

AGSF 29 June 2011

Minutes

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT STATISTICAL FORUM

Chair	Brian Pink, Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics); Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician (Australian Bureau of Statistics);
Present	Denis Farrell, Ian Ewing, Trevor Sutton, Frank Yu, Denise Carlton, Jeanette Cotterill (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), Helen Rogers (Dept of Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs), Greg Evans (Medicare Australia), Scott Matheson (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), Tom Karmel (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research), Tim Quinn (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism), Kane Travers (Australian Taxation Office), Leanne Johnson (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport & Regional Economics), Geoff Richardson (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population & Communities), Scott Wallace (Australian Government Information Management office, Department of Finance and Deregulation),
Apologies	Laura Gannon (Centrelink), Greg Coombs (Department of Health and Ageing), Richard Snabel (Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research), Ben Searle (Australian Government Office of Spatial Data Management), Peter Robertson (Department of Human Services), David Kalisch (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare), Milly Lubulwa (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics), Paul Lowe (Australian Bureau of Statistics),
Speakers	Gemma Van Halderen, Peter Harper, Jill Charker, Tom Joseph, (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
Secretariat	Kellie Browning, Jenny Myers, Presley Peter (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
Observer	None

Actions Arising

1. Next AGSF meeting (8 November 2011) to discuss the National Statistical Service (NSS) and role of the AGSF in progressing the NSS.

Agenda Item 1. Welcome

Mr Pink welcomed members and speakers.

a. Minutes from November 2010 meeting

Mr Pink called for comments on the minutes from the AGSF meeting held 11 November 2010. The minutes were taken as an accurate record of the meeting.

Actions Arising from the November 2010 meeting

There are no outstanding action items.

b. Statistician's update

Mr Pink provided members with the following updates:

- Plans for the Census of Population and Housing (Census) on 9 August 2011 are progressing well. The Census 'Beyond the Count' conference was held 2-4 March 2011. Mr Harper (ABS) noted that the conference had enabled conference participants to understand how Census information could be used to inform policy.
- The Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board (CPDIOB) will meet again in August. It is developing governance, institutional arrangements and guidelines relating to integrating authorities. The next stage is the accreditation process proposed through cross-government consultation for data integration projects.
- The NatStats 2013 Conference will be held 12-14 March 2013 in Brisbane. NatStats provides a sense of community; bringing together the public and private sectors. Members were requested to mark their diaries.
- The next AGSF meeting in November 2011 will discuss the National Statistical Service (NSS) and role of the AGSF in progressing the NSS.
- A key NSS priority is the role of the ABS to support institutional challenges for a more effective and efficient COAG measurement process. This includes looking at how information is managed within the ABS, and the potential to help agencies in their information management. The November 2011 AGSF may include a presentation on Information Management Transformation and implications for the NSS.
- Statistical data integration work is ongoing, to understand the synergies of bringing data together, and the value of composite datasets.
- COAG decisions on priorities have placed a requirement for strategic information held by governments. Commonwealth and jurisdictions come together via fora such as AGSF, State Statistical Forum (SSF), and the COAG fora to prioritise effort on improving quality and accessibility of nationally important measures and data sources. The COAG health agreements requiring 70+ indicators was one such instance of working together to make decisions around which measures really matter. Prioritising measures and their data sources have been prioritised helps focus effort.
- Significant effort is being invested to spatially enable data across government. Referencing spatial information to a consistently-defined location enables: connecting information to a location; combining geographically related information; and mapping.

Agenda Item 2. Statistical Data Integration

Ms Van Halderen provided members with background to the Cross Portfolio Statistical Data Integration Committee (CPSDIC) that preceded the current Cross Portfolio Data Integration Oversight Board (CPDIOB). [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.] The CPSDIC was established in April 2009 by the Secretaries Board in recognition of the need for a secure environment to hold Commonwealth data for statistical and research purposes. In February 2010 the Secretaries Board endorsed a set of seven high level principles, agreed to the establishment of governance and institutional arrangements to effect the principles, and represented by all portfolio agencies. CPSDIC work was completed in November 2010.

The Board membership includes Secretaries of the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Health and Aging (DoHA), the Department of Families and Housing, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the Australian Statistician.

