

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Annual Report 2006-07(1001.0)

Chapter 10 - Engagement with users and producers of statistics? ?

INTRODUCTION

The ABS' objective, as outlined in Chapter 1 Australian Statistician's review of 2006–07, and Chapter 3 ABS and the national statistical system, is to lead an effective national statistical service (NSS). This involves providing statistical services that meet the needs of users in government and the broader community. It also involves working with those who are holders of statistical data that can be part of the national statistical service—coordinating statistical services, and assisting the holders in making the data available. Thus, the engagement of the ABS with users and producers of statistical services is vital to meeting this objective.

Reflecting the wide range of users and producers of statistical services, the ABS uses a variety of mechanisms to engage with them, including:

- participating in a wide variety of meetings
- working in partnership
- placing outposted officers in departments and agencies, and
- conducting training courses.

In addition, the ABS is responsible for the Statistical Clearing House, which reviews business surveys proposed by the Australian Government.

NATIONAL STATISTICAL SERVICE

In recent years, the ABS has been examining its role in leading the national statistical service, and how to better coordinate, enhance and expand the service. Key to this is engaging effectively with users and producers of statistics, and exploring new ways of providing assistance. While all the approaches described in this chapter contribute to this aim, a key initiative has been the development of the National Data Network (www.nationaldatanetwork.org) as a resource for users and producers of statistics. For more information see Chapter 3 ABS and the national statistical service.

Australian Government and state and territory government departments and agencies hold considerable amounts of information, and the ABS has been working closely with them to explore and utilise these data holdings. Such partnerships will continue to be a crucial part of continuing to enhance the national statistical service.

The ABS facilitates the Australian Government Statistical Forum, which aims to provide strategic directions for NSS developments. The forum, which meets twice a year, discusses key national and international statistical developments, to facilitate and encourage communication amongst senior staff of Australian Government agencies, with important roles in the NSS. Presentations made during 2006–07 included: aligning the use of spatial data across government; approaches to developing a national statistical policy for Australia; using micro simulation and Geographic Information Systems capabilities to support service delivery decision; and the statistical work of the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics in the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

ABS Regional Directors have been working closely with state and territory governments in assessing their statistical priorities. The annual State Statistical Forum, where the state and territory nominees on ASAC meet together, always includes discussion of state and territory statistical priorities. In the 2008 meeting, there will be a strong focus on how to work together to meet these priorities, using all potential data sources, not just looking to ABS to conduct surveys.

NATIONAL DATA NETWORK

The National Data Network (NDN) uses collaborative approaches to promote access and use of quality statistics. Australia has a strong statistical system but, unlike information on the internet, collections of data held within different organisations are not easy to discover or access. The NDN aims to achieve the best use and return on investment from survey and administrative information resources by:

- providing owners and custodians of information resources with a means of giving greater visibility and wider access to their information resources, while continuing to give close attention to access and use conditions, and
- providing researchers and analysts with an improved means of finding and accessing information resources, particularly those information resources that are not publicly available.

Fundamental to the design of the NDN is the provision of a collaborative environment and governance framework in which organisations have direct control over the visibility and accessibility of data they make available and the opportunity to share good practice and tools.

During 2006–07, the demonstration phase of the NDN continued with the establishment of a number of collaborations with web service providers, including:

- signing a memorandum of agreement with the United States Census Bureau regarding the cooperative development between the ABS' National Data Network and the US Census Bureau's Data Ferrett/Data Web service
- working with Macquarie University and their Meta Access Management System project on federated identity management software
- cooperating with the Queensland Government on implementation of the Creative Commons licensing framework, and
- assisting CSIRO Mathematical and Information Sciences with the Privacy Preserving Analytics tool, which is a remote analysis service allowing analysis of a dataset through a secure privacy preserving interface.

In addition, the branch head responsible for the NDN provided an advisory role to the Data for Science Working Group, which reported to the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Innovation Council in December 2006 and provided input to the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy Investment Plan.

At the end of the 2006–07 demonstration phase there are nine NDN custodians, more than 100 information resources in the NDN Central Catalogue and over 150 registered NDN users.?

- The following organisations are participating as Full Nodes: ABS, Queensland Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Telethon Institute of Child Health Research, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and Tasmanian Department of Police and Emergency Services.
- The following organisations are participating as Lite Nodes: Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet, Tasmanian Department of Education,

NSW Department of Planning, and Cystic Fibrosis Association of Australia.

In 2007–08 the NDN will move into a pilot phase with the objectives of:

- providing leadership in the use of statistical and administrative data through facilitation of information resource feasibility
- establishing the NDN's usefulness in informing policy outcomes, and
- Proving the technical feasibility of the initiative

MEETINGS WITH USERS AND PRODUCERS OF STATISTICS

The ABS meets with users and producers of statistical services in a wide variety of forums, including:

- participating in bilateral meetings with key agencies and departments
- participating in cross-agency meetings where statistical issues are discussed
- convening meetings of users and/or producers to look at issues in a particular area of interest, and
- consulting on an ad hoc basis in relation to particular initiatives or projects.

In 2006–07, the ABS undertook a major consultation exercise in relation to the future household survey program. This involved senior level discussions held with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the Department of Health and Ageing, Treasury and other Australian Government and state and territory government agencies. These meetings assisted the ABS to better understand the agencies' highest priority areas for unmet need and the meetings have helped the ABS to prepare the program of surveys for the future. For more information on the review of the household survey program see Chapter 5 Population and Social Statistics Program.

Examples of other meetings held in 2006–07 are presented below.

