

AGSF 11 November 2010

Minutes

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

Chair:	Brian Pink, Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
Present:	Denis Farrell, Ian Ewing, Frank Yu, Trevor Sutton (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Walter Shafron (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Teresa Dickinson (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) Mark Cully (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), Bradley Peters (Centrelink), Carol Ey (Dept of Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs), Rory King (Medicare Australia), Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Ageing), Tony Hunter (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Richard Snabel (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Tim Quinn (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Kane Travers (Australian Taxation Office), Ben Searle (Australian Government Office of Spatial Data Management), Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services)
Apologies:	Gary Dolman (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government), Laura Gannon (Centrelink), Jeanette Cotterill, Peter Harper (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Victor Dobbs (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Geoff Richardson (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts), Scott Wallace (Australian Government Information Management office, Department of Finance and Deregulation)
Speakers:	Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Ageing), Timothy Pilgrim (Office of the Privacy Commissioner), David Lawrence (Curtin University if Technology), Joan Sheedy (Prime Minister and Cabinet), Gemma Van Halderen, Marie Apostolou, Melissa Gare (Australian Bureau of Statistics),
Secretariat:	Annette Hants, Narelle Sykes (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
Observer:	Gillian Nicoll (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

Actions Arising

1. Next AGSF meeting (19 May 2011) theme to be Census 2011. Agenda to include a presentation on Census data enhancement.

Agenda Item 1. Welcome

Mr Pink welcomed members and speakers.

a. Minutes and Actions Arising from 20 May 2010 meeting

Mr Pink called for comments on the minutes from the AGSF meeting held 20 May 2010. The minutes were taken as an accurate record of the meeting.

Actions Arising

1. Ms Apostolou advised that a copy of the Community Trust of ABS Statistics Survey instrument will be sent out with the November AGSF minutes.
2. Mr Wall (ABS) to demonstrate Data Quality Online to the State Statistical Forum (26 May) - Actioned.
3. Mr Searle from Office of Spatial Data Management (OSDM) and Simon Wall (ABS) to discuss the Data Quality Online tool and progress in data quality within the geospatial community. Mr Searle (OSDM) stated that he and Mr Simon Wall are having active and continuing discussions on data quality within the geospatial community.
4. Next meeting to include update from Greg Coombs on progress from the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSIC) meeting - Actioned on November AGSF agenda.

b. Statistician's update

Mr Pink highlighted the following items;

- NatStats 2010 Conference, which was held on 15-17 September
- Results of the Community Trust in ABS Statistics Survey
- Australian Law Reform Review
- Second phase of the Statistical Data Integration project.

On 20 October 2010, the first World Statistics Day was celebrated in over 130 countries and areas. World Statistics Day, an initiative of the United Nations, provided an opportunity to celebrate the role and importance of statistics and to foster the awareness and trust of the public in official statistics. The initiative was well received in Australia and celebrations were held across the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and many statistical organisations around Australia.

Agenda Item 2. Statistical Issues arising from Governments Initiatives

a. NatStats2010 Conference, Sydney 15-17 September 2010

Mr Ewing provided an update on the NatStats 2010 Conference. The Conference attracted over 460 delegates, 54 presenters, 14 exhibitors from both users and providers of data from government, business, the media, academia and the wider community to consider how we might improve Australia's statistics and strengthen the national statistical system. The overall theme for NatStats 2010 was "Measuring what counts: economic development, well-being and progress in 21st century Australia", which explored drivers of economic and related social

change that are shaping Australia's future development.

A key outcome from the Conference was the development of a set of Recommendations to assist in setting directions for shaping a future national statistical system that will be relevant and responsive to future challenges in Australia. Ideas and issues raised in speaker presentations and discussions were captured in the initial draft recommendations, and consultation occurred through an interactive website blog. The final NatStats 2010 Recommendations were released through the NSS website on World Statistics Day 20 October 2010.

b. Community Trust in ABS Statistics

Ms Apostolou provided an overview of the OECD project for measuring community trust in official statistics. ABS has supported the OECD project in the development of a trust framework and by undertaking a cognitive pilot of the international instrument developed by the OECD Electronic Working Group (EWG) of which the ABS is a member. This survey is the first such survey undertaken in Australia to measure community trust in ABS statistics. Ms Apostolou described the OECD trust framework, highlighting that the survey was undertaken by an independent consultant that surveyed both specialist users and the general community.

Ms Apostolou described the limitations of the survey methodology in particular, the low response rates and that findings needed to be interpreted with caution. The results of the survey, released to coincide with World Statistics Day, show that the majority of Australians trust the ABS and its statistics. There is wide spread public and specialist agreement that ABS statistics are important tools in understanding the economic and social landscape of Australia. The results also give a global sense of how well Australian statistics are trusted and used. This was followed by AGSF discussion.

