

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

3 May 2006

Summary of Discussion

Chair: Dennis Trewin (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Present: Denis Farrell, Susan Linacre, Carl Obst, Steve Matheson (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Colin Mues (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), David Braddock (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Dr Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), John Ryan (Department of Immigration, and Multicultural Affairs), Carol Ey (Centrelink), Roger Barson (Family and Community Services), Chris Foster (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations), Dr Don Brunner (Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources), Sean Sullivan (Department of Environment and Heritage), Peter Thomson (Medicare Australia), Richard Jukes (Department of Health and Ageing), Wendy Black (Australian Taxation Office), Dr Evan Arthur (Department of Education, Science and Technology), Andy Turner (Department of Transport and Regional Services), Kim Terrell (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet)

Apologies: Jonathan Palmer (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Presenters: Dennis Trewin, Denis Farrell, Susan Linacre, Steve Matheson, Bob McColl, Julie Evans (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Kim Terrell (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet), Dr Don Brunner (Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources)

Observers: Geoff Lee, Bob McColl, Gemma van Halderen, Julie Evans (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Secretariat: Eric Morris, Geoff de Baux (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

1. Minutes from previous meeting

Minutes accepted from previous meeting.

2. ABS Developments

a. Statistician's Update

In his update Mr Trewin highlighted the following activities within the ABS:

Population census

1. The major focus is currently on preparing for the 2006 Census
2. Changes from the 2001 Census include new questions on long term

- illness, voluntary work, unpaid work and fertility.
3. It is expected about 10% of the population will take up the 'e-census'.
 4. ABS is hosting a conference in Canberra in July to share ideas and develop understanding of how the census can be used.

Census data enhancement

1. Will increase utility of census data by adding longitudinal element via statistical matching.
2. Quality studies will be undertaken to allow measures of reliability to be placed on this data.
3. An information paper is being published on 31 May.

Privacy issues

Mr Trewin is meeting Privacy Commissioners on 18 May. Key areas for discussion are the 2006 Census and the National Data Network.

Geography

Work is continuing on mapping mesh blocks and making this structure available via Address Coder software.

2006 Agricultural census

Records will be meshblock coded so statistics for various geographic structures can be produced.

ANZSIC

ANZSIC 06 released April 2006

State of Environment reporting

The ABS is collaborating with DEH on a possible statistical leadership role in environmental reporting to help improve availability, accessibility and quality of data across this sector.

b. ESG Issues.

(i) Plan for development of Longitudinal Data Base of Business - for information. Denis Farrell, ABS.

Mr Farrell discussed the development of the Business Longitudinal Database (BLD). The database aims to provide an improved understanding of business dynamics, particularly in regard to the imperatives driving small and medium sized businesses. Previously most analysis of business dynamics in Australia and internationally has focussed at the macro level with little analysis at the individual firm level.

The BLD will enable a capacity-cause-effect view of firm-level productivity:

1. The capacity of firms to undertake activities which will enhance productivity growth.
2. The interaction and relative importance of various activities which are presumed productivity drivers, such as research and development.

3. The impact of 1 and 2 on firm level productivity growth over time.

As well as productivity-related information, the BLD will enable a view of various business characteristics and activities and their impact on sustainability, growth and performance more generally. Two examples of this are analysing: businesses that export with those that don't; and new and ceased businesses versus existing businesses.

The ABS anticipates that user understanding of business dynamics resulting from the firm-level information from the BLD will make demand for some existing aggregate ABS data redundant over time.

Two databases will be built, a small-dense BLD consisting of 3,000 businesses and a large-sparse BLD which will bring together all available information for all businesses.

It is intended to integrate the BLD with information from various aggregate data sources to produce a pseudo drill-down view into these aggregates.

As part of this integration, the small-dense BLD will be supplemented by additional units to produce aggregate estimates of innovation and business use of IT. This is the main thrust of the ABS's Integrated Business Characteristics Strategy (IBCS).

The BLD will also be integrated with a Food Industry Survey commissioned by DAFF.

Some discussion ensued on the BLD, particularly in regard to the availability of selected data. The ABS commented that the availability of state data will be limited due to problems with classifying businesses that cross state boundaries. However the large sparse version may allow for some state data in sectors where activity is largely single state.

