Australian Government Statistical Forum - Agenda

9.30am-12.30pm
Mon 29 October 2007
Archer Board Room
ABS House
45 Benjamin Way,
BELCONNEN ACT 2617

1	*Welcome*	Brian Pink ABS
	a. Minutes from April 2007 Meeting *b. Statistician's update*	
2	*Statistical Issues arising from Government Initiatives -* briefings for information and comment	
	a. Update on Data for Science	
	b. National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS)	
	c. Children and Youth Statistical Portal - demonstration	
3	*Around the table : Statistical matters of significance -* briefings for information and comments	
4	*The impact of new Information Technology on Statistics -* for information and discussion	Brian Pink
	MORNING TEA from 10.30 am	
5	*Capturing Spatial and Statistical Metadata Across Government*	Ben Searle Office of Spatial Data Management OSDM
6	*Statistical Conference November 2008 -* for information and discussion	Steve Matheson
	a. Purpose *b. Themes*	
7	*ABS issues of interest -* briefings for information and comments	
		Peter Harper ABS Susan Linacre ABS Ian Ewing ABS
8	*Other business*	
9	*Arrangements for next meeting*	
10	*Close and Lunch*	

Actions Arising

AGSF Meeting	Review of actions	Assigned	Status
	From last meeting		
30/04/07	Provide a link to GA's closed extranet	ABS - NSSLB	completed
30/04/07	Confirm date for next AGSF meeting	ABS - NSSLB	completed

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

30 April 2007

Record of Discussion and Actions arising

Chair: Brian Pink (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Present: Brian Pink, Denis Farrell, Susan Linacre, Peter Harper, Julie Evans, Alister Nairn, Geoff Lee (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Milly Lubulwa (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Cathy Hales (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Neil Mullenger (Department of Immigration, and Citizenship), Ben Healey (Centrelink), Andrew Whitecross (Family and Community Services), Peter Thomson (Medicare Australia), Jacqueline Ball (Department of Health and Ageing), Evan Arthur (Department of Education, Science and Technology), Andy Turner (Department of Transport and Regional Services), Godfrey Lubulwa (Department of Transport and Regional Services), Phillip Hind (Australian Taxation Office), Dr Don Brunker (Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources), Mel Butler (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Lucio Krbavac (Department of Education, Science and Training), Jenny Bone (Geoscience Australia)

Apologies: None

Presenters: Brian Pink, Peter Harper, Denis Farrell, Susan Linacre, Julie Evans, Alister Nairn (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Evan Arthur (Department of Education, Science and Technology), Jenny Bone (Geoscience Australia)

Observers: Steve Matheson (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Secretariat: Mark Lound, Eric Morris, Kettie Hewett (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Meeting Summary

The new Australian Statistician, Brian Pink, introduced proceedings. He raised some of the key challenges facing the ABS and the National Statistical Service, and commented on his experiences in Statistics New Zealand (Para 1-5).

Summary of progress and discussion on the possible statistical useage of the <u>Australian Government Access Card</u> (AGAC) (Para 6-9). Evan Arthur from DEST gave a presentation on the progress being made on the PMSEIC <u>Data for Science Recommendations</u> (Para 10-12).

A briefing on the <u>Protocol for the Release of Social Security Information</u> was presented to the Forum by the FACSIA representative (Para 13-14). Its purpose is to provide guidelines to manage the release of social security information by agencies for research and development purposes.

There were presentations from Geoscience Australia and the ABS on <u>aligning the use of spatial data across government</u> (Para 16-25). It was noted in the ensuing discussion that with the exception of a small number of datasets, spatial data can be attributed to most data if address information is collected. The use of Mesh Blocks, a more stable unit than Collection Districts, was seen as an important development in this area.

There was a presentation from the ABS about the <u>development of a National Statistical Policy</u> and how this could be approached (Para 26-31). Discussion amongst AGSF members supported the need for an NSP. It was expected that it would take several years and significant collaborative work across agencies to work through the issues and develop an NSP that would be accepted across Government.

An update was given on ABS issues in <u>ESG, PSG</u> and <u>National Statistical Service and National Data Network</u>. (Para 32-34)

Actions Arising

AGSF Meeting	Review of actions	Assigned	Status
	From last meeting		
30/04/07	NSS to provide a link to GA's closed extranet	ABS - NSSLB	
30/04/07	Confirm date for next AGSF meeting	ABS - NSSLB	

Record of Discussion

Agenda Item 1. *Welcome* Brian Pink. ABS

Mr Pink moved that the minutes from last meeting be accepted.

