Sue Spearritt, Jay Ramasamy (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

## Meeting Summary

The Australian Statistician, Brian Pink, introduced proceedings with the minutes being accepted from the meeting held on 1 May 2009. In his update, he noted that, following a review from the department of Finance and Deregulation and as part of the May 2009 Budget, the ABS had secured an additional annual funding of \$15 million. He also informed the meeting about the Cross Portfolio Integration Committee (CPSI) which is looking at data integration across Commonwealth Government agencies, ABS support for COAG activities and preparations for the 2011 Census of Population and Housing (Para 1-6).

In regard to statistical initiatives arising from government initiatives there was:

- a. An update on NatStats10 which will be held in Sydney from 15-17 September 2010 (Para 7-9);
- b. A review of the 3rd OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy (Para 10-12);
- c. Information provided about the formation Cross Portfolio Integration Committee (CPSI) (Para 13-14);
- d. An update on the Commonwealth Spatial Data Integration (CSDI) Pilot Project (Para 15); and
- e. Information about the release from the Australian Taxation Office of a confidentialised 1% sample file of individual tax return information (Para 16-17).

Gary Dolman, Bureau of Transport and Regional Economic (BTRE), presented on the "Development of a Transportation Metadata Portal" which makes transport metadata available via a single web based gateway rather than through a data warehouse (Para 18-20).

Judy Schneider, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM & C), delivered a presentation on the "Social Inclusion Reporting Framework". The presentation covered the development of an indicator framework for measuring social inclusion over time. The framework will be used to increase our understanding of the extent and nature and social inclusion in Australia and to monitor progress in achieving greater social inclusion over time (Para 21-27).

Dr Siu-Ming Tam, Australian Bureau of Statistics, presented on "ABS Unit Record Data: Current Access and Future Directions". He commented that the ABS needs to respond to the growing requirements of researchers for detailed levels of data while meeting its legislative obligations to protect the confidentiality of data providers. He said that there is growing interest internationally in developing microdata capabilities and informed the meeting about future work planned by the ABS in this area (Para 28-34).

Mr Geoff Lee, Australian Bureau of Statistics, presented on "Sharing Statistical Information between National and International Agencies". He said that the ABS is currently reviewing existing metadata standards and is considering three for use by the ABS - Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX); Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) and Australia and New Zealand Land Information Council (ANZSLIC) (Para 35-38)

Members reported on a range of statistical work being undertaken in their agencies (Para 39-43).

### **Actions Arising**

1. Send members links to reports associated with the 3rd OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy" - Completed.

## **Record of Discussion**

### **Agenda Item 1. Statistician's Update**

1. Mr Pink welcomed members and accepted the minutes from the meeting of 1 May 2009. He informed the group that following a review from the Department of Finance and Deregulation and as part of the May 2009 Budget, the ABS had secured additional annual funding of \$15 million. As a result the ABS had reinstated the full sample for the Labour Force survey, continued the monthly sample for the Retail Survey, and restored funding for many of the other programs which had been reduced in 2008-09.

2. In addition, Mr Pink said that the ABS had secured further funding for:

- a. the creation of a new index to measure the out-of pocket living costs experienced by households whose principal source of income is derived from a pension or other government benefit;
- b. the measurement of progress in reform and improvements in service delivery against performance indicators in COAG National Agreements in the areas of health, disability, education and housing; and
- c. Census field staff payments to ensure compliance with the new National Employment Standards under the revised workplace relations system.

3. Mr Pink said that whilst the additional funding was pleasing, ABS needed to ensure that it had the staff and capability to deliver the new work requested. ABS operates in 8 labour markets across Australia and would look to allocate new work according to the location of the staff capability.

4. Following a proposal from himself and Jane Halton (Secretary, Department of Health and Ageing) earlier in the year, a high level Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSI) has been formed to focus on data integration for Commonwealth Government agencies. While there are a lot of opportunities with data integration, there are also risks which need to be managed appropriately. Currently the committee is only looking at Commonwealth data integration, but eventually they expect to hold discussions with other jurisdictions.

5. ABS has been providing considerable support for COAG initiatives, particularly in the education, health and indigenous sectors. Mr Cameron from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations noted the assistance the ABS has been providing for their COAG work in the education area.