Mr Ewing noted that the ABS should not get complacent in this area. However, the survey does give reassurance that the Australian public are generally comfortable with the statistics produced by the ABS and the confidence that the general public has in national statistics. Mr Karmel asked if trust in specific products was measured. Ms Apostolou responded that per OECD framework both institutional and product trust (for example Census, Prices, GDP etc) was measured.

Mr Pink reiterated that the level of specialist users confidence in the production of ABS statistics in Australia is high and the general perception is that statistics help to keep the community well informed. He noted that there is a lack of attribution of ABS statistics in the media and the survey did reinforce that the ABS needs to continue to remind and educate the media on the importance of appropriate attribution.

Agenda 3. Overview - Privacy a Community Perspective

a. Update on the Australian Privacy Principles

Ms Sheedy provided an update on the Australian Government Privacy Reforms and Privacy Principles.

On 14 October 2009, the Cabinet Secretary, Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig publicly released the Australian Government's First Stage Response to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) report which recommended 295 changes aimed at improving Australia's privacy framework. The Government is responding to the report in a two stage process. The first stage response outlines the Government's position on the 197 recommendations contained in the report.

On 24 June 2010, an exposure draft was released on legislation containing an important element of the First Stage Response – the proposed Australian Privacy Principles, which unify and simplify the current Information Privacy Principles and the National Privacy Principles. The new principles will be the cornerstone of a new Privacy Act. The drafting of this new Act will be done in 2 stages, with each part to be referred to a Senate committee for consideration and public consultation as the drafting of each is completed. The new Privacy Principles will result in more flexibility in data access, particularly in sending data overseas. Other changes include provisions relating to credit reporting; health information and health records; and strengthening the Privacy Commissioner's powers to conduct investigations, resolve complaints and promote compliance with the Privacy Act. Stage two of the Government's response will consider the remaining 98 recommendations in the Australian Law Reform Council (ALRC) report.

Substantial changes to the The Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act) have also been implemented with the principal objects of promoting a pro-disclosure culture across the Government and building a stronger foundation for more openness in government.

b. New Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC). Role, future directions in relation to privacy

Mr Pilgrim, Privacy Commissioner, presented an overview of the new Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) launched on 1 November 2010. The OAIC is headed by the Australian Information Commissioner, Professor John McMillan and supported by the Privacy Commissioner Mr Timothy Pilgrim and the new FOI Commissioner Dr James Popple. The Information Commissioner has all the powers of the Privacy and FOI Commissioners as well as the Information Commissioner functions.

The OAIC brings together functions relating to freedom of information with the existing functions of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and a new role relating to information policy. The new arrangements recognise the focus on open government and promoting better information management by government. Functions of the OAIC will include investigating complaints, reviewing agency FOI decisions, education and awareness, and reporting on compliance, legislative review, advice to government and business. Work undertaken by the new OAIC since its launch includes: developing guidelines,

training packages and publications; launching the new OAIC website www.OAIC.gov.au; and implementing procedures and systems for handling complaints.

Mr Pilgrim also noted the changes to the FOI Act which has been revised to inject a stronger pro-disclosure philosophy, and a new Information Publication Scheme which will require government agencies to publish far more information than previously. Other changes include the simplification and narrowing of the range of exemptions from access, a new single public interest test weighted towards disclosure, and the abolition of application fees for accessing documents. These changes reflect a broader policy change that acknowledges that information held by the Government is a national resource to be managed for public purposes.

Mr Snabel asked if there would be an increase in administration costs due to the increased transparency. Mr Pilgrim responded that the increase in volume of FOI requests under the new system is unknown and it may take several years to understand the overall impact. However, with agencies making information more available, the numbers of FOI requests received should reduce. There will be a review of costs to government to meet these obligations but the main purpose of the reform is to change the way information is used increase its accessibility. AGSF members discussed the impact of potential FOI requests on government. Mr Sutton queried if it will reduce the amount of information that is recorded and published.

Mr Pink noted the importance of the new reform and of preparing for the changes in this space that will be occurring over the next few years.

Mr Sutton took over the chair of the meeting as Mr Pink excused himself to attend another meeting.

Agenda item 4. Update on Governance Models for Statistical Data Integration

Mr Coombs provided an update on the governance model for Statistical Data Integration.

The Commonwealth Portfolio Secretaries established the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSIC) in April 2009. The Committee is jointly chaired by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. The aims of the Committee are to improve access to data for research and evaluation; and for the protection of personal information and confidentiality of data.

In February 2010, the Secretaries Board agreed to the high level principles for integrating Commonwealth data for research purposes. In October 2010 the governance and institutional arrangements were endorsed. An Oversight Board, chaired by the Australian Statistician, and comprising Secretaries of DoHA, DHS and FaHCSIA, will be established to oversee the development of a cross government environment for dealing with data integration matters. The ABS will provide Secretariat to the Board and will be supported by funding from the agencies represented on the Board.

The Oversight Board will be established in early 2011 with an initial focus on establishing Terms of Reference, guidelines for accreditation and education and training self-help tools.