Mr Farrell indicated that actions from the last meeting had been addressed.

1   Mr Pink raised some of the key challenges facing the ABS and the NSS, and commented on his experiences in Statistics New Zealand.

2   While in New Zealand he observed that the concept of Australia's National Statistical System had become more clearly articulated. At the same time he saw a strong set of challenges emerging that need addressing to effectively progress national statistics. He cited the increasing complexity of official statistical systems, demands of users for more effective information and increasingly antagonistic data providers.

3   In this environment he considered that a key focus for the NSS was working to make best use of information already held by government agencies. This information has the potential to offer the biggest gains to the NSS. To make significant progress, effective work was needed to address issues such as privacy, data integration, accessibility and educating providers in the value of the information they hold.

4   Mr Pink suggested that the AGSF had a key role in making progress against these issues. He cited initiatives like the National Data Network (NDN) and Standardised Business Reporting (SBR) as examples where coordinated action by statistical producers had the potential to realise significant benefits.

5   Mr Pink closed by noting the two big challenges he saw facing the Australian Statistical system:
    a. Improving the National Statistical System is not the major business or core role of most agencies. Statistical leadership was needed to engage CEOs to help them buy into the whole of government advancement of national statistical priorities.

    b. The statistical community had to work at balancing its role of servicing both government and the community. Statistical leadership needs to lead by informing, influencing and providing coordination in methods and standards to build a respected and trusted statistical system for producers and users whilst maintaining and building the trust of the community.

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

a. Australian Government Access Card - briefing for information and comment: Julie Evans (ABS)

6   Ms Evans gave a presentation on the current status of the Australian Government Access Card (AGAC). She noted that the Department of Human Services (DHS) have emphasised that the AGAC is not an ID card and subscribing will be optional. She also noted that information needed for the card will be kept on a central register, while participating agencies will retain information for their uses (which will not be part of the central register). The main debate in Parliament had been regarding privacy.

7   The ABS has a strong statistical interest in the AGAC. She commented that legislation governing the AGAC was introduced to Parliament in March of this year, but the draft law setting up the AGAC was put on hold after a Senate inquiry raised major concerns about the legislation, in particular, the approach of using two stages with confidentiality provisions included in the second stage. When and if the AGAC legislation is passed through Parliament, data will be subject to the relevant agencies' confidentiality rules, and the ABS will be able to access the information on that basis.

8   There was a brief discussion about the availability and quality of data from the AGAC. It was noted that the AGAC had the capacity to improve the quality of data, as information on the register, such as address, will be able to be updated from any participating agency. However, the group acknowledged that the statistical use of the data for government organisations was limited if the AGAC could not be used for data linking and if there were problems with the quality of the source data. There was also some discussion about how the card was expected to work in practice.

9   There is a working group who meet regularly to discuss legal issues relating to the AGAC. The ABS is represented on this group and will keep the AGSF informed of progress.

b. Data for Science - briefing for information and comment: Evan Arthur (DEST)

10   Mr Arthur gave a presentation on the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) and the Data For Science initiative (see Attachment 1). The overall recommendation from the Group was for a cooperative, whole of government approach within a national strategic framework. Key recommendations included a national network of data repositories, improved sharing and collaboration and increasing the skill of the workforce for best practice in data management. He also provided information on a number of DEST initiatives in this area.

11   There was some discussion about how the National Data Network (NDN) could potentially align with the Australian Academic and Research Network (AARNet). Although the AARNet is compatible with the NDN on a technical level, at this stage it does not have the capability that the NDN does to provide custodians of information

sources control over who can access their data.

12   There was also some discussion about the Research Quality Framework and how research across Australia could be documented in a common way. Members noted that while there are some areas that have defined topics, one of the major issues in developing a framework is that definitions are highly specific and are difficult to scale.

Agenda Item 3. *Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance -* **briefings for information and comment**

a. Protocol for the Release of Social Security Information - **briefing for information and comment**

13   Mr Whitecross from FACSIA outlined the Protocol for the Release of Social Security Information. The protocol has been set up between 5 Agencies: FaCSIA, DEWR, DEST, DHS and Centrelink. Its purpose is to provide guidelines to manage the release of social security information by agencies for research and development purposes. Release of information is categorised according to the level of authorisation required to secure access. The protocol attempts to balance the requirements of stakeholders, the responsibilities of ministers and government and the constraints of relevant laws and Acts.