6. Mr Pink also advised that the Census of Population and Housing will be held on 9 August 2011 and that preparations for the 2010 Census Dress Rehearsal are well underway. The 2011 Census is the centenary of the first National Census, and ABS will be encouraging householders to complete their Census form online via eCensus.

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

#### **a. NatStats 2010 Conference**

7. Ms Cotterill informed the meeting that following the successful NatStats08 Conference,

the ABS has commenced planning for a NatStats 2010 Conference, to be held in Sydney 15-17 September 2010. The NatStats 2010 Project Board includes Adjunct Prof Mike Salvaris who was on the NatStats 08 and Community Indicators Summit Project Boards, and representatives from NSW Treasury, Australian Treasury and the Reserve Bank, as well as ABS staff led by Ian Ewing.

8. The NatStats 2010 Conference will be a key platform to promote the National Statistical Service (NSS). The Conference themes are still being finalised, but will include a focus on Long Term Economic Sustainability, Social Progress and a theme around Population, Labour and Skills. There will also be an emphasis on improving understanding of statistics both within government, and the broader community. ABS will be looking for high level speakers across all of these areas and is seeking strong support from all levels of government. Member's suggestions for speakers or for anyone who may wish to support the Conference in any way are welcomed.

9. Ms Cotterill noted other NSS work:

- a. The Community Indicators Summit held in Brisbane in July 2009 was very successful, with 170 delegates across local, state and federal government attending. A Summit Declaration was developed and is available from the NSS web site ([www.nss.gov.au](http://www.nss.gov.au)), along with videos of the presentations. Plans are also underway to establish a working group to progress a more consistent approach to the development of community indicators in Australia.
- b. A guide to metadata management, data sharing and data quality declarations (titled "DATAfitness") was recently released, and is available on the NSS website.
- c. The NSS website is being reviewed and updated with new statistical guides and resources. The website content is now licensed under Creative Commons.

**b. Review of 3rd OECD World Forum on "Statistics, Knowledge and Policy", October 2009, South Korea**

10. Mr Pink reported that he recently attended this Forum, and observed that the genesis for these World Forums came from a groundswell of interest in measuring the wellbeing of societies. The ABS has been a leader in this work since releasing *Measures of Australia's Progress* in 2002. Nearly 2000 delegates from over 50 countries attended the Forum and heard presentations by leading researchers, heads of statistical agencies and civil society organisations, and policy-makers. Topics discussed included:

- a. how to measure aspects of wellbeing, sustainability and inequality;
- b. how to engage citizens and policy-makers in defining and measuring progress; and
- c. tools to use in disseminating and communicating results.

11. Mr Pink noted that one of the Forum keynote speakers was the Economics Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, who had been commissioned by President Sarkozy of France to produce the *Report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*. The report was discussed by the G20 leaders meeting in September 2009 and is optimistic about providing better measures of progress in the future. The Commission of the European Communities has also released a report titled *GDP and Beyond: Measuring Progress in a Changing World*, which again calls for better measurements of progress. Each of these reports reflects a strong political demand for better data to measure the impact of policy on all dimensions of wellbeing.

12. Mr Pink said that the OECD has released a roadmap outlining actions it will take to support the Global Project on Measuring the progress of Societies and future Forums, in collaboration with partner countries.

ACTION 1: ABS to send members a web site link to the reports noted in Para 11.

**c. Formation of Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSI)**

13. Mr Sutton advised the meeting that the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration (CPSI) Steering Committee was formed in the middle of the year, jointly chaired by ABS and the Department of Health and Ageing. He commented that there has been good levels of engagement with stakeholders and informed discussion about the drafting of Principles for Statistical Integration across Australian Government agencies. The Principles will provide a framework against which appropriate institutional and governance arrangements can be developed including the role of the ABS. It is expected that the Principles will be ratified by the Portfolio Secretaries group at their meeting on 2 December 2009.

14. Mr Sutton said that a CPSI Committee Working Group has been formed and one of their goals will be to obtain broader representation from government agencies. He also noted that the Committee is working with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner on the proposed principles and directions.

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

15. Mr Harper provided an update on the CSDI project, which is working on providing a platform for sharing social statistical information. A cross portfolio steering committee has been established, comprised of Geoscience Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Human Services (DHS). The technical pilot is being developed by DHS with the ABS working on an information sharing framework, and a data and metadata framework. The second pass business case is currently being finalised by DHS.

