

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

1 November 2006

Record of Discussion and Actions arising

- Chair:** Peter Harper (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
- Present:** Denis Farrell, Susan Linacre, Geoff Lee (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Phil Kokic (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Diane Gibson (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), John Ryan (Department of Immigration, and Multicultural Affairs), Carol Ey (Centrelink), Andrew Whitecross (Family and Community Services), Chris Foster (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations), Sean Sullivan (Department of Environment and Heritage), Peter Thomson (Medicare Australia), Indra Gajanayake (Department of Health and Ageing), Oon Ying Chin (Department of Education, Science and Technology), Andy Turner (Department of Transport and Regional Services),
- Apologies:** Dr Don Bruncker (Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources), Dr Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Phillip Hind (Australian Taxation Office)
- Presenters:** Peter Harper, Denis Farrell, Susan Linacre (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Carol Ey (Centrelink), Andy Turner (Department of Transport and Regional Services)
- Observers:** Steve Matheson (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
- Secretariat:** Mark Lound, Eric Morris (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Meeting Summary

Discussion on several Whole of Government issues and their impact on national statistics - Standardised Business Reporting, Amendments to the Privacy Act and Australian Government Access card. Many AGSF members had strong stakeholdings in these topics and were keen to explore how the AGSF could collaborate to examine and influence their progress (Para 2-5).

Summary of ABS activity in Environment Statistics, Agriculture census and Population census (Para 6-14)

Summary of progress and discussion on Community Indicators and Population Well Being Data Gaps. These are statistical issues that are significant to a wide range of Australian government stakeholders. Both have been examined in National Workshops recently with follow up focussing on identifying key policy needs and mapping data availability. The AGSF flagged widespread interests in ongoing work amongst members and an interest in being informed and involved where appropriate. (Para 15-20)

Highlights of key National Statistical Service projects. (Para 21-23)

Presentations on DoTARS statistical collections (Para 24-26) and Centrelink Service Delivery (Para 27-29) which lead to discussion around demand for data with flexible geographic classifications to meet the needs of policy makers and service deliverers. It was considered that the AGSF could have a role, in liaison with ANZSLIC, in progressing spatial data requirements across government.

Actions Arising

AGSF Meeting	Review of actions	Assigned	Status
	From last meeting		
1/11/06	Next AGSF meeting to include the Access Card issue as a topic	ABS - NSSLB	
1/11/06	Respond to ABARE about the effect that agricultural enterprises with multiple ABN's would have on Agriculture census coverage	ABS - Agriculture Business Statistics Centre	In progress
1/11/06	Circulate Population census output schedule to AGSF members	ABS - NSSLB	http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/89a5f3d8684682b6ca256d002c809b/9c201b70baf2eca257212001761a5!OpenDocument
1/11/06	Send link to Community Indicators Workshop papers and outcomes to AGSF	ABS - NSSLB	http://www.nss.gov.au/ss/home.NSF/pages/Community+Indicators+Workshop?OpenDocument
1/11/06	Investigate how to keep stakeholders (including the AGSF) informed on activity in Community Indicators	ABS - NSSLB	
1/11/06	Distribute ASAC paper on NSS to AGSF members	ABS - NSSLB	See Attachment 3
1/11/06	Distribute census data enhancement paper to AGSF members	ABS - NSSLB	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Documents/2060.02006?OpenDocument
1/11/06	Distribute list of NDN Interim Governing Board members to AGSF members	ABS - NSSLB	See Attachment 4
1/11/06	Report on discussions on spatial information at this meeting to ANZSLIC .	ABS - NSSLB	In progress
1/11/06	Circulate PMSEIC data for Science & Research paper to AGSF members	ABS - NSSLB	Pending
1/11/06	Confirm date for next AGSF meeting	ABS - NSSLB	Set for wed 2/5/07 Budget date 8/5/07

Record of Discussion

Welcome: Peter Harper (ABS)

1. Mr Harper welcomed attendees. He briefly highlighted the following issues:

- the new Australian Statistician will be announced shortly
- Population Census and Agriculture Census have been at the forefront of ABS attention
- ABS is contributing to a project to streamline Australia's Greenhouse and Energy Reporting, and
- ASGC (Australian Standard Geographic Classification) is being reviewed in 2007.

2. Mr Harper noted the ABS involvement with the SBR (Standardised Business Reporting) initiative. This project aims to reduce costs of businesses reporting to government through whole of government IT infrastructure which would collect and distribute data reported. The project is still in its early stages of development, and ABS interest involves management of the metadata component and assessing the effects on overall statistical reporting.