14   It was noted by the ABS representatives that the protocol could be used as an example of a project that would be supported through the development of National Statistical Policy (Agenda item 5).

b. Other Issues

15.   No other issues were discussed.

Agenda Item 4. *Actions to Advance and Align the Use of Spatial Data Across Government -* **for information and discussion**

a. Presentation - **Jenny Bone (OSDM)**

16   Ms Bone gave a presentation outlining Australian Government Policy on Spatial Data Access and Pricing (see attachment 2).

17   Government policy on spatial data access and pricing was established in 2001. Cabinet established the Spatial Data Policy Executive (SDPE), the Spatial Data Management Group (SDMG) and the Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM) to coordinate implementation of the policy. The basic principles of the policy, where the IP for the spatial data was wholly owned by the Commonwealth and available to the public, determine that spatial data be made available at no charge when provided over the Internet, at the marginal cost of transfer for packaged products (nominally $99 per CD) and at the full cost of transfer for customised products. The spatial data can be used for any purpose as long as the source is acknowledged.

18   There was some discussion on the availability of data. Ms Bone explained that OSDM worked with agencies to determine whether they had any data eligible for

listing on the Schedule. Data currently available included topographic and natural resource information, sea surface temperatures, native title boundaries, etc. She added that the list of datasets is available on the internet (http://www.osdm.gov.au/schedule/schedule_search.jsp) and users can either be linked directly to data that you can download, or alternatively, there are contact details to facilitate obtaining the data.

19   Ms Bone explained that the SDMG Socioeconomic Spatial Data Working Group were investigating issues relating to the recording, geocoding, quality assurance and exchange between agencies of socioeconomic and human health data with a location element; paying due regard to all statutory and agency-specific policies and procedures concerning the protection of the privacy of individuals and the re-use of information for purposes other than those for which it was originally collected (i.e. individual identifiers were removed from any exchange of data). The group is very keen to promote 'best practice' through the use of common reporting frameworks such as Mesh Blocks and the National Address Management Framework.

20   The group noted that with the exception of a small number of data sets, spatial data can be attributed to any data that has an associated address. There was also some discussion on how the work of the spatial data group relates to the work of the 'Data for Science' initiative.

21   Ms Bone advised that Ben Searle will replace Dr John Busby as General Manager of the Office of Spatial Data Management.

(i)   **Action item** - Ms Bone to provide link to closed extranet.

b. Presentation - Alistair Nairn (ABS)

22   Mr Nairn gave a presentation on 'ABS Initiatives to Align the Use of Small Area Statistics Across Government' (see Attachment 3).

23   Mr Nairn provided a summary of the development of Mesh Blocks (MBs) and explained differences to the current Collection Districts (CDs). He noted mesh blocks were a more stable unit, making them a better building block for statistical data. Mr Nairn also talked briefly about the Geocoded National Address File (G-NAF).

24   Mr Nairn informed the group about the review of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (AGSC). In July 2007, the ABS will be releasing an information paper and next year, the ABS will be proactive in alerting agencies to any changes to the AGSC. He added that the 2006 Population Census and dwelling counts will be available at the Mesh Block level in 2008 and that the 2006 Agricultural Census was based on Mesh Blocks.

25   There was some discussion about confidentiality issues with Mesh Blocks compared to CDs. Mr Nairn commented that only limited data would be released at the Mesh Block level to avoid confidentiality issues.

Agenda Item 5. *Developing a National Statistical Policy*

Presentation - **Denis Farrell (ABS)**

26   Mr Farrell spoke about the approach to developing a National Statistical Policy (NSP). He raised the increasing importance of ABS' legislated role to provide coordination of the National Statistical Service and explained the attributes of this coordination role (integration, minimise duplication, advisor role, maximise use of data, etc.). Following the 2004 Allen Consulting Review, it was recommended that the ABS support the development of an NSP to assist the ABS in successfully delivering its objectives against this role.

27   Mr Farrell highlighted that a range of international agencies had already established statistical protocols and principles that may provide examples of how an NSP might look. These included the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the New Zealand Protocols for Official Statistics, and the UK National Statistics Code of Practice. He anticipated it would take several years and significant collaborative work across agencies to work through the issues and develop an NSP that would be accepted across Government.