**e. Tax Office 1% Individual Sample File**

16. Mr Travers informed the meeting that the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) had recently released a confidentialised 1% sample file containing individual tax return information for the 2005-06 and the 2006-07 income years. The files are confidentialised to protect the identities of those individuals and contains 49 data items, including eight with demographic information. He noted that they are not longitudinal files.

17. The purpose of producing the files was to provide micro level data to researchers, and to enable advanced users of taxation data to source the information directly from the sample file. Mr Travers said that the ATO discussed the project with other Australian Government agencies and academic staff before releasing the files. He commented that there are currently about 40 users, mainly from the university sector.

**Agenda Item 3. Development of Transport Metadata Pilot Portal**

18. Gary Dolman from the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (BTRE) informed the forum that the Transport Metadata Portal is a joint initiative by Australian and

State/Territory governments. The web based metadata portal was a result of a decision from the Strategic Research and Technology Working Group (SR&T WG) to make strategically important transport metadata available via a single web based gateway rather than through a data warehouse. Mr Dolman advised the meeting that the Australian Transport Council (ATC) endorsed the project.

19. As the first step, a pilot web portal was developed with ABS' assistance to test the functionality of the website and the level of collaboration required from the various jurisdictions. The portal collects basic metadata information such as: name of survey or collection; owner; purpose; and frequency of the collection; scope and coverage; contact details; descriptions of dataset; and access arrangements.

20 Mr Dolman showed the group some features of the transport portal website and commented that it has received considerable support and interest. He said that the newly formed Australian Transport Data Action Network (ATDAN) is expected to pick up the responsibility for the website project, governance and business processes with the ABS to look after the infrastructure and ongoing maintenance of the website. ATDAN is having its first meeting in November 2009.

#### **Agenda Item 4. Social Inclusion Reporting Framework**

21. Dr Schneider from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) introduced this agenda item and commented that the development of the framework has been an important step in the development of the Social Inclusion Agenda.

22. Dr Schneider said that the process for developing the indicator framework included researching other social inclusion reporting frameworks and wide consultation with Australian and State/Territory government agencies, the Australian Social Inclusion Board, academic researchers, and international experts. They also worked with Australian Government agencies through a subgroup of the Social Inclusion Consultative Forum, and used relevant indicators from other government reports eg COAG indicators. The indicator framework will be used as the basis to tell a comprehensive story about social inclusion and how it is changing over time. Dr Schneider explained that it includes indicators for aspects of participation and underlying resources which can be analysed for selected population groups such as long term unemployed or people with a disability.

23. The proposed reporting framework includes indicators at a number of levels: headline and supplementary indicators are outcome indicators of aspects of social inclusion Strategic change indicators, which are yet to be developed, are indicators of potential progress that show areas of government policy intervention which are expected to influence social inclusion outcomes.

24. Dr Schneider noted that a multidimensional approach to measuring social inclusion is essential to capturing the broad picture of levels of participation and resources that impact on social inclusion and exclusion. Research has found that people with multiple disadvantages were concentrated in disadvantaged locations and reported greater difficulty accessing services. Longitudinal datasets such as the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) study and administrative data will be used to analyse entrenched disadvantage.

25. Dr Schneider explained that one of the main purposes of developing this monitoring and reporting framework for social inclusion was to establish a baseline, against which

future policy changes designed to improve social inclusion outcomes can be measured. The baseline report will be released by the Australian Social Inclusion Board in January 2010, with an update 2 years later. Reporting on strategic change indicators by agencies will be required annually commencing in 2011.

26. Dr Schneider also noted that in May 2009 the Australian Social Inclusion Board released a compendium publication which draws together statistics from a range of sources and provides some international comparisons on social inclusion.

27. Further work on finalising the reporting framework includes developing the strategic change indicators and indicators of multiple disadvantage for life cycle groups. They will also undertake a data development strategy to improve the availability of data for reporting .