One member asked about the collection of information on training. The BLD will not contain data on training but this may be collected in the future and linked with the BLD. It was also noted that there are other options for collecting information on training including the annual Business Characteristics collection and the Economy Wide Survey.

The first panel is currently in the field with published results and files for analysis available about the end of the year.

c. *PSG Issues.*

(i) *Population Well-being Data Gaps Workshop 8 June 2006* - for information. Bob McColl, ABS.

Mr McColl gave members the background to the Data Gaps Workshop being organised as a joint initiative between ABS, Treasury and FACSIA.

The purpose of the workshop is to assist the needs of Australian social policy makers through identifying high level shortcomings and gaps in

information and how to fill these gaps on an ongoing basis.

There are 25 delegates attending, mainly CEOs and Deputy CEOs of organisations formulating social policy and experts in social research. Key presenters and discussants include Len Cook, Wayne Jackson and Adam Graycar.

Papers were distributed on 22 May. Topics for discussion include:

1. data gaps identified via mechanisms like IDPs and infrastructure plans;
2. overseas experiences in meeting demand for social policy data;
3. plans for addressing data quality and availability issues;
4. measuring performance and indicators ;
5. a specific focus on some subject areas, for example consideration of indigenous and health sectors.

Ms Linacre commented that this workshop should place an across government perspective on this issue by moving away from bilateral examination and approaches, to a wider community approach with a longer term look at solutions.

(ii) Establishment of the Migrant Statistics Unit - for information. Susan Linacre, ABS.

A Migrant Statistics unit, jointly supported by DIMA and the ABS, has been established in the ABS Adelaide office. The unit would draw together existing data across this field as well as examine data needs and gaps.

Some of the key areas of interest and policy questions on the agenda for examination include:

1. how successfully migrants settle under different immigration schemes;
2. barriers to migrants accessing services;
3. the economic contribution of migrants;
4. regional impacts of migration;
5. understanding what makes Australia a desirable destination;
6. the use of and demand for support services; and
7. regional migration.

In discussion, some data sources were highlighted that will help in the development of statistics in this field including a module on migrant entry conditions and visa status in the General Social Survey and use of the census data enhancement work.

Comments around the table were strongly supportive of this initiative, highlighting the value of the data. There was some discussion about the use of statistical matching across different datasets to provide reliable data in this area.

d. National Statistical Service Update - for information and comments. Steve Matheson, ABS.

Mr Matheson gave a brief background to current ABS position on the NSS.

He noted that the NSS is still the number 1 objective in the ABS revised corporate plan and that the ABS has established a new Branch to coordinate existing activity and drive new work in this area. The new Branch would initially focus on coordinating and adding value to ABS cross cutting initiatives.

The ABS is working towards establishing a National Statistical Policy and code of practice. Initially, the ABS is focusing on delivering on key NSS projects to gain credibility. These 'iconic' projects are being used as NSS exemplars:

1. improving coordination and production of environmental statistics;
2. Population Well-being Data Gaps;
3. improving the availability of regional statistics via mesh block and coding work to support geographic classifications;
4. Census Data Enhancement; and
5. National Data Network.

Other key strategies being pursued by the ABS to progress the NSS are:

1. linking statistical priorities more directly to statistical need and government policy directions; and
2. developing a community of statisticians across government agencies.

4. *NCVER's role and their current thinking on producing information - for information and comments.* Tom Karmel, NCVER.

Mr Karmel gave a presentation outlining the role of NCVER in the production and dissemination of vocational education statistics. Slides are provided as attachment 1.

NCVER is a semi autonomous non government organisation based in Adelaide. Main activities include:

1. producing, compiling and disseminating vocational education statistics;
2. managing national research in the vocational education field;
3. managing a national research database; and
4. conducting vocational education research.

Their collections span a range of subject areas: students and courses, finance, apprentices and student outcomes. Sources of data are from both administrative and direct collection.

Dissemination is by a range of methods (web tables, data cubes, publications, URFs etc). Output includes themed publications, annual summaries of key messages, in-depth reports on specific issues, briefings and presentations. Most of their published material is available free of charge from their web site.

NCVER faces similar challenges to many statistical producing agencies, namely:

1. information gaps;
2. quality assurance of material;
3. maintaining adequate documentation;

4. stakeholder engagement;
5. benchmarking; and
6. research capacity and flexibility.