28   The following issues were highlighted as examples of areas that a NSP might cover:
    a. privacy and confidentiality of data
    b. microdata use
    c. data linking
    d. data release strategy and policy
    e. provider load
    f. data quality standards

29   Discussion supported the need for an NSP. It was identified that many components, both optional and compulsory already exist across government and could be incorporated into the NSP as it is developed. These include the Protocol for the Release of Social Security Information (discussed under Agenda Item 3a) and the Statistical Clearing House. It was noted that the drive to make better use of administrative data sources would also support the development of an NSP. Comments were also made that any policy would need to be concise and clear to make it most effective and aimed appropriately so it can effectively answer questions about statistical process and practice.

30   Mr Pink highlighted attributes of other countries National Statistical Policies. In New Zealand and the UK, the policy provided transparency to help the public see how information collected from businesses and households is used. He added that, in New Zealand, there were significant benefits for National Statistics in the collaborative process that worked through the issues. He considered development would take a while and was seeking members' opinion as to the value of this process.

31   Mr Farrell said that the next step involved identifying an approach for developing an NSP. He envisaged that this would involve a working group with cross agency representation which would take responsibility for drafting the NSP.

Agenda Item 6. *ABS Issues of Interest* **- for information and discussion**

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

32   Ms Linacre gave a presentation outlining some key projects in the Population Statistics Group (PSG).

> a. The Census processing is well underway and information about products to be released is available from the ABS website. Population estimates, such as age and sex, will be released on 5 June 2007 while state levels estimates will be available by 24 July 2007.
> b. The household survey program for the next 10 years is currently being reviewed and there have been a series of high level meetings with other agencies. There is a high demand for a 'richer program' and working out priorities has been a difficult, but worthwhile exercise. Feeding into the household survey review is the work being undertaken on data gaps. AIHW, DEST, FACSIA and ABS have been working together to identify key data sets in the area of Early Childhood Learning.
> c. ANZSCO has being implemented in all ABS surveys and the ABS is also supporting ISCO (International Standards and Classifications) redevelopment with an expert group meeting taking place later in the year.
> d. The Census Data Enhancement Program is continuing and there has been preliminary research into potential longitudinal studies following the 2011 Census.
> e. The Health area is investigating strategies to make use of and harmonise health data from different states.
> f. Due to high demand, there is work underway to develop a long term strategy for improving access to data, often administratively based, at the regional level..

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

33   Mr Harper gave a presentation outlining some key projects in the Economic Statistics Group (ESG).

> a. The 2006 Agricultural Census results will be released in mid May.
> b. The Australian Greenhouse Office (part of the Department of the Environment and Water Resources) is streamlining it's reporting procedures. It will not be ABS' responsibility to collect greenhouse data, but the ABS will work closely with the Office to get maximum statistical efficiency.
> c. The ABS is preparing a discussion paper on the development of a Business Longitudinal Database (BLDB).
> d. Part of the governments water initiative has seen $10m funding to the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) for 'Water Accounts'. ABS is working with BOM to ensure their work dovetails with the ABS Water Accounts to ensure comparability.
> e. The Foreign Trade Statistics area is working on a harmonised system to classify imports and exports. As of January 2007 the new trade classifications have applied.
> f. There has been a lot of interest in statistics on broadband usage. The ABS currently runs the Internet Activity Survey every 6 months with a reference period of March and September. The ACCC will be discontinuing their survey of the top 12 broadband services. While this is a good outcome in terms of reducing the duplication of data collection, it could impact on the ABS in terms of timeliness of survey results.

g. Work is being undertaken on the Standardised Business Reporting initiative to improve the efficiency of businesses reporting to government agencies. There are currently several agencies involved in the project including ABS, ATO, AGIMO, APRA and Customs. A business case is being presented to Cabinet in July 2007.

c. National Statistical Service and National Data Network Update - briefings for information and comment: Denis Farrell (ABS)

34   Mr Farrell gave a presentation outlining some key projects in the National Statistical Service Leadership Branch (NSSLB). He highlighted the status of the National Data Network (NDN) which is moving from Demonstration Phase to a 12 month Pilot Phase from July 2007. Mr Farrell also outlined the development of the Community of Users and Producers of Statistics (CUPS). As a first step, the NSS web site has been updated to include a section on CUPS containing: information on statistical training, recruitment and career development; statistical references, and; links to conferences, seminars and worshops. He also noted that the ABS proposes to run a Conference of Users and Producers of Statistics in November 2008 and that we would be approaching members of this group for their support and advice.

(ii) Action item - *Arrangements for next meeting:*

It was agreed that future AGSF meetings be moved to an earlier annual cycle to avoid clashes with key whole of government events. There were no objections to this proposal. The next meeting will be organised by the NSS Leadership Branch out of session.

