

**Australian Government Statistical Forum
Summary Record
Friday 29 June 2012, ABS House, Canberra**

Theme: ***Whole of Government approaches to unlocking the statistical potential of public data assets***

Attendees

Chair	Mr Brian Pink, Australian Statistician.
Members	Mr Ian Ewing, Mr Trevor Sutton, Mr Michael Davies, Ms Denise Carlton (ABS), Mr David Dennis (DoHA), Dr Scott Matheson (DEEWR), Ms Julia Neville (ATO), Mr Tim Quinn (DRET), Dr Judy Schneider (FAHCSIA), Mr Walter Shafron, Ms Milly Lubulwa (ABARES), Mr Richard Snabel (DIISRTE), Ms Anita Davis (DIAC, proxy for Mr Mark Cully), Dr Phil Anderson (AIHW, proxy for Mr David Kalisch), Ms Francesca Beddie (NCVER, proxy for Dr Tom Karmel), Ms Lorraine Watt (AGIMO, proxy for Mr Scott Wallace), Dr Godfrey Lubulwa (BITRE, proxy for Dr Gary Dolman), Mr Greg Evans (DHS, proxy for Ms Katy Balmaks).
Apologies	Mr Rory King (DHS), Ms Helen Owens (OSP), Mr Geoff Richardson (DSEWPaC), Mr Mark Cully (DIAC), Mr David Kalisch (AIHW), Ms Teresa Dickinson (AIHW), Dr Tom Karmel (NCVER), Mr Scott Wallace (AGIMO), Dr Gary Dolman (BITRE), Ms Katy Balmaks (DHS), Mr Peter Harper (ABS).
Guests	Ms Ann Bray (DIISRTE), Mr Sebastian Lang (DSEWPaC).
Presenters/ Observers/ Minutes	Mr Jon Kendall, (DIISRTE), Mr Tala Talgaswatt (DIISRTE), Mr Warwick McDonald (BOM). ABS - Dr Jill Charker, Ms Christine Williams, Ms Gemma Van Halderen, Mr Ben Searle, Mr David Skutenkno, Mr Paul Romanis, Ms Jenny Myers, Ms Carolyn Verey, Dr Caroline Blink.

Agenda Item 1 (a) – Welcome

1.1 Mr Brian Pink opened the meeting, acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land and paid respect to their elders, past and present. He also welcomed attendees and proxies, and noted member apologies. The summary record of the November 2011 meeting was accepted as a true record by members.

1.2 Mr Pink noted one outstanding action item from the previous meeting. While the ABS had written to Mr Paul Madden, Chief Information and Knowledge officer, Dept of Health and Ageing (DoHA), to discuss opportunities for improving information leadership across the Commonwealth, a meeting with the broader community of interested parties, including the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia, was still to be arranged (Action item 1).

1.3 Mr Pink proposed inviting the Bureau of Meteorology to become a member of the AGSF, given their role in collection of data in regards to Australia's water resources and the production of the National Water Account, as well as a range of other scientific data, which members endorsed (Action item 2).

Agenda Item 1 (b) – Statistician's update

1.4 Mr Pink noted the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon. Bernie Ripoll, MP, had shown enthusiasm and commitment to his new responsibilities in relation to statistics and had already visited the ABS. In addition, Mr Ripoll has indicated he would like to attend part of the next Australian Statistical Advisory Council (ASAC) meeting in November 2012.

1.5 Mr Pink noted the ABS, along with the broader APS, continued to face fiscal challenges due to the increased efficiency dividend. Mr Pink advised members that the majority of reductions were in internal technical, corporate and training expenses. After consultation with stakeholders, the ABS was also ceasing the Survey of Education and Training as there is alternative data sources available to meet the key information needs.

1.6 Mr Pink also provided the following updates to members:

- First release of 2011 Census results – Mr Pink commented the ABS had gained extremely positive media coverage from the release of 2011 Census results. He advised members that over 30% of Australians completed the Census online, and the ABS is working to make the 2016 Census a predominately electronic Census. The ABS is looking at the possibilities that this will open up for data collection, such as the ability to target different sets of questions to people depending on their responses.
- First results from the Australian Health Survey – Mr Pink commented that this project was on track for an October 2012 release of the general population results. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander segment of the survey is currently in the field.

