

The role and position of the national statistical office in the overall government structure

Differences between centralised and decentralised systems

Overall aim of a statistical system

- To produce a comprehensive set of integrated statistics (definitionally, conceptually, through the use of harmonised nomenclatures and classification devices) that are immensely more powerful for users than statistics collected without harmonisation.



Policy relevance v integrity

- A basic dilemma
- A good set of criteria to judge the effectiveness of any statistical system

Policy relevance

- A perceived fact that can't be measured
- Statistics alone are not relevant!
- Must be given a political/policy context
- Yields information for a particular decision



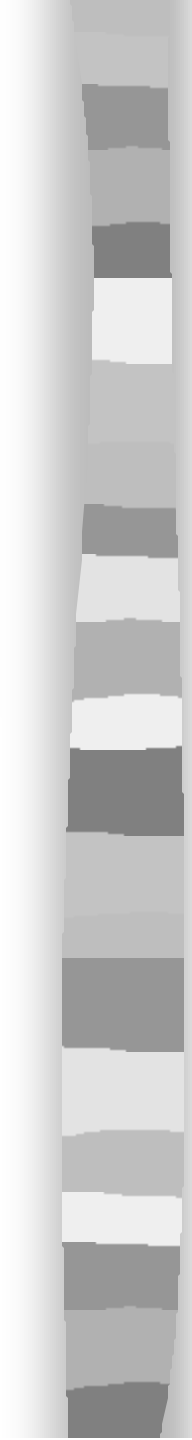
Needed attributes of statistics

- Timeliness
- Revisions to a minimum
- Consistency
- Statistical planning
- Analysis to place the statistics in context



Integrity of statistics

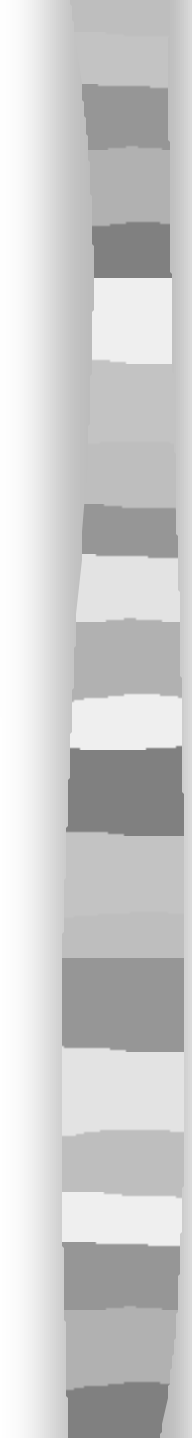
- A perceived fact
- The perception is as important as the fact

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- Accurate and objective statistics
 - Professional and ethical standards
 - Openness
 - Predetermined dates and times for the release of statistics
 - Publication of methodologies



A basic tension and ultimate inconsistency

- Total integrity denies flexibility
- Total responsiveness makes it difficult to maintain professional and institutional integrity

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- A good statistical system is one that attains a proper balance between the unobtainable goals of total policy relevance and and the total integrity of the statistics

The United Kingdom experience

- Historically decentralised on a subject basis
- 1940: CSO established to coordinate data
- 1945: CSO - national accounts
- 1969: BSO and OPCS set up
- 1969: GSS established



Government Statistical Service

- Activities of all statisticians in government
- Statistical director in each department
- Each department separately responsible

Head of the GSS

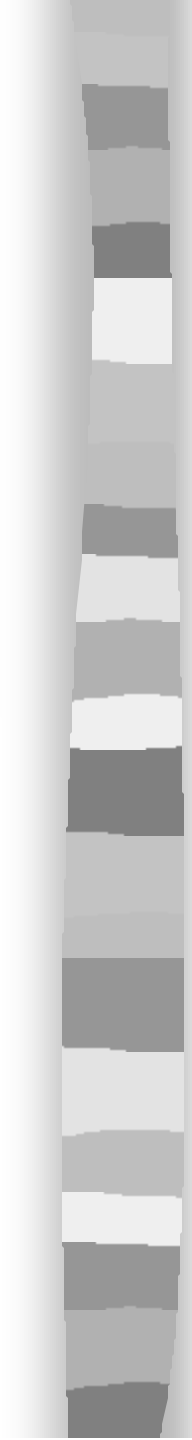
- Overall responsibility for the integrity and validity of official statistics
- Concerned with the maintenance of an effective professional staff
- CSO based committee structure for dealing with subjects of interdepartmental interest