Agenda Item 4

The Impact of New Information Technologies on Creation, Access and Use of Statistics

Introduction

1.   This paper explores how the adoption of new technology is changing the behaviour of people and organisations. It provides an overview of the Australian National Data Network initiative, an innovative approach for information sharing. The collaborative and open source approaches used are outlined. This approach has the potential to assist organisations to exploit and benefit from the rapid adoption of new technology and to support improvements to national and international statistical systems. The paper concludes with some comments on the opportunities and challenges ahead for National Statistics Organisations (NSOs).

Adoption of Technology by Individuals and Organisations

2.   As individuals and organisations adopt new technology, organisations face new opportunities and challenges. National Statistics organisations need extensive interactions to achieve their mission. They interact with individuals, business, institutions, the media, researchers, their workforce, central and regional governments, other NSOs and international agencies.   The nature of these interactions is changing because of the adoption of technology.

3.   Many individuals are rapidly increasing their use and reliance on mobile devices and the internet, and are changing their expectations of how they wish to deal with each other and with organisations. Consumer technology such as mobile phones, MP4 players, PDAs (personal data assistants) and wireless connection to the internet combined with the widening use of on-line communities, blogs, wikis, virtual games, YouTube, video calls, podcasts, and similar innovative uses of the internet are changing the way that many people worldwide live their lives and the way they communicate.

4.   The traditional hierarchy of society includes tribes, towns, cities and nations, but technology is enabling new types of communities which are independent of geography. People are able to build affinity and contact with people around the world who share their personal or business interests. Some people have more intense levels of interaction with people across the world than they do with people in their own neighbourhood.   An increasing number of people conduct significant aspects of their social and home life on-line and are becoming increasingly annoyed by telephone, mail or personal approaches from organisations. Many people use the technology to publicly announce views, debate issues and lobby for change. As their use of technology in their personal lives evolves, they expect increased functionality at work and the technology available in their workplace becomes a factor in job satisfaction.

5.   In the business arena, there is an ever widening scope for the application of technology to meet client needs, enhance capability, improve efficiency, or respond to changes. Although some of the technologies have existed for many years, the technologies are now mature enough to use in business environments.   For example, many organisations are supporting new ways of working such as virtual teams of individuals in multiple geographic locations, with room, desktop and mobile videoconferencing, global

positioning systems, wireless broadband, telephony integrated with applications, instant messaging, on-line meetings, virtual spaces and webinars.

6.   In the past, business systems and technology were focussed on usage within organisations. The development of communications networks and the internet has allowed the development of more and more sophisticated approaches to electronic transfer of information and the development of business processes that span across multiple organisations. Governments, standards bodies, industries and businesses are investing in architecture frameworks to assist the design of processes which cross organisational boundaries.

7.   Because the adoption of technology is driving access to information "anywhere, anytime, in a way that suits me", users are changing the way they wish to contribute to and use statistics. The number of individuals and organisations involved in managing, providing or consuming statistical information is rapidly increasing, driven by the need to inform policy debates but also by the changes in the way society communicates and collaborates using technology. The ability to easily search, discover and collaborate using the internet is driving innovation; resulting in the availability of many new tools, changes in the production model and changes in society itself.

8.   National Statistics organisations and other producers of quality statistics need to consider how to respond to these changes. The approach used for building the Australian National Data Network illustrates some aspects of the ABS response.

The Australian National Data Network

9.   The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is leading an endeavour, the National Data Network (NDN) (http://www.nationaldatanetwork.org/), which uses collaborative approaches to promote access and use of quality statistics. Australia has a strong statistical system but, unlike information on the internet, collections of data held within different organisations are not easy to discover or access. The NDN aims to achieve the best use and return on investment from survey and administrative information resources by:

   a) providing Owners/Custodians of information resources with a means of giving greater visibility and wider access to their information resources, while continuing to give close attention to access and use conditions, and
   b) providing Researchers/Analysts with an improved means of finding and accessing information resources, particularly those information resources that aren't publicly available.

10.   Fundamental to the design of the NDN is the provision of a collaborative environment and governance framework in which organisations have direct control over the visibility and accessibility of data they make available and the opportunity to share good practice and tools.