Best practice guidelines for data integration projects involving Commonwealth data will be developed by a cross government working group and approved by the CPDIOB. These guidelines will include privacy, approvals, registration, and agreements. The accreditation process for data integration proposals will differentiate high risk and medium to low risk projects. While both accreditation paths require authorisation either by legislation or consent, high risk projects will have legal protection that prohibits the disclosure of identifiable data. Medium to low risk projects will require a policy environment ensuring that no identifiable data is disclosed. Data custodians are responsible for their collections and comply with the various Acts applicable to their collection. The accreditation process includes a self-assessment conducted by the data custodian, an audit carried out by an independent third party, and a decision made by the CPDIOB on accreditation. A web based register for data integration projects will be established to build trust and transparency. A public feedback mechanism will ensure that support or concerns for a particular project or family of projects are addressed.

Ms Van Halderen noted that an education and training strategy will be developed and implemented to support the guidelines for data integration projects. The strategy will provide key stakeholders with an understanding of the values of a secure environment, issues in managing privacy and confidentiality, legislative requirements, sanctions and support.

Outcomes from the CPDIOB meeting included the terms of reference, interim accreditation process and requirements for Integrating Authorities, forward work program for the Cross Portfolio Data Integration Secretariat, and upcoming meetings in August and December 2011. The CPDIOB is expected to have a web presence by end of July 2011 on the NSS website.

Agenda 3. Overview - Census Data Enhancement Projects

Ms Van Halderen provided members with an update on Census Data Enhancement (CDE) in the ABS. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.] CDE projects link (i.e. combine using unit record data) information from the Census with other ABS and non-ABS datasets, creating new datasets for statistical and research purposes. The objective is to deliver significant benefits without compromise on the privacy and confidentiality aspects of data. CDE was initiated in August 2005 after extensive consultation, an update on the CDE project for the 2011 Census was released in October 2010.

The 2006 CDE project broadly encompassed: initiating and assessing the feasibility of creating a Statistical Longitudinal Census Dataset (SLCD); Quality studies (comparing

linkage with, and without, name and address information); and Statistical Studies for statistical and research purposes (linking 5% of Census with other datasets without name and address). A number of key benefits were realised, including improvements in life tables for Indigenous Australians, improved methodologies for statistical linking and quality assessment, and feasibility of automated matching of the Post Enumeration Survey (PES) to Census.

Based on the feasibility assessment from the 2006 CDE, the 2011 and 2016 CDE project plans to extend this work, including waves 2 and 3 of the 5% SLCD. A non-identifying grouped numeric code will be created and assessed for the SLCD. Pre-determined quality studies for 2011 CDE include DIAC's Settlement database, preparation for the Australian Longitudinal Learning Database (ALLD), and the WA mortality data. Pre-determined statistical studies are the Indigenous Mortality project (essentially a repeat of the 2006 study) and the Enhancing Australia's Cancer Statistics projects. At this stage, no data integration projects involving the 5% SLCD have been planned.

The indicative time-line for the above planned activities are: Census Night is 9 August 2011; access to full Census file April 2012 (begin quality studies); the Census Data Processing centre shuts down November 2012; and the "expected" release of the 5% SLCD is late 2013.

Name and address information is not available after the processing period (when the processing centre shuts down), i.e. only the coded values and demographic Census information are available to be used to link data sources. The use of coded values is anticipated to improve the match, however the challenge is to provide access outside the ABS while maintaining confidentiality. The ABS expects to progress Survey Table Builder to provide improved remote access to confidentialised tables. The 2006 Census TableBuilder product has proved to be a powerful tool; with the aim to extend this type of product to survey data and the longitudinal dataset. The Analytical Server, rather than the Remote Access Data Laboratory (RADL), is better able to undertake multivariate analysis. However, many needs are met by the Table Builder model. The CDE project has demonstrated the significant unlocking potential of data without compromising confidentiality.

Agenda item 4. International developments - roles of National Statistical Organisations (NSOs) in the Population Census

Mr Harper overviewed developments in international National Statistical Organisations (NSOs) in population census. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

- United States census: conducted every ten years. The most recent Census was in 2010, with a mail out/back and short-form that worked well, no e-Census, and net over-count 2% (but no adjustment). Per-capita cost roughly four times that of Australia.
- New Zealand census: the March 2011 Population Census postponed to 2013 due to the recent earthquake in Christchurch, where the head office and data processing centre are located.
- Canada census: conducted every five years, historically a a long-form to a sample (16%) and a short-form to everyone else . The May 2011 Census replaces the mandatory long-form with a voluntary survey. (The head of Statistics Canada resigned after this decision). The eCensus take-up anticipated up to 40%; a mixed approach with 60% receiving a letter with information on both the on-line questionnaire and how to request a paper questionnaire; 20% of dwellings received a questionnaire package by mail; the remaining 20% of dwellings had questionnaires dropped off.
- United Kingdom census: conducted every 10 years and is mail out/back. The 2011 Census in the UK will be the last 'traditional' census. Issues that may impact quality

include postal strikes, security and campaigns against the census. Use of eCensus is voluntary; the eCensus response rate anticipated around 15-16%. The form of the 2021 census could involve use of administrative data.