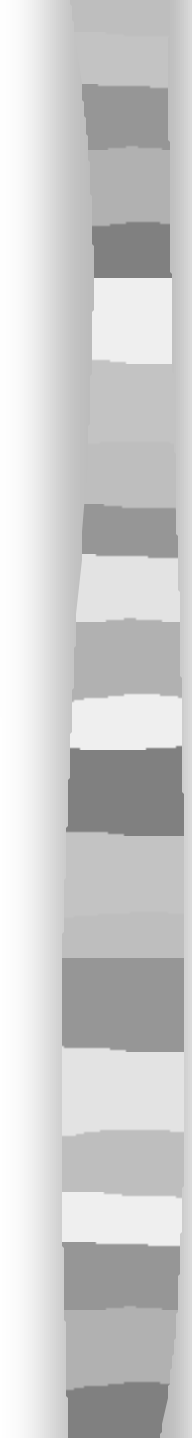


Thatcherism

public sector reform

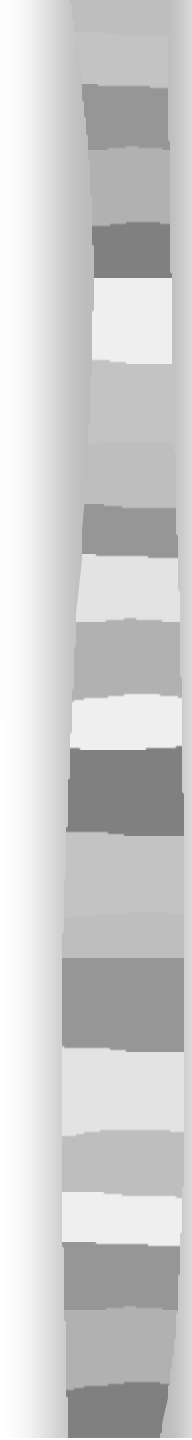
- Significant impact on the quality of government statistics
- Parliamentary concern

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- 1985: BSO merged with CSO
 - 1991: CSO as an executive agency “to ensure the integrity and validity of UK statistics”
 - 1992: “there are some services that only the public service can provide (and) one such service is..the provision of .. official statistics”

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- 1995: OPCS was merged with the CSO to become ONS, and labour statistics were transferred to the center
 - ONS employs about 2,500 staff out of about 5,000 in the GSS

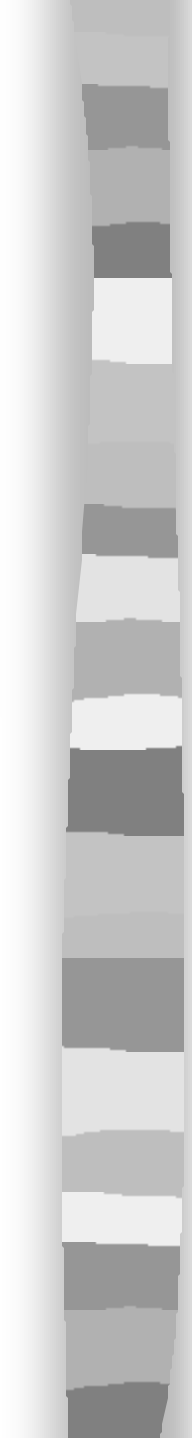
Positives of this system

- Ministries maintained the statistical function where the center didn't have the expertise – agriculture
- Statistical work remained in the ministries where it is an offshoot of administrative procedures – social services

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- Statistical work remained in ministries where there were legislative reasons – taxation
 - Some concentration of specialised manpower in ONS
 - In some ministries, statisticians in close contact with policy offices promoting relevance
 - GSS statisticians in close contact with government and non government users

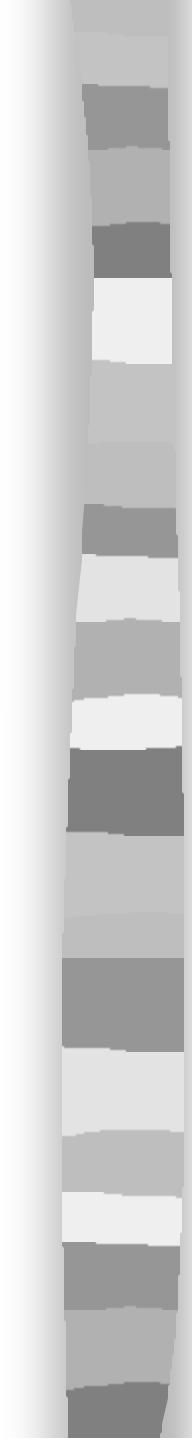
Negatives of this system

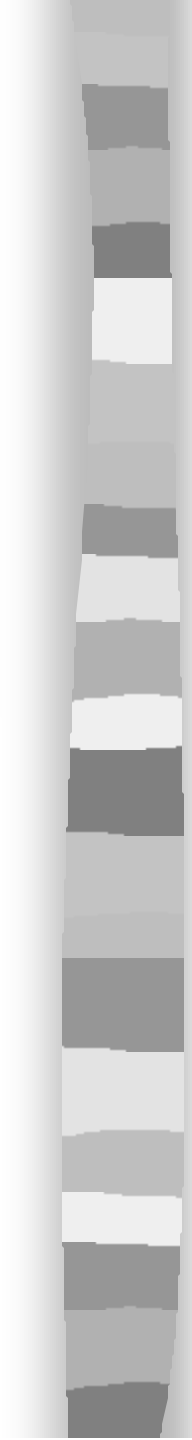
- Virtually no effective planning across the statistical system
- Coordination of the statistical effort in name only
- Difficulty dealing with Eurostat
- Statistical integrity often sacrificed; significant ministerial involvement