11.   The NDN operates under the following principles:

a) <u>Data should be managed as an asset and be exposed as broadly as practicable</u>
Data has a value by virtue of its utility to inform decision making. By exposing data

widely it increases the range of information available to decision makers. At the same time, it is acknowledged that custodians of data may need to constrain how widely data is exposed.

b) <u>Data should be used responsibly and in accordance with any conditions specified by the custodian, privacy principles and all applicable laws</u>
 Decision makers and researchers have a responsibility to ensure they do not use data in ways that are deliberately misleading, circumvent privacy or other legislation or in any manner contrary to these principles.

c) <u>The quality of the data should be described, clearly and understandably</u>
 For data to have value to decision makers, metadata must be available that documents the data and allows for an informed assessment of whether the data is fit for a particular use.

d) <u>The National Data Network will be developed and used collaboratively by all participants</u>
Many producers contribute to the range of national and international statistics through sharing responsibility for production. The users of statistics are a diverse community with different needs and uses for statistical information. Developing the NDN collaboratively will create a network that meets the diverse needs of all groups contributing to the statistics environment.

12.   The NDN is designed to provide a distributed library of data holdings, tools and services relevant to policy analysis and research. As shown in Figure 1, the NDN consists of the NDN Central linking to the NDN Nodes, which contain each custodian's data holdings, tools, services and associated metadata.

13.   Custodians will have at their disposal a range of web based services, protocols, procedures, and tools to assist them to manage and share data in a way that ensures availability, accessibility, security and privacy. Researchers and policy analysts can search the NDN through the web site. Once access conditions set by the custodian have been met, researchers will be provided access to the data, tools and services.

Figure 1. The National Data Network
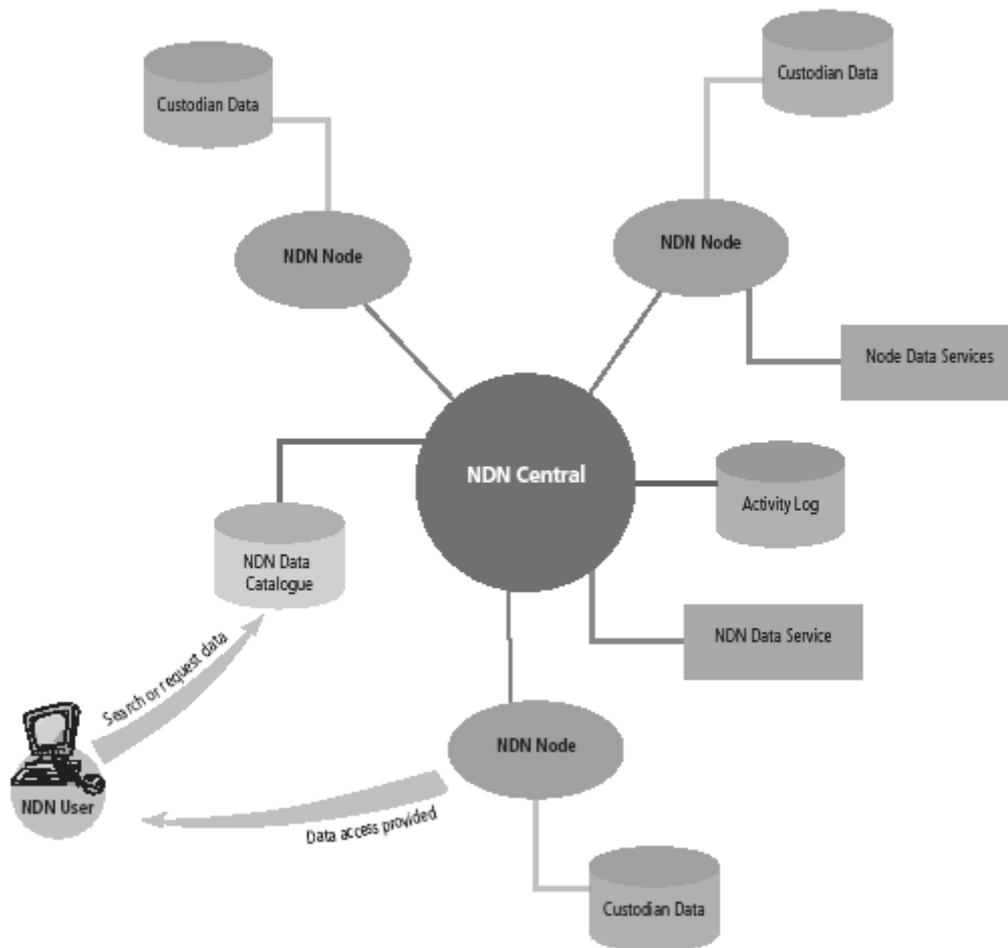
Collaborative approaches to improving national and international statistical systems

14.   Organisations have limited resources and face increasing challenges in prioritising investments and maximising outcomes, particularly given the explosion in technology use and opportunity, the cost and complexity of technology and shortages of skills. Where organisations are planning to develop information or administrative systems, information sharing may or may not be a high priority. The use of the NDN as a building block can simplify the task by providing clear and consistent access protocols and sharing expertise, methods, metadata approaches, business processes and enabling technology.