#### **Agenda Item 5. ABS Unit Record Data: Current Access and Future Directions**

28. Dr Siu-Ming Tam from the ABS introduced this agenda item by explaining that the ABS provides Microdata to users in three different Confidentialised Unit Record File (CURF) forms:

- a. Basic CURF (most highly confidentialised available on CD-ROM);
- b. Expanded CURF made available in Remote Access Data Lab (RADL); and
- c. Specialised CURF, made available through onsite datalabs in the ABS.

29. Dr Tam noted that there are over 100 CURFs available, and these are listed on the ABS website. He explained to the forum the need for the ABS to balance between legislative obligations to protect the confidentiality of data providers while at the same time responding to the growing requirements of researchers for detailed levels of data. The three different CURFs represent the restrictions on data availability and the access environment.

30. Dr Tam said that CURFs are used by around 1500 users from over 100 Australian organisations ranging from Government agencies, universities and private organisations. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) has entered into an agreement with Statistics New Zealand (SNZ) to enable Australian university academics and researchers access to SNZ's microdata files.

31. Dr Tam explained that while outputs from the use of CURFs is easy to measure, outcomes from their use is a challenge. A majority of CURFs are used for the purpose of policy and program development, cabinet briefings, postgraduate research, consultancies and for modelling. Journal articles, conference papers and research reports are the most visible outputs of CURF usage.

32. Internationally, Dr Tam said that National Statistical Offices (NSOs) provide a range of access arrangements. While the ABS is regarded as a leader in providing remote access to Microdata, all NSOs are keen to develop remote access capabilities and common metadata standards in order to address the growing demand for microdata.

33. Dr Tam said that future directions for ABS Microdata access include:

- a. Providing microdata on users' desktops in conjunction with the use of programs such as Privacy Preservation Analytics (PPA) developed by the CSIRO to protect microdata files;

- b. Extending ABS Datalab (ABSDL) environment to users to perform highly complex analyses; and
- c. Improving access to national and international microdata by developing common metadata standards.

34. In the discussion that followed, Mr Harper, ABS Deputy Australian Statistician emphasised the importance of Microdata to users and the ABS position on Microdata access.

**Agenda Item 6. Sharing Statistical Information between national and international agencies: Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX)**

35. Mr Lee opened his presentation by noting that information dissemination and sharing across the world is changing dramatically, driven by the spread of technologies such as the web, more open government and the decreasing cost of data sharing and dissemination.

36. Mr Lee explained that the ABS is reviewing existing metadata standards due to the increasing demand for ABS website based information and involvement with a number of government data initiatives which are looking for appropriate metadata standards. He said that three metadata standards are being considered as suitable for the ABS and potentially more broadly across government: Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX); Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) and Australia and New Zealand Land Information Council (ANZSLIC).

37. Mr Lee said that SDMX has received considerable support from international agencies and interest from the Australian Treasury and the Reserve Bank due to its ability to support metadata and data exchange in XML based format and as well as a range of web services. He noted that all three technologies share many common features and ABS is looking at adopting all three standards depending on the type of data, ie DDI for microdata, ANZSLIC for geospatial data and SDMX for Census data.

38. In the discussion that followed, Mr Brian Pink said that the OECD is undertaking work on the use of data sharing technologies and is meeting with IT companies such as Microsoft and SAS about SDMX capability within their applications.

**Agenda Item 7. Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance - briefings for information and comment**

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

40. Ms Carol Ey, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) informed the forum about the Longitudinal Survey Workshop to be held in Canberra. She also advised that *Longitudinal Survey of Indigenous Children* had been released nationally and that the datasets were available to researchers, on a similar basis to other FaHCSIA datasets but with some additional conditions.

41. Mr Scott Wallace, Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), advised that they are finalising the Australians Interacting Report, and working with other jurisdictions on an implementation plan for the National Government Information Sharing

Strategy (NGISS).

42. Mr Mark Cully, Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), said that they are developing a new survey on recent immigrants, which will involve a sample size of 4,000 to 5,000.

43. Greg Evans, Centrelink, said that his agency had established an Enterprise Data Warehouse to improve their data management capabilities.

**Agenda Item 8. Other Business**

44. There was no other business.

**Agenda Item 9. Arrangements for next meeting**

45. The next meeting date will be confirmed with members but it is expected to be in the week beginning 17 May 2010.

**Agenda Item 10. Close and Lunch**

46. Mr Pink thanked members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting at 12.45 pm.