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- Difficult to share information
 - Few joint activities – the my data syndrome!
 - Poor or bad brand name recognition
 - Poor public perception, currently and in the past

The Australian experience

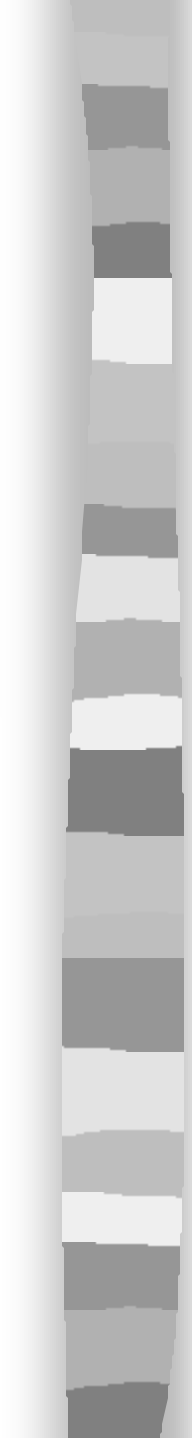
- Historically independent but centralised statistics in each colony (state)
- Result of UK colonial administration
- 1861: Population Censuses in all colonies
- 1901: Federation

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- 1905: CBCS but state statistical offices remained with significant coordination required
 - Regular Conferences of Statisticians
 - 1957: integrated statistical service (at last!)
 - Growth in demand, technology and the need for planning drove the integration

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- 1975: ABS as a statutory authority
 - ASAC
 - 1992: centralisation of subject matter collections in State Offices
 - Not all statistical work is done in the ABS, with a reasonable amount being done in Federal and State agencies.
 - Administrative by-product data remain with the “home” agency

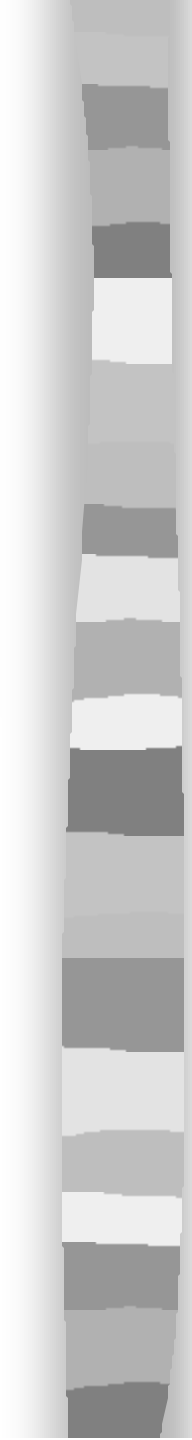
Positives of this system

- Concentration of specialised manpower
- Coordination of most programs within one office
- Easy and good recognition of the ABS
- There is a main source of data
- The production of a comprehensive set of integrated statistics

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- Effective recruitment and development of quality staff is enabled.
 - The maintenance of integrity and hence the trust of the public.

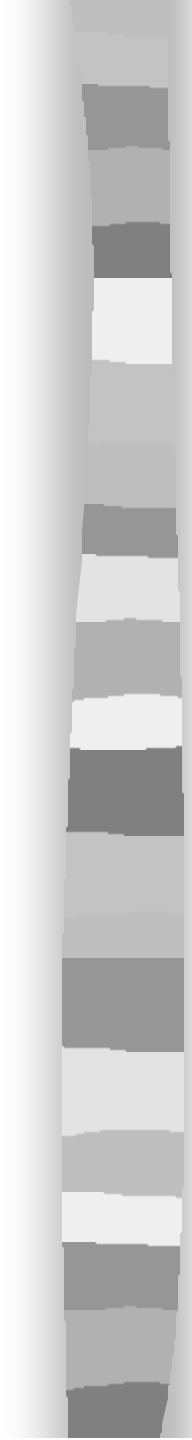
Negatives of this system

- ABS is not very close to users, and hence may be seen as not as responsive as required
- Coordination mechanisms, such as out posted officers and collection approval processes, have never been very successful

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- Some conflict with other Federal collection agencies
 - Some tender relationships with the State statistical processes
 - There are difficult priority issues to be dealt with in the planning processes

Conclusion

- The UK system scores well on the policy relevance dimension but less well on the integrity of data dimension.
- The Australian system scores very well on the integrity dimension but not as well as the UK on the policy relevance one

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- The ABS produces a higher standard and more comprehensive set of integrated statistics than the UK, but the reason for that may possibly not be solely the different organisational arrangements.