15.   The use of open source software, often available free of charge, reduces duplication and high software costs that might otherwise be a barrier to participation by custodians and users. The use of an open source approach allows participants to collaborate on the future development of the network, to connect the services or tools they use, and to contribute these for broader use if they are relevant to others.

16.   The NDN provides a practical vehicle for organisations with strong capabilities in statistics to provide leadership and assistance to others, with supporting technology and

protocols, and thus it supports national (and potentially international) statistical leadership goals. Organisations can contribute in those areas where they have strong capability and benefit from other partipants in the areas where they have less capability or limited capacity. For example, some participants may be well placed to support others through contributing sound data and metadata standards. Others may be able to contribute data and metadata which conforms to the standards. Others may have specific expertise or a tool that they would like to see used widely. Many participants may simply use the NDN without making specific contributions.

17.   The approach copes well with differences in requirements because if a participant wants some new functionality they can either extend existing functions or connect new functionality to the NDN as a service. For example, if government requires the use of particular products or technologies, or a participant has a preference for products or technologies, they can adapt their own node to use or connect to these.

18.   Figure 2 shows the potential scope of the NDN in terms of Owner/Custodian and Researcher/Analyst services. A number of research, government, National Statistics organisations and international organisations are involved and are providing services and components which will progressively extend the NDN, potentially across the entire statistical production process. Development to date has focussed on the Publish, Search, Acquire, Analyse and Report processes.

Figure 2. Potential Scope of National Data Network Services
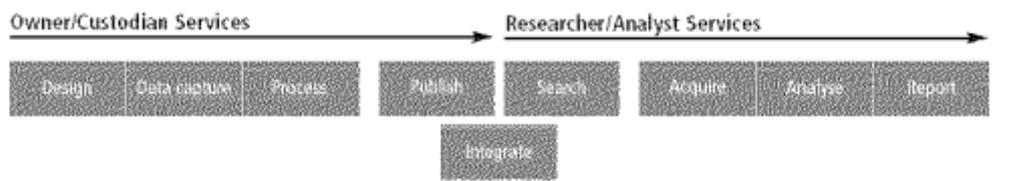
19.   A collaborative development agreement is in place with the US Census Bureau to integrate their data mining, analysis, presentation and mapping tool, Data Ferrett, (http://dataferrett.census.gov/) with the NDN. Shibboleth, which is open source, standards based, federated identity management software (http://shibboleth.internet2.edu/), is being incorporated into the NDN. It was originally created to assist universities to share research and allows sites to make informed authorisation decisions for individual access of protected on-line resources. Both of these collaborations remove the need for the NDN to develop or buy similar functionality, support the use of open standards and the reuse of existing assets for the benefit of the statistical community.   The NDN is also exploring the the use of the Creative Commons licencing framework (http://creativecommons.org/).

Opportunities and Challenges

20.   The NDN is one example where producers and users of statistics are collaborating to meet the challenges arising from increasing demand for information and the rapid evolution of technology use. The collaborative approach harnesses and shares the work of the participants to build Australia's national statistics system more effectively than individual efforts. The design and the use of open source software and approaches (much

of which exists already) provides a means to join disparate components into a functional network. The federated nature of the technology development mirrors and draws on the federated nature of the evolving business process. As a result, data custodians can make data held within their organisations more accessible to researchers and analysts.

21.   However, the NDN is at an early stage of development. There are further opportunities and challenges ahead. For example:

a) How to encourage involvement of more participants, including other open source developments, commercial providers of software and services and individuals. This may include a stocktake of software used by other statistics organisations and repeated scanning of software and services available on the internet.

b) Opportunities and challenges to build new communities using technologies such as blogs, wikis and webinars.

c) Availability of conflicting information (via the NDN or independently on the internet), where individuals may challenge the veracity of official statistics.

d) Approaches which help users of statistics to assess the quality of the sources and the statistics.

e) Source or design of strong algorithms and approaches for protecting confidentiality.

f) When acquiring or developing any new processes, methods or systems for use within an NSO, consideration of their relevance to the broader statistical community.

g) Incorporation of methods for safely linking data which already exists.

h) Encouraging the use of metadata standards, information and interoperability frameworks and developing effective ways of evolving preferred standards.

i) Finding ways to simplify the process of producing and using metadata.

j) Identifying and resolving any associated legal or intellectual property issues.