- ABS work in developing the newly endorsed UN Environmental-Economic Accounting international standard – with the ABS hosting a recent conference 'Completing the Picture: Environmental Accounting in Practice', to increase the awareness of this new initiative.
- Launch of the 2012 Year Book Australia – Mr Pink informed members that this year the release introduced a new chapter, focussing on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- NatStats 2013 – Mr Pink informed members that registrations were now open for NatStats (March 12-14, 2013 in Brisbane). He encouraged people to look at the program and to register early. The conference theme is 'A Better informed Australia, the role of statistics in building a nation'.

1.7 Mr Pink concluded by updating members on the Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board which oversees the use of data in the Commonwealth involving data integration from different sources. He advised members that a number of Commonwealth agencies were applying for interim accreditation as Integrating Authorities enabling them to undertake high risk data integration projects involving Commonwealth data. Some state jurisdictions had also expressed interest in the accreditation process.

Agenda Item 2 – 2011 Census release update and key issues

2.1 Dr Jill Charker (ABS) explained about the three-phase release strategy for 2011 Census data using the Internet as the main dissemination tool, and spoke of the strong interest in the results when the data was released on 21 June 2012.

2.2 Dr Charker indicated there would be a public consultation process to review Census topics and procedures for the 2016 Census, with consultation expected to commence in October 2012. The ABS will release an information paper on the nature and content of the 2016 Census to facilitate this consultation. Dr Charker encouraged members to take part in this consultation and to register their interest on the ABS website once the information paper is released.

2.3 Dr Charker responded to a question regarding the coverage of the 2011 Census, noting the very strong (and improved) rate compared with the 2006 Census. Dr Charker also confirmed the ABS will be continuing with the Census Data Enhancement project for the 2011 Census. Members discussed a range of questions about the implications of an online Census for improvements in processing time and data quality. Dr Charker noted a predominantly online Census will have a range of advantages.

Agenda Item 3 – Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia

3.1 Ms Denise Carlton (ABS) revisited the purpose of the Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) for Australia initiative for members. Ms Carlton noted the aim of the project was first to identify the essential statistics and secondly to ensure efficient use of government resources where information gaps exist. She stressed that ESA for Australia was not a cost-cutting exercise in any way.

3.2 Ms Carlton informed members that a discussion paper had recently been released which included a consultation list of essential statistics that the ABS had selected from all three pillars of statistics as a starting point to generate discussion. The list consists of official statistics produced by governments at both Commonwealth and State and Territory level, based on a broad set of criteria. The rationale for consultation was to ensure that the list was the right one and to facilitate broad ownership of the initiative within the community.

3.3 Ms Carlton briefly described the structure of the preliminary list, explaining the debate would be focussed on what could possibly be in or out, rather than what was definitely in or out. Ms Carlton highlighted the multi-faceted consultation process the ABS would be undertaking including direct consultation with Commonwealth over the next few months and urged members to seek opportunities to contribute. She noted that a revised list would be developed to take to the next ASAC meeting in November 2012.

3.4 Ms Carlton sought feedback on the ESA initiative. Members encouraged the ABS to consult with the business community given that it was likely there was essential data for markets which would be worth including. Members also raised the notion of what is seen as essential may change over time and perhaps a forward looking category of what may be important in the future would be useful. In taking the feedback on board, Ms Carlton noted the evolutionary nature of the initiative.

Agenda 4 – Governance and institutional arrangements relation to the linking of Commonwealth data

4.1 Ms Christine Williams (ABS) spoke about the developments for Commonwealth data integration planned for 2012 reaffirming Mr Pink's earlier comments that several agencies were expected to gain their interim accreditation as Integrating Authorities by the end of the year and that the ABS had gained its accreditation. In addition, an online tool for Integrating Authorities to use to register Commonwealth data integration projects and best practice guidelines was being developed.

4.2 Ms Williams highlighted a paper is being prepared to take to the Secretaries Board later this year, covering the legal and policy framework developed as part of the governance and institutional arrangements for Integrating Authorities.

4.3 The outcomes from the April 2012 Oversight Board meeting were provided to members. The Oversight Board has recognised that the accreditation system is not yet mature enough to ensure that adequate safeguards could be applied to private sector firms. In addition, the Board is considering options for state government bodies wanting to apply for interim accreditation as an Integrating Authority.

4.4 An International Data Linkage Conference was held in May 2012. The key messages included the opposing views from researchers and consumer groups in

relation to the restricted accessibility of data whilst trying to accommodate the public's heightened awareness of information privacy and data security issues.