- Other European countries have a range of issues and take different approaches to their population census. Privacy and confidentiality concerns were expressed in only a few European countries. The 2011 census in Germany employs a population register-based process, and has some issues with coverage.

In Australia, it is important to continue to demonstrate the benefits and the value-for-money of the Census -- quality is important for this demonstration.

Mr Cully noted the matrix developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), observing that there may be an opportunity for NSOs to collaborate on comparative research.

Agenda Item 5. The 2011 Census: (a) The eCensus experience; (b) Whole of government approach to planning and conducting 2011 Census

Dr Charker (presenting for Mr Lowe) provided an overview of the 2006 eCensus pilot and eCensus plans for future Censuses. The eCensus was piloted in the 2006 Census, with an uptake of 10% of households. The 2011 Census will be a transitional year for the eCensus mode, with improvements to speed and usability based on learnings from the 2006 pilot. Both eCensus and paper questionnaire modes will be available to respondents. The eCensus will be actively promoted through a communications campaign (beginning 18 July 2011), and by the Census collectors themselves. The eCensus is anticipated to reduce the burden of respondents and collectors. A key challenge for eCensus will be the demands placed on Census and communication infrastructure, particularly during the peak load on Census night. Planning for the 2016 Census includes eCensus as the main channel, how to incorporate knowledge gained such as quality improvements and automatic 'smart edits', and how to return information (such as interesting facts) to respondents.

Support from all levels of government and community groups is essential for a successful Census. There has been strong support in planning and conducting the 2011 Census. Local governments provide a range of support, such as access to administration data for planning, and 'release arrangements' for staff to assist with collection processes.

The time taken to complete an eCensus form depends on the infrastructure capacity and user capability, but the overall respondent time is anticipated to be similar to the traditional mode.

Mr Cully (DIAC) asked about the potential for using the eCensus mode to ask extra questions for key subpopulations. Mr Harper (ABS) noted that there are a range of different proposals for the 2016 Census which would need to be assessed for their feasibility and benefits, and then prioritised.

Coding to mesh block would occur at the Data Processing Centre after collection from address provided; where this information has quality issues, collector information is used to derive mesh block.

[Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

Agenda Item 6. Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian communities - Census case study in Northern Australia

Mr Joseph discussed engagement with Indigenous communities undertaken in preparation and implementation of the 2011 Census, using the engagement in northern Australia as a case study. This area represents one-third of the land mass of Australia, and a significant proportion of Australia's Indigenous community. Census field staff comprise around 1500 collectors and community coordinators. There has been significant engagement and cooperation from local governments, authorities, community groups and individuals. A new initiative for the 2011 Census is the development of community networks across local areas. Benefits include: an awareness of community events; an understanding the movement of people during Census enumeration; development networks of community members; and improved understanding of what is important to communities. The goal of visiting every community to identify community contacts and support was achieved. Enumeration in Arnum land was able to be coordinated with a festival. A clear message from communities is their strong appetite for data; communities want to know their own 'Census story'. The Census team also has ongoing dialogue with commonwealth agencies, such as FaHCSIA and Centrelink, to facilitate coordination of separate engagement in communities. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

Agenda Item 7. Improving Indigenous demography statistics

Dr Charker overviewed improvements to enumeration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These improvements involved the 2011 Census, the 2011 Post Enumeration Survey (PES), as well as stakeholder collaboration on methodology, and data quality principles and guidelines. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

A quality Census is fundamental to demographic statistics. Improvements include those enumeration strategies discussed in Mr Joseph's presentation, and separate strategies for urban areas.

A quality PES is critical to estimate population undercount in the Census, used to calculate the Estimated Resident Population (ERP). The ongoing program of improvements to PES include increased sample size, improved targeting, and improving the approach to matching PES and Census responses. As the 2006 trial to automate the manual matching process suggested improvements to efficiency and matches, this approach is intended to be trialled in the 2011 process.