22.   These challenges are not unique to the ABS or the NDN.

23.   There has been a long history of collaboration between National Statistics Organisations. With the growth in open source collaborations (including the NDN) and the emergence of powerful new ways to communicate, we should encourage the evolution of enterprise architectures for global use. This applies not only to the collaborative development of technology but also to the collaborative development of other aspects of the information production model. We should consider commissioning individual organisations to lead collaborative developments to fill gaps and should consider what forums might be needed to progress this.

Agenda Item 6

NatStat Conference 08

Issues for Discussion

1. Does the AGSF have any comments on the conference purpose and themes.

2. Does the AGSF have any suggestions for key note or invited speakers.

Introduction

1.   The ABS is planning to host a conference, to be called _NatStat Conference 08_, tentatively scheduled for November 2008. The conference will connect users and producers of statistics and provide an opportunity to discuss strategies for measuring progress in Australian society and improving statistics for the nation.

2.   ABS senior management have discussed the purpose, vision and governance arrangements for the conference, as well as preliminary themes and topics. Before forming the Program Committee the ABS is seeking comments on the proposed themes from the AGSF.

Purpose and vision

Purpose

3.   NatStat Conference 08 will provide a unique opportunity for key stakeholders to discuss strategies for measuring the progress of Australian society and improving national statistics.

4.   The broad theme for the conference will be:

> _"NatStat Conference 08: Working together for a better informed and performed Australian Society"_

5.   Professionals, researchers, policy makers, practitioners and academics will be invited to speak on topics relevant to the conference theme. The conference program will be tightly managed and constructed and will consist of key note and invited speakers who:
   a) are significant contributors to national statistics and are valued and recognised in their particular field of work; and/or
   b) can provide insight into measuring the progress of Australian society and the future development of national statistics.

Vision

6.   The vision for the conference is:

NSS stakeholders working together for a better informed and performed Australian Society.

7.   The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss strategies for the production of better, broader and more comparable information. As well, it will also encompass the effective use of this information for better monitoring of the effectiveness and efficiency of program services, improved access to and use made of the data by the wider community, and reduced overall costs for the provision of government information services.

Program Structure and Themes

8.   The conference Program Committee will consist of a range of stakeholders from across jurisdictions and sectors. The Program Committee will be responsible for developing the conference program, including developing the topics under the broad conference theme, identifying and liaising with session organisers and chairs, reviewing papers, preparing presenter guidelines and allocating sessions to time slots. The Program Committee will also ensure the conference vision, objectives and outcomes are achieved.

9.   The conference program will consist of key note, plenary and concurrent sessions. Contributed papers will be sought but the inclusion of these will be at the discretion of the Program Committee. A draft program structure is attached (Attachment A) for information.

10.   The ABS has been developing a draft set of themes for comment. These are:
   a) Improving measures of progress in Australia   in line with the OCED World Forum objectives.
   b) Statistics at work   case studies demonstrating collaboration and engagement;
   c) From data to decision making - improving the use of data for decision making;
   d) Communication of statistics - initiatives which aim to improve this area; and
   e) Statistics: Trends and Challenges - barriers / opportunities that will be faced in the future.

11.   An interim Project Board is currently being formed to start working on the conference arrangements.

Attachment A   Draft Conference Program

NatStat 08		
6 & 7 November 2008		
Wednesday	**Thursday**	**Friday**

	Wednesday		Thursday		Friday
8		8	Registration	8	
30		30	**Welcome/**	30	**Key Note**
9		9	**Key Note**	9	
30		30	Plenary	30	Plenary
10		10		10	
30		30	Morning Tea	30	Morning Tea
11		11		11	
30		30	Concurrent Sessions 1	30	Concurrent Sessions 3
12		12		12	
30		30	Lunch	30	Lunch
1	Registration and	1		1	
30		30	**Key Note**	30	**Key Note**
2	Exhibition Set up	2		2	
30		30	Plenary	30	Plenary
3		3		3	
30		30	Afternoon Tea	30	Afternoon tea
4		4		4	
30		30	Concurrent Session 2	30	Concurrent Sessions 4
5	Welcome Reception &	5		5	
30		30	Conference Dinner	30	Closing Address
6	Registration	6		6	