Mr Coombs noted some of the challenges with dynamic and static datasets. The preferred approach is to have static linkage until sufficient experience is gained with the effectiveness of Integrating Authorities. AGSF members discussed the need to protect confidentiality of the data and noted that approval for access should be assessed on a case by case basis.

In response to a question from Mr Karmel regarding records being destroyed once the research had been conducted, Mr Coombs noted that this will be addressed on a case by case basis and will depend on the nature of the research work undertaken. There are issues such as usage and cost that need to be taken into consideration. Efficiencies should be looked at so agencies are not collecting data twice and the ability to examine the source data used for research purposes needs to be considered.

Agenda Item 5. Update on current (CPSIC) work to develop guidelines to support statistical data integration activities.

Ms Van Halderen provided an update on the work being undertaken by the ABS to develop guidelines for supporting statistical data integration activities. It was noted that the ABS is focussing on establishing the Oversight Board and preparing for the first meeting in 2011. The ABS is also developing a set of guidelines on "What is an Integrating Authority" and a three part series on Confidentiality, which will be released in the near future.

Ms Ey asked if additional data sets will be available, noting sensitivity of some data sets, for example tax and social security data. Ms Van Halderen noted that this has been raised with the ABS. Negative and positive impacts will be reviewed and issues such as public consultation, testing in the marketplace and community acceptance will be addressed by the Statistical Data Integration Oversight Board. Data will only be provided for research purposes.

Agenda Item 6. Confidentiality in Practice - A user perspective

Mr Lawrence provided an overview on confidentialising data. The aim of the presentation was to raise awareness of the work being undertaken in Western Australia in working with confidentialised data and to provide some best practice examples.

Mr Lawrence provided definitions and examples of commonly used terms such as Data Integration, Data Linkage, Confidentialise, Statistical Linking and Integrating Authority. He noted that there has been a long history of using confidentialised data but the difficulty has often been in trying to achieve zero risk with maximum return. The goal in WA has been to balance utility and risk, recognising risk can never be eliminated. Exposure risk can be minimised by restricting the content of the file or restricting the access to the file. There is also a range of risk assessment software products available which are useful in risk management. Mr Lawrence noted the procedures that can be undertaken for disclosure control, such as: rounding; categorising or re-coding; top or bottom

coding; random perturbation; data swapping; post randomisation; micro-aggregation.

Mr Lawrence provided an overview of confidentiality procedures in Western Australia and outlined the framework for the WA Data Linkage System. There is a long history of developing relationships with data custodians to build trust and understanding in this process. He provided examples of the impact on confidentialising data. Mr Lawrence described ABS procedures for confidentialising files and noted that ABS is good at managing this risk as there is a strong investment in consultation with the main users of the data.

Mr Karmel commented that while confidentialising data was important, it is often difficult to do when full access is not provided to the complete data set. Mr Lawrence said it was important to identify the outputs and that any good research should start with a reasonable hypothesis.

Mr Sutton noted that it was important for data users and custodians to be well educated to build confidence and rigorous approaches to developing research. Data confidentiality is an important aspect and users need to develop robust methodologies. The ABS has also developed various support tools to raise awareness and to develop understanding.

Agenda Item 7. Developing Confidentiality Capability - (Remote Execution Environment for Microdata) REEM project

Ms Gare provided an update on the REEM project. The presentation included an overview of the current framework for analysis of microdata by researchers including Basic CURFs (Confidentialised Unit Record Files) for use in researchers own environment, Expanded CURFs through RADL (Remote Access Data Laboratory); Specialist and Expanded CURFs in the on-site ABSDL (ABS Data Laboratory), and Special Data Service/Consultancies. This framework is to be expanded to include: a new remote execution environment that enables table generation and analysis to be performed on the detailed (unconfidentialised) data collected; and an enhanced ABSDL to enable complex analysis of detailed data including linked and longitudinal datasets.

The project will have a staged approach. Work commenced in November 2009 to extend TableBuilder to household surveys. The initial stage of development for count estimates from Household Surveys is due to be released in early 2011. The next stage of development will focus on key tabular outputs from continuous household survey data items and initial development and analysis functionality. Subsequent stages will focus on key outputs from business survey data, linked datasets and administrative datasets, searchable and richer metadata, but are subject to funding.

Agenda Item 8. Statistical matters of significance

Mr Farrell reported on the results of the Census Dress Rehearsal. A number of lessons have been learned, including a stronger than expected response to the e-Census. One in three completed the online form and the ABS is now preparing to increase capacity from 35% to 50% to ensure the volume is manageable. Mr Karmel asked if the Census results would be delivered earlier given the increased

use of e-Census. Mr Pink said that the process will be reduced but the overall time frame will not change.

Agenda Item 9. Other business

There was no other business.

Agenda Item 10. Arrangements for next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 18 May 2011 with a Census 2011 theme. Mr Cully also requested a presentation on the Census Data enhancement projects for the next AGSF meeting.

Agenda Item 11. Close

Mr Sutton thanked the members for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting at 12.40.