4.5 Ms Williams concluded by highlighting the ABS's data integration projects which mostly revolved around the release of the 2011 Census results.

Agenda Item 5 – DIIRSTRE Improving the Collection and Coordination of Firm-Level Data

5.1 Mr Jon Kendall (DIIRSTRE) informed members about the whole-of-government initiative lead by DIIRSTRE to strengthen the collection, coordination and integration of data on Australian businesses. He noted that Ms Williams previous session highlighted the advancement of social statistics coordination and shone a light on the way forward for firm-level and business data.

5.2 Mr Kendall explained that currently a lack of data on firm performance and productivity, as well as the capacity to evaluate the effectiveness of government initiatives in a strategic cross-portfolio context, is a key constraint to determining which initiatives are most effective in raising firm performance.

5.3 The initiative would improve data collection and coordination across government and would provide more information on business conditions and needs. It would also encourage information sharing across government and provide a more effective evidence base for designing, delivering and evaluating firm policies and programs. The initiative would achieve this by improving data quality, by harmonising and integrating core economic data items under a data quality framework, and by ensuring better collaboration on issues which would enable sharing and linking of data, as well as on analysis requirements.

5.4 Currently, DIIRSTRE is consulting widely with key Commonwealth agencies and other high level Commonwealth bodies, as well as academics, businesses and peak bodies ahead of developing a plan to take through a formal Cabinet process later in the year.

5.5 Mr Kendall recognised a range of "big issues" facing the project including the lack of common standards and definitions for business data, data confidentiality and the inability of business to report once to Government and have the data used by many agencies.

5.6 Mr Tala Talgaswatta (DIIRSTRE) concluded the presentation by discussing a pilot data matching project that DIIRSTRE had been working on with the ABS which demonstrated the power and potential of using integrated firm-level data to evaluate business policies and programs. The project compared Australian firms receiving government assistance for innovation with non-assisted firms across several key performance indicators. The results showed that the financial performance of government-assisted firms was higher than non-assisted firms across different industry sectors and size categories.

5.7 Mr Kendall noted there was strong demand, especially from academics, for greater access to microdata and a system like the ABS's Remote Execution Environment for Microdata is needed to meet this need. Mr Pink noted there was also greater demand from other agencies and academics for microdata held by the ABS, but that the ABS was constrained by a lack of funding to build the necessary infrastructure. Mr Pink highlighted the importance of support from the community of users who required this data was critical to the success of ABS's bids for infrastructure funding.

Agenda Item 6 – DSEWPaC: NPEI as a whole of government approach to deliver high quality information for environmental decision making

6.1 Mr Warwick McDonald (BOM) presented the National Plan for Environmental Information (NPEI) on behalf of Geoff Richardson (DSEWPaC), stating the Australian Government recognised the need to improve the way environmental information required for decision making is collected and managed. The NPEI initiative had therefore been commissioned to establish the foundations for ongoing improvements in managing the environmental information base by improving the quality and consistency of data through greater coordination.

6.2 Mr McDonald explained the respective roles of DSEWPaC in leading an environmental information reform program working closely with BoM. Mr McDonald noted a statement of Australian Government requirements for environmental information will be released in the next few weeks on BoM's website.

6.3 Mr McDonald concluded by mentioning the development of environmental accounting which BOM had been collaborating with the ABS on. Mr Pink commented that this was the start of a long journey and noted that the level of sophistication and richness of the ABS's National Accounts had taken 60 years to evolve since the first System of National Accounts was introduced in the 1950s.

Agenda Item 7 – Statistical Spatial Framework

7.1 Ms Gemma Van Halderen (ABS) informed members the ABS has been looking at how it can increase the utility of its data through geospatial enablement in response to external demand. The ABS has engaged Mr Ben Searle, a geospatial expert consultant, to develop a framework to link statistical and geospatial data, not just for the ABS, but potentially for broader use across Government.

7.2 Mr Searle spoke about how this is a green field and the development of a statistical spatial framework will bring together the geospatial and statistical community providing the statistical equivalent of topography to data. The key to this project is to determine a common location-based methodology. Mr Searle commented that Australia was well positioned to develop this framework as it already had in place geography and address standards through the Australian Statistical Geography Standard and the Geocoded National Address File.