3. Mr Harper informed the group that the Privacy Act has been amended to allow Australian Government Agencies to disseminate identifiable information in response to national emergencies. The amendment is enabling only, with any release of information still at the discretion of the Agency. The ABS has indicated that they will not utilise this provision, and has sought exemption in the legislation for data collected under the Census and Statistics Act. (CSA). While this has been rejected, the Government has indicated that it would exempt the CSA via a Regulation. Members commented about the lack of awareness about this initiative, especially considering the potential implications for statistical producers.

4. Mr Harper noted that the ABS has been involved in the Working Group established by the Department of Human Services for the Australian Government Access Card. The ABS is keen to see the statistical benefits of the project maximised but is aware that service delivery is the key focus of the card and will be the main determinant of the ultimate range of data items collated. The ABS also wants to ensure that rules and protocols are established around data accessibility for statistical purposes. A number of AGSF members indicated strong interest in this project. It was proposed that the Access Card issue be the subject of the next AGSF, possibly with a presentation from the Office of the Access Card.

5. **Action Item:**

- i. Next AGSF meeting to include the Access Card issue as a topic.

ABS Developments

ESG Issues - for information and comments: Peter Harper (ABS)

- Initiatives in Environment Statistics

6. The ABS is progressing a range of initiatives in environment statistics including:

- October 2006: Release of estimates from the first Natural Resource Management Survey 2004-05 (cat. no. 4620.0)
- November 2006: The Water Account Australia 2004-05 (cat. no. 4610.0) Australia's Environment Issues and Trends 2006 (cat. no. 4613.0) and Environmental Issues: People's Views and Practices (cat. no. 4602.0), and
- December 2006: Estimates of Regional Water Use, Australia 2004-05 (cat. no. 4610.0.55.002).

7. The demand for environment and energy statistics is increasing and the ABS is working with key stakeholders to best meet the expectations of the user community.

- 2005/06 Agricultural Census

8. The five-yearly Agricultural Census is being conducted for 2005-06 to provide benchmark information on the agriculture sector for small geographic areas. There have been some significant changes from the previous census:

- the move to a new population frame with an improved coverage, and
- the use of mesh blocks to support flexible geographic output regions.

9. Response to the Agricultural Census has been excellent with almost 90% response received to date. Preliminary results for principal commodities are expected to be released in February 2007 with final estimates released in December 2007.

10. Mr Kovic asked about the effects agricultural enterprises with multiple ABN's would have on census coverage. Mr Harper indicated that sample and frame maintenance processes are implemented to ensure that this issue is managed.

11. **Action item:**

ii. ABS to advise ABARE about the effect that agricultural enterprises with multiple ABN's will have on Agricultural Census coverage.

PSG Issues - for information and comments: Susan Linacre (ABS)

- Population Census Update

12. 2006 Population Census processing is underway. Key features to note:

- the Population Census achieved a strong positive response from the media and public
- 9% of respondents chose the e-census option. Given the success of e-census, this option will be marketed more strongly in 2011
- the post enumeration survey has been conducted with good response achieved, and
- the timing of the 2011 census will be considered given the first 2 weeks in August is a peak holiday period in several states.

13. AGSF members expressed interest in the output schedule for 2006 Census data.

14. **Action item:**

iii. Circulate census output schedule to AGSF members

- Community Indicators Workshop

15. A Community Indicators Workshop was held on 5-6 September in Melbourne. The workshop discussed the key social, economic and environmental issues and progress on developing indicators in these spheres. The discussions identified key issues for the ABS in preparation for the OECD forum on International Measures of Progress to be held next year in Istanbul. Mr Harper proposed that the next AGSF meeting could discuss progress on community indicators to help formulate strategies in this area, particularly given that sources for this type of information is likely to include many of the AGSF participants.

16. There was some discussion about the wide range of data sources in the national and state domains and the need for bilateral/collaborative work to develop, align and integrate different data sources to develop a common set of indicators. It was noted that it was important to share knowledge and progress to reduce duplication across jurisdictions. AGSF members expressed interest in being kept up to date on developments in this area. The papers from the workshop will be made available through the NSS web site and the ABS will look into other avenues to keep stakeholders informed.

