

UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE (NSS)

Executive Summary

This paper provides an update on the progress since the last report to ASAC in May 06. That paper identified the four NSS strategies, namely:

- Strategy 1:** *ABS will develop and communicate a shared understanding of Australia's statistical service and lead the implementation of this vision.*
- Strategy 2:** *ABS will ensure that statistical priorities are directly linked to stakeholders' needs, including policy directions of government.*
- Strategy 3:** *ABS will develop a strong community of those interested in statistics within government.*
- Strategy 4:** *ABS will continue to work with our partners to implement the National Data Network (NDN).*

As highlighted in May, the ABS needs the support of Australian and State/Territory government stakeholder agencies for the success of the initiatives underpinning the NSS. This support is being gathered through extensive liaison with senior departmental staff, including department heads.

During the next twelve months, interest and support in the NSS will be heightened with the move of the National Data Network (NDN) from the current demonstration phase to a production network.

Progress in addressing the four national initiatives is reported below. An indication of progress on the development of Information Development Plans (IDPs) is provided in table form at [Attachment A](#).

Issue for discussion

1. Do members of ASAC have any comments, questions or issues in relation to work undertaken to date?

Australian Bureau of Statistics
November 2006

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Strategy 1: *ABS will develop and communicate a shared understanding of Australia's statistical service and lead the implementation of this vision.*

Iconic Projects

2 We feel that this strategy is best achieved by having a relatively small number of 'iconic' projects that are successful and clearly demonstrate the value of the NSS approach and where the ABS can show statistical leadership. Progress on four of these is reported immediately below. Progress on the fifth, the National Data Network (NDN), is covered under strategy 4 below.

Environment statistics

3 The ABS has considerably increased its involvement with other Commonwealth state and territory agencies in the development of a coherent and accessible set of environmental information. Particular activities that are relevant include:

- a. the Australian Statistician has been actively engaged in preparation of the *2006 State of the Environment Report*
- b. the ABS is participating in a working group that has been asked by the NRM Standing Committee to recommend how to develop an improved environmental and sustainability reporting system for Australia
- c. the ABS is a member of the National Land and Water Resources Audit Advisory Committee, and the various national coordinating committees established by the Audit, which is developing strategies to provide data, information and assessments of Australia's land, water and biological resources to support sustainable development
- d. the ABS is also a member of a subgroup of the COAG Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Group looking at streamlining national greenhouse and energy reporting requirements
- e. the ABS is a member of an Expert Advisory Panel on Water Accounting, which is looking at the long term requirements for Water accounting in Australia
- f. the ABS is contributing to Australia's Water Resource Assessment 2005, a requirement of COAG's National Water Initiative, by producing the 2004-05 Water Accounts six months ahead of schedule (supported by the National Water Commission)

- g. the ABS is producing three key statistical outputs: *Water Use on Australia's Farms 2003-04*; *Natural Resource Management on Australian Farms 2004-05*; and *Characteristics of Australia's Irrigated Farms* (a joint release with the Productivity Commission).

4 ABS is also making good progress with the production of data at the meshblock level from the Agricultural Census (funded by the National Water Commission and the Natural Heritage Trust), with the development of a land parcel methodology for use in future natural resource management surveys, and on a project to develop an environmental accounting framework to facilitate the compilation and reporting of physical and monetary statistics and metrics as they relate to Victoria's environmental assets, markets and service (in partnership with the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment).

Population well-being data gaps

5 In June this year, the ABS, the Australian Treasury and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) hosted a workshop on Population Well-being Data Gaps. The workshop was attended by senior representatives from government, academia and the not for profit sector. Issues discussed included identifying population well-being data gaps, improving priority setting and facilitating whole of government approaches across this field of statistics. The summary record of the workshop has been released on the NSS website (www.nss.gov.au). As a result of the workshop, the ABS has identified a range of actions to be taken forward, both as a single agency and in conjunction with other agencies. These include:

- a. improving statistical frameworks and standards
- b. managing data and access across government
- c. data mapping
- d. improving the usefulness of data collections, and
- e. building capacity within agencies to improve statistical analysis and information management.

6 The first project will be a pilot data mapping exercise, which will be undertaken over the next 6 months by FaCSIA and ABS in consultation with other key stakeholders. This project will look at early childhood and will:

- a. identify the top few critical policy issues in the field
- b. assess the knowledge required to support informed related policy advice
- c. determine what data are needed to develop the required knowledge
- d. identify whether those data already exist, and if so who the custodians are
- e. how existing data can be harnessed through existing business processes and governance arrangements

- f. what interagency data model would best deliver the outcomes being sought, and
- g. use the NDN to improve awareness of what is currently available.