Stakeholder collaboration on methodological issues (such as ERP Rebasing) is ongoing, and includes the special Population Estimates Technical Workshop (PETW) in May 2011. Information Papers outlining methods and consultation are anticipated in late August 2011. A recent consultation process and review of all demographic statistics is expected to be published in July 2011. An age standardisation workshop in April 2011 reached general agreement about the preferred technical methods for COAG measures.

Administrative data sources are also used to calculate ERP. Census and PES are important to understand and address known quality issues in administrative data sources (such as Indigenous status in school enrolment data), qualitative issues (such as the propensity to identify as Indigenous) and technical issues (such as age standardisation). The ABS has been investigating these issues, and has been collaborating with key stakeholders to work through methodological issues and to develop shared guidelines and principles.

Agenda Item 8. Census data, the new geography and implications for outputs

Dr Charker discussed how the 2011 Census will be output in terms of the new geography standard (the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS)). Dr Charker overviewed the reasons for the changed standard, the timeline of events, and implications for Census Outputs. [Please refer to the presentation slides for more detail.]

Details of the new geography standard were published in December 2010 after extensive consultation nationally. Reasons for the changed geography standard include the need for stability and consistency of units over time, and a base-level unit designed specifically for output (rather than collection).

The smallest geographic unit in the ASGS is the Mesh Block (approximately 30 to 60 dwellings); however 2011 Census data will not be output at this level. For all output from the 2011 Census, the base-level is Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1); this includes the product Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). There are a greater number of SA1 units in the new standard (ASGS) compared to the number of base-level unit in the previous standard (ASGC used Census Collection District, CD) -- making SA1s slightly smaller, more consistently sized and more relevant to the needs of data users compared to CDs. Non-ABS structures, such as Post Codes, will still be able to be derived using concordances available on the ABS website. However, there will be a break in some outputs. Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) will be available for 2011 Census outputs, but not for 2016.

A Census output geography Discussion paper was released in March 2010, with Outcomes published in February 2011. Registrations for Consultancy Advanced Ordering are available March 2012.

Mr Harper reiterated that the new geographic standard (ASGS) is more consistent and relevant to user needs -- the ABS would be widely promoting the use of ASGS across government. Dr Charker noted that concordances will be available to assist resolving issues with time series; however, there will not be a CD-to-SA1 concordance.

Agenda Item 9. Around the table: Statistical matters of significance

Mr Harper invited members to share statistical updates.

Mr Richardson (DSEWPaC) noted that chapters of the State of the Environment Report are undergoing peer review and will be tabled by the end of 2011. As part of the National Plan for Environmental Information, DSEWPaC and BOM jointly establish a high-level advisory group on environmental information (chaired by BOM) -- a statement on priorities and policies to be issued.

Mr Cully (DIAC) noted the quarterly update of net overseas migration (NOM) forecasts published by DIAC.

Mr Evans (Medicare Australia) noted that the Human Services Legislation Amendment Act 2011 integrated the services of Medicare Australia, Centrelink and CRS Australia on 1 July 2011 into the Department of Human Services. Integration of the information management and governance structures will be important.

Mr Travers (ATO) noted that Tax Statistics was well received internationally, it made good use of data visualisation techniques. The website contained a pathway page linking to other sites using tax data.

Mr Karmel (NCVER) noted the May 2011 paper on the review of the data provision policy for data collections managed by NCVER; the paper argues for mandatory collection.

Mr Quinn (DRET) noted that ABARES (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences) was formed in 2010 following the merger of ABARE and BRS (Bureau of Rural Sciences). DRET were interested in exploring gaps in tourism data, statistical data integration and the new geography standard (ASGS).

Ms Johnson (BITRE) noted that the first Australian Infrastructure Statistics Yearbook 2011 was released in March 2011.

Mr Harper (ABS) noted that, for the first time, this year's Agricultural Census form can be completed online. Respondents can access the online option once they receive the paper form that has been despatched.

Agenda Item 10. Other business

There was no other business.

Agenda Item 11. Arrangements for the next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 8 November 2011 and will discuss the National Statistical Service (NSS), the role of the AGSF in progressing the NSS, nationally important statistics and Information Management Transformation.

Agenda Item 12. Close

Mr Harper thanked the members for their attendance and contributions, and closed the meeting at 12.30.