7.3 Members agreed that Australia had an early advantage on this work and that there was demand for this information from all sectors of the community. Members were concerned about the duplication and fragmentation of work across government and Mr Searle indicated the ABS was developing standards which agencies could move across to when they were updating their systems. Mr Pink commented the integration of geospatial and statistical information is an exciting development and Australia was well positioned to demonstrate and influence international standards.

Agenda Item 8 – Around the table: Statistical matters of significance

8.1 Mr Pink invited members to share statistical updates:

- Mr Greg Evans (DHS) commented that his department is feeling the pressure of demand for geospatial information and have been improving the quality of their address information, through address validation at point of entry for Centrelink and Medicare datasets to support geospatial data requirements.
- Dr Judy Schneider (FAHCSIA) stated the power of longitudinal data for policy analysis was not well understood which may be impacting on decisions around funding support. She volunteered to present at the next AGSF meeting on this topic as part of a broader theme around statistical capability (Action item 3).
- Dr Godfrey Lubulwa (BITRE) spoke of how the Bureau was looking at filling in the gaps within current data collections.
- Mr Richard Snabel (DIISTRE) spoke of integration work involved in bringing skills, industry and tertiary education together in the Department following Machinery of Government changes.
- Ms Anita Davis (DIAC) commented on how rapid ICT changes had de-spatialised a lot of economic and social data, and how global integration was impacting on the issue.
- Ms Lorraine Watt (AGMIO) noted that AGIMO were looking into data sovereignty as a priority issue and were liaising with the Attorney Generals Department.
- Dr Phil Anderson (AIHW) spoke of the upcoming release of a new monthly data collection, Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, with data collected via a secure website with a more person-oriented, outcomes-based approach. He indicated AIHW were moving in this direction generally and were developing more web-based products. Dr Anderson also mentioned AIHW were in the final stages with their application for interim accreditation as an Integrating Authority.

- Mr Tim Quinn (DRET) mentioned the appointment of Mr Quentin Grafton as the new chief economist of Bureau of Resource and Energy Economics (BREE). He stated the tourism potential of Australia was receiving increased recognition from overseas investors leading to considerable tourism research being conducted by academics. Tourism Research Australia were grappling with the demand for unit record information and how to provide confidentialised data.
- Ms Francesca Beddie (NCVER) indicated NCVER were focussing on geocoding to enable better analysis of students in regions. Ms Beddie also mentioned NCVER were trying to build much needed infrastructure, such as a portal for users to submit and retrieve data, although funding requests for development had been denied.
- Ms Milly Lubulwa (ABARES) indicated that while ABARES was experiencing demand for unit-level data, they were concerned about confidentiality and were looking at solutions already developed.
- Mr Sebastian Lang (DSEWPaC) reiterated points presented earlier, noting DSEWPaC were managing an independent review of Australian Government environmental information and were halfway through meeting with agencies, and intended to deliver their report to their Minister before the end of the year.
- Mr David Dennis (DoHA) noted that DoHA understood the benefits of data integration and were working on an enterprise data warehouse to manage the consolidation of health data. He mentioned DoHA were also working on a policy around the appropriate use of data, that they endorsed the value of longitudinal data, and were currently also pursuing geocoding of data.
- Dr Scott Matheson (DWEER) noted the collaboration with the ABS on the National Early Childhood Education and Care collection and welcomed the advances in development of this collection. He mentioned that the Government's response to the Gonski Review were being considered for the National Schools Statistics Collection. Dr Matheson briefly updated they were receiving better quality data for the Closing the Gap initiative. Finally, Dr Matheson indicated that DWEER were also preparing a submission to become an Integrating Authority.

Agenda Item 9 – Other business

9.1 No other business was raised by members.

9.2 Mr Pink advised members that the proposed topic of the next meeting, scheduled for 1 November, 2012, was *“Statistical Capability and Literacy”*. In light of the discussions at the meeting, it was agreed that capability in relation to

confidentialisation of data would be included on the agenda as well as building a stronger understanding of the potential of longitudinal data.

Meeting close

Action Items

Action Item	Description	Responsibility	Time-frame	Minute reference
1	ABS to arrange a meeting with Mr Paul Madden (DoHA), OSP and other interested agencies to discuss opportunities for improving information leadership across the Commonwealth.	ABS	Nov 2012	Para 1.2
2	ABS to invite the Bureau of Meteorology to become a member of the AGSF.	ABS	As soon as practical	Para 1.3
3	FAHCSIA to present on the power of longitudinal data for policy analysis at the next AGSF.	FAHCSIA	Nov 2012	Para 8.1