17. **Action items:**

- iv. AGSF members will be provided with the web site link to workshop papers and report.
- v. The ABS will investigate how to keep stakeholders (including the AGSF) informed on activity in this area

- Population Well-being Data Gaps Workshop

18. A Data Gaps workshop was held at the ABS in June 2006 as a joint Treasury/FACSLA/ABS initiative. Papers have been released to the NSS web site. A key focus of the workshop was how to access and make better use of current data sources and the identification of data gaps.

19. The Workshop Steering Committee is developing a set of actions from the workshop. The work on these action items will firstly involve the identification of key policy issues which will then be mapped to the data that is available and/or required. For the initial data mapping exercise, "early childhood" has been selected as a topic with broad interest and a range of data that is both available and required. Work has commenced with several agencies to identify the key policy issues related to this topic.

20. The meeting discussed issues around data mapping with a focus on identification of existing sources, data matching and integration. It was agreed that there is a range of technical, technological and legislative constraints that provide barriers to this work that will require a commitment by agencies to resolve.

National Statistical Service and National Data Network Update - for information and comments: Denis Farrell (ABS)

21. Highlights of key NSS projects being progressed by the ABS:

- work is continuing on meshblocks to cater for more flexible geographic regions of various user groups and allow for integration/comparability of data
- quality studies being conducted around census data enhancement will examine longitudinal change between censuses. The areas of focus will include indigenous mortality and labour force status
- the update to the ANZSIC (Australia New Zealand Standard Industry Classification) is progressing well, and
- the National Statistical Training Institute within the ABS is offering it's suite of training to government agencies through the ABS Website.

National Data Network (NDN)

22. The ABS convened a National Data Network (NDN) workshop on 27 October 2006 for key stakeholders about the future directions of the network. The workshop looked at what was required for the NDN to move to the first production release. It was agreed that prior to general release the NDN would need to develop some case studies that focus on meeting the business needs of selected custodians and user communities, rather than focusing directly on infrastructure development. The NDN Governing Board will meet at the end of November to identify the appropriate strategies to move forward.

23. **Action Item:**

vi. The ASAC paper on the NSS, the Census Data Enhancement information paper and list of NDN Interim Governing Board members will be distributed to AGSF members.

Focus on DOTARS/BTRE statistical collections (presentation): Andy Turner (DOTARS)

24. Mr Turner gave a presentation outlining the statistical work of BTRE. The presentation is attached below (Attachment 1).

25. The discussion focussed on the increasing demand for spatial information from the statistical user community who are increasingly using visual analysis in decision making. This demand required flexible output to meet the different geographic constructs of users. However, it also requires significant resources to implement and detailed knowledge of user needs. The meeting recognised the work of ANZSLIC and others in this field and expressed an interest in the AGSF keeping abreast of developments.

26. **Action item:**

vii. ABS to consider how the AGSF could be used to assist in developing a 'whole of government' approach to spatial information, in conjunction with ANZSLIC

Using microsimulation and GIS capabilities to support service delivery decisions (presentation): Carol Ey (Centrelink)

27. Ms Ey gave a presentation on how Centrelink use spatial data to make decisions about service delivery. The presentation is attached below (Attachment 2).

28. In the discussion that followed a number of agencies reported using data with a geographic dimension as input into models to examine service delivery. It was noted though that each agency used different systems, standards etc and that some collaborative work was required as per BTRE's presentation. Given the range of statistical issues with spatial data modelling and the fact that this issue has significant interest across whole of government, it was suggested that AGSF members keep informed about developments.

29. **Action item:**

Refer to Action item vii.

Around the table - for information

30. Key issues:

- DEH is tabling State of the Environment Report on 6th December, and
- the Prime Ministers Science & Engineering Innovation Council (PMSEIC) Working Group is meeting on 8 December to consider a strategy paper on data for science and research and how it could be better used across government.

31. **Action items:**

- viii. Circulate PMSEIC paper to AGSF members.
- ix. Confirm date for next meeting.

Arrangements for next meeting:

32. Proposed:
9.00am - 12.30pm
Monday 30 April 2007
Host Agency. TBA

Attachment 1: Focus on DOTARS/BTRE statistical collections



AGSF 1 November 06 - BTRE Statistical Collections - slides only version.ppt

Attachment 2: Using microsimulation and GIS capabilities to support service delivery decisions



Centrelink presentation to AGSF Nov 06 web.ppt

Attachment 3: ASAC Paper on the NSS



- ASAC Item 9_1.pdf

Attachment 4: NDN Interim Governing Board Membership List



- NDN IGB_1.pdf