Regional statistics

7 The scope of this project is to upgrade the availability of regional statistics, using the meshblock/address coder developments to support the geographic classification of administrative data sets and access to high priority data sets through our regional statistics data bases, NDN and/or other means. In relation to this project:

- a. draft meshblocks were released for comment in September 2005 and a revised draft was released in May 2006. Feedback is currently being processed
- b. the address-to-meshblock coder developed by the ABS was released via the National Data Network website in September 2006
- c. the ABS's National Regional Profile product has been improved (both in data content and functionality) - the updated product was released via the ABS website in September 2006
- d. discussions have begun with the owners of some of the high priority administrative datasets to both determine their state of readiness and to make special arrangements for adding meshblock and other codes to these very large datasets.

8 Key milestones for the next six months are:

- a. the draft meshblocks are being quality assured and the first official version of meshblocks will be released towards the end of 2007, after census figures have been taken into account
- b. the Address-to-meshblock coder will be upgraded based on experiences with coding of agricultural and population census, and other users throughout ABS as well as feedback from NDN-based users
- c. assessment of the spatial-readiness of State/Territory based health service data (on behalf of SIMC) will be nearing completion, and
- d. a scoping paper outlining options and recommending the way forward for improving access to area-based statistics on the ABS website will have been completed.

Census Data Enhancement (CDE)

9 The project is currently planning for the creation of the Statistical Longitudinal Census Dataset (SLCD). The SLCD will be: created by combining data from the 2006 census with data from future censuses; created by bringing together the data through statistical techniques rather than matching based on name and address; and based on a 5% random sample of the population.

10 As part of the overall project, the ABS is also undertaking several quality studies which involve linking specified datasets to the 2006 Census data. These datasets are: death registrations; birth registrations; DIMA's Settlement database; Overseas Arrivals and Departures; 2005 Census Dress Rehearsal; Labour Force Survey; and the Census Post Enumeration Survey.

11 To date, skirmishes on linking the birth registrations and the Census Post Enumeration Survey Dress Rehearsal to the Census Dress Rehearsal have been undertaken with promising results. Work on linking DIMA's Settlement database and death registrations to the Census Dress Rehearsal dataset has recently commenced; however, it is too early to state how this work is going. Key milestones for the next six months include continuing to work on linking DIMA's Settlement database and death registrations to the Census Dress Rehearsal dataset. Linking of the various datasets to the 2006 census dataset is expected to commence in April 2007, after the first round of Census processing is complete.

Strategy 2: *ABS will ensure that statistical priorities are directly linked to stakeholders' needs, including policy directions of government*

Information Development Plans

12 Several Information Development Plans (IDPs) have been released or scheduled for release during 2006. At the beginning of the 2006 calendar year, it was decided to 'back-off' a little on the timetable for IDPs to avoid overloading external stakeholders and ABS subject matter areas. As such, a number of IDPs remain 'in progress' with revised target completion dates. Summary information on the IDPs released to date by the ABS, those released under joint arrangement between ABS and other agencies, and IDPs scheduled for release by the ABS up until mid-2007 can be found in Attachment A.

Statistical Priorities

13 As part of the second strategy of the NSS, ABS has been actively involved in discussing statistical priorities with stakeholders, particularly Australian Government agencies. The focus of these discussions has been strategic and options for funding additional work are being regularly investigated. Particular examples of engagement in recent months are given below:

- a. High level meetings have been held between the ABS and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts with acknowledgement that funding of information needs to be factored into new policy proposals in future. For one particular need (regional Internet activity statistics) DCITA has agreed to pursue options for fulfilling this need with regulatory authorities who could potentially become data providers in the context of the NSS.

- b. A strategic liaison officer has been outposted to the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources and a high-level strategic liaison committee has been established. DITR have also been involved in the analysis of innovation microdata which has progressed understanding of the link between data and policy development and evaluation. Strong engagement with DITR has continued in areas such as business demographics, tourism and statistics on foreign affiliates and international trade.
- c. Productivity Commission staff have been seconded to the ABS to undertake analysis of water use in the agricultural industry. The analysis has advanced ABS understanding of linking datasets, and the link between data and analysis.
- d. There has been active engagement in environmental issues with the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH), the National Water Commission and Bureau of Resource Sciences.
- e. Partnership MOUs have been signed with the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). The ABS/DoHA MOU covers the period from 2006-2012. It acknowledges both agencies shared interest in improving health outcomes through improved decision-making processes; recognises the value of sharing information between agencies in relation to future information needs and current statistical activities; and outlines processes for ensuring a strong ongoing relationship. The ABS/DIMA MOU establishes the jointly funded National Migrant Statistics Unit within the ABS and covers the period 2006-2009. The MOU reflects the increased community and policy interest in the field of migrants and their settlement outcomes and indicates the strong support for the ABS to provide leadership and coordination in this area of statistics.
- f. High level meetings have been held between ABS and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to discuss ABS directions and emerging issues and priorities in the education and training fields. A particular focus has been future arrangements for the National Education and Training Statistics Unit (NETSU) within ABS. Both agencies are working together and with other stakeholders to develop a more strategic focus for this unit which will be reflected in the new NETSU agreement covering the period 2006-09. The new agreement is expected to be finalised before the end of the year and will outline an agreed work program based on a shared funding model involving ABS, DEST and the state and territory education and training departments.
- g. A draft paper on Strategic Directions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics has been considered by the ABS's Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics (AGATSI). A wider consultation process is now underway to ensure ABS plans for further development of these statistics are in line with current national, state and territory priorities.