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5. *Role of Cabinet Implementation Unit of PM&C* - for information and discussion. Kim Terrell, PM&C

Slides are provided as attachment 2.

Mr Terrell explained that the Cabinet Implementation Unit has a focus on ensuring that key initiatives and decisions emerging from cabinet are implemented effectively. He cited a quote from Peter Shergold "People making policy don't focus enough on making it happen" as a key motivator for establishing the unit.

Their main aims are ensuring:

1. projects have clear objectives;
2. implementation plans are considered with high priority when policy initiatives are first proposed;
3. policy is delivered in a consistent and sympathetic manner;
4. effective project management is carried out; and
5. key initiatives are reviewed once implemented.

At present the unit is tracking 170 key progress measures against milestones across government.

The unit has learnt a number of lessons in its operations:

1. The public sector performs reasonably well in delivering major government initiatives.
2. Project Management capacity across government has improved.
3. Results focus across government has improved.
4. The public sector has been responsive in tackling project implementation issues and barriers.

In considering links to the NSS in developing policy, Mr Terrell cited the following:

1. The current government has a strong focus on delivery of results and using information to inform progress and decisions.
2. Statistics are important in measuring how effective outcomes are achieved.

Members noted the importance of policy areas considering statistical output needs for performance measures and evaluation before projects commence.



DPMC_AGSF 3 May, Kim Terrell.PRZ

3. *NDN Developments* - for information and comments. Steve Matheson, ABS.

Mr Matheson gave a brief report updating progress on the development of the National Data Network (NDN) which is currently in demonstration phase.

The key goal of the NDN is to improve visibility of and access to information through a controlled exposure environment.

Issues under action at the moment include:

1. establishing a range of full and lite nodes in the demonstration environment;
2. development of the controlled access protocols and functions;
3. collaborations with US Census Bureau (Data Ferrett) and Macquarie University (MAMS); and
4. enabling key NDN services such as CSIRO's PPA (Privacy Preserving Analytics), address coder software and other output tools.

6. *a. Cooperative Analytical Projects between the ABS and Australian Government Agencies* - for information. Julie Evans, ABS.

Ms Evans discussed ABS's current position in regard to collaborative analytical projects involving access to ABS Microdata under Clause 7A of the Census & Statistics Act. This was provided as a follow up to discussion on this issue at the last AGSF.

There was an evaluation of the five projects that were conducted under this arrangement. The evaluation report highlighted that real value emerged for both the ABS and agencies via the in depth analysis that this approach could support. The ABS plans to consult with industry groups and other stakeholders to further progress projects of this type.

Mr Trewin noted that although the ABS was keen to progress further collaborations, he also reiterated cautions around the high cost of supporting these projects and the need for them to assist the Statistician as well as the collaborating agency.



Paper_Item 6a AGSF May 3 2006.pdf

b. Update on ABS/DITR analytical collaboration on innovation data - for information. Don Brunner, DITR.

Mr Brunner distributed copies of the DITR and joint DITR/ABS publications resulting from a recent collaboration. He discussed the value of the project for DITR, with the in-depth analysis resulting in valuable output on drivers of innovation and characteristics of innovating businesses. From the perspective of assisting the Statistician he noted that understanding of the data developed during the analysis work helped frame possible improvements and enhancements to future collections.

He closed by reiterating DITRs strong support for this project. A member noted the collaboration with DOTARS and ABS has also been successful with DOTARS providing valuable assistance in reviewing the survey methodology.

7. *Around the table - for information*
International statistical matters

Mr Trewin noted:

1. AUSAid has expanded funding to the ABS to develop the Statistical System in the South Pacific
2. OECD is holding workshops that might lead to the development of a framework for presenting indicators, using different perspectives (eg economic, environmental) with a major conference scheduled next year. This led to some brief discussion on the quality of indicators, particularly when distilled to one number and used as a ranking instrument.
3. ABS is assisting the Indonesian Statistics Agency in National Accounts and other fields of statistics.

8. *Other business*
None.

9. *Arrangements for next meeting:*

9.00am - 1.00pm
Wednesday 29th November 2006
Archer Board Room
ABS House

Action items

1. ABS to report back on take up of 'e-census'
2. ABS to report back on outcomes from June Data Gaps Workshop