- h. Based on priorities identified in information development plans and consultation processes leading up to the Population Wellbeing Data Gaps Workshop, ABS is currently conducting a major review of its Household Survey Program for the next 10 or so years. Consultation processes associated with the review are underway. Possibilities for increased external funding will be pursued as part of these processes.
- i. There has been active engagement in data activities associated with the COAG reform agenda, including those on human capital indicators and Indigenous data gaps.

Strategy 3: *ABS will develop a strong community of those interested in statistics within government*

Community of Statisticians

14 The ABS will be taking a lead role in progressing an APS Community of Statisticians. The proposed approach is collaboration with existing professional associations, such as the Statistical Society of Australia (Inc.) and the Institute of Public Administration Australia, and networks such as Statistical Liaison Officer networks in federal and state agencies, to stimulate discussion and debate amongst those involved in some way with statistics in public policy. An initial statistics in public policy conference is being considered for the June quarter of 2007.

ANZSIC 06

15 Development and implementation of the Australia New Zealand Standard Industry Classification 06 is proving to be a highly effective means of advancing strong interest in statistics across government agencies. In recognition of the importance of this initiative, the 2005 Commonwealth Budget allocated \$18.3m to the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and ABS for implementation of the new standard. The implementation program will be over five years (up to 2010) and involves many Commonwealth and State government agencies, as well as private sector organisations, eg banks and other structural users. A major milestone was achieved earlier this year with the successful conversion of the Australian Business Register (maintained by the ATO) to the new standard. The ATO, the ABS and many other users of the ABR are now reaping the benefits of this updated standard.

Other statistical training

16 The National Statistical Training Institute (NSTI) within ABS continues to work closely with staff in each ABS office to meet requirements for statistical training of both ABS and non-ABS staff. The existing healthy level of interest in statistical training can be expected to be stimulated further by the release in 2007 of data from the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and the 2006 Agriculture Census.

Strategy 4: *ABS will continue to work with our partners to implement the National Data Network*

17 The National Data Network (NDN) is a platform for discovering, acquiring, sharing and integrating data relevant to policy and research in Australia. The current NDN demonstration phase has established infrastructure, protocols, standards and services to support the sharing and integration of data across Australia in a secure environment. As part of the demonstration phase, a theme-based portal (Child and Youth) is being developed to examine the benefits of adopting a theme based approach to exposing data through the NDN. The NDN Interim Governing Board will be meeting in late November 2006 and February 2007 to assess the demonstration NDN and determine final requirements for the 'production' NDN which is expected to begin operation in July 2007.

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Attachment A

Information Development Plans (IDPs) Released to September 2006

Theme	Published by	Title	Release date
Indigenous Health	AIHW	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information Plan	May 1998
Community Services*	AIHW	National Community Services Information Development Plan	April 1999
Health	AIHW	National Public Health Information Development Plan	August 1999
Health	AIHW and AHMAC	Health Information Development Priorities	September 2002
Indigenous Community Services	AIHW	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Services Information Plan	October 2002
ACT Disability, Housing and Community Services	ABS and ACT Dept of Disability Housing and Community Services	Plan to Improve the Quality, Coverage and Use of ACT Disability, Housing and Community Services Statistics	May 2003
Education and Training	ABS	Measuring Learning in Australia - Plan to Improve the Quality, Coverage and Use of Education and Training Statistics (ABS Cat. 4231.0)	September 2004
Crime and Justice	ABS	Information Paper: National Information Development Plan for Crime and Justice (ABS Cat. 4520.0)	June 2005
Community Services	AIHW	National Community Services Information Strategic Plan 2005-2009	December 2005
Rural and Regional Statistics	ABS	Information Paper: Regional Research in Australia - the Statistical Dimension: an Information Development Plan for Rural and Regional Statistics (ABS Cat. 1362.0)	January 2006

*Replaced by the December 05 product.

Information Development Plans (IDPs) Released From October 2006

Theme	Published by	Title	Target release date
Emergency Management	NSW Statistical Coordination	Emergency Management Information Development Plan (ABS Cat. 1385.0)	October 06
Children and Youth	National Centre for Youth Statistics Unit	Information Paper: Improving Statistics on Children and Youth - An Information Development Plan (ABS Cat. 4907.0)	December 06
Ageing	National Aging Statistics Unit	Aged-related statistics: Improving the quality, coverage and use. An Information Development Plan. Australia (ABS Cat. 4146.0)	March 07
Education and Training *	National Centre for Education and Training Statistics	Information Paper: Measuring Learning in Australia - Plan to Improve the Quality, Coverage and Use of Education and Training Statistics (ABS Cat. 4231.0)	June 07
Indigenous Health	AIHW	Strategic Plan for the Development of Data and Information about the Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2006-2008	TBA

*This product is an update to the IDP released in September 2004.