Executive level meetings with key users and producers: Discuss emerging issues and the need for data	<p>During 2006–07, the ABS met with the executives of Australian Government agencies, including Treasury, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Health and Ageing. The aim of these meetings was to gain an awareness of needs in the current ABS statistical program, and to build support for initiatives considered for the future ABS work program.</p> <p>ABS executive staff met with senior staff from the tourism division of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources (DITR) to discuss tourism statistics, including work undertaken by the ABS to contribute to a review of the international standards for Tourism Satellite Accounts.</p> <p>Regular meetings were held between the ABS Queensland Regional Director and the Queensland State Government Statistician. A range of issues were discussed including statistical priorities for Queensland Government agencies, including information on Indigenous people in the labour force.</p> <p>As a result of an executive level meeting, a</p>
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	<p>memorandum of understanding was signed by the Australian Statistician and the head of the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority, which set out the framework for cooperation between the two agencies. The framework will facilitate the comparability of financial statistics through cooperation on the definitions, collection and publication of information from the finance industry.</p>
<p>Participation in groups: Contribute to discussions on information needs and data sources, and gain an understanding of the way information is used</p>	<p><i>Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Group</i> The ABS joined a subgroup of the Council of Australian Governments Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Group, which is developing the legislative framework and governance arrangements for streamlining greenhouse and energy reporting.</p> <p><i>Longitudinal Surveys Advisory Group</i> The ABS joined a new Longitudinal Surveys Advisory Group, which was established by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). The group will provide strategic and policy advice for the future development of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.</p> <p><i>National Committee for Housing Information</i> The ABS is a member of the National Committee for Housing Information—a national housing data committee established by the Housing Minister's Advisory Council. It is responsible for the development and management of the national and Indigenous housing data.</p> <p><i>Tasmania's Demographic Change Advisory Council</i> The Demographic Change Advisory Council, which is chaired by the Tasmanian Treasurer, brings together senior government ministers and community and business representatives to research and analyse trends relating to demographic change, and to lead and influence discussion and encourage information sharing regarding Tasmania's demographic opportunities and challenges. The ABS Tasmanian Regional Director has observer status on the council and the ABS also participates on a steering group to advise the council.</p>
<p>Formal user and advisory groups established by the ABS: Discuss issues relating to the ABS statistical program</p>	<p>The ABS convenes a wide range of user and advisory groups. A full list of groups is provided in Appendix 2 User groups advising the ABS. Below are some examples of the work done by the groups.</p> <p>The Rural and Regional Statistics Advisory Group was formed to provide advice to the ABS on rural and regional statistics priorities, development, adequacy and availability from both government and research perspectives. At their biennial meeting in November 2006, the group identified and discussed emerging issues that relate to data priorities for rural and regional areas. Issues discussed at the meeting included assessing the social, environmental and economic</p>

	<p>consequences of the introduction of water license trading; monitoring the effects that climate change, drought and water management have on regions; and measuring the impact of humanitarian settlement on regional communities and the involvement of migrants in the community.</p> <p>The Health Statistics Advisory Group (HSAG) is a representation of key organisations that use ABS health data. The group advises the ABS on health statistics developments and priorities along with the content for the ABS' health survey program. The ABS conducted a Review of Strategic Statistical Issues for Future National Health Surveys to determine a strategic approach to managing the scope, content and coverage of future National Health Surveys, and ensure integrations with other national and international health surveys. Proposals were discussed at several meetings of the HSAG and the final proposals were strongly supported at the most recent meeting.</p> <p>The Economic Statistics User Group has provided information and guidance on a wide range of issues, including the ABS' strategic direction, the update to the System of National Accounts and the Balance of Payments Manual, the implications of revisions to international trade classifications, and progress with the implementation of Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification 2006 and the Business Longitudinal Database.</p> <p>The State Accounts User Group has been consulted about using the production approach for the development of estimates of Gross State Product. These newly developed estimates will be implemented in the 2007 release of the annual State Accounts, resulting in a significant improvement in the quality of these estimates.</p>
<p>Consultations on statistical activities: Gather the views of users about aspects of the ABS' work</p>	<p>Since June 2007, ABS has been consulting with the Australian Government Treasury, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Productivity Commission about ABS plans to implement revisions to standards in the System of National Accounts and Balance of Payment Manual.</p> <p>A consultative workshop conducted for tourism indicators raised awareness of the many indicators that currently exist for the tourism field of statistics. There is now a better understanding of the existence and impact of revisions to the estimates, and a greater engagement of clients with the ABS on both the Tourism Satellite Account and proposed international changes to</p>

	<p>standards.</p> <p>Other consultations have taken place in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the proposed content of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey • the future direction of regional statistics • the strategic review of ABS health surveys • a proposal to publish experimental Indigenous Australian data from the recorded crime victims collection for New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, published on 2 June 2007 in Appendix 2 of Recorded Crime—victims, Australia, 2006 (cat. no. 4510.0) • priority setting for information technology related statistics, and • review and evaluation of the 2006 Census Indigenous enumeration strategy.
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PARTNERSHIPS ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES

The ABS works closely with a range of partners to extend the use of statistics by exploring their needs for information, by examining potential data sources (from ABS and elsewhere) that may assist in meeting these needs, and by advising on issues around the collection of statistics. Below are some examples of partnerships with users and producers of statistics in 2006–07.

○ Council of Australian Governments

The ABS has been involved in assisting to meet data gaps for some Council of Australian Governments (COAG) priorities. Health data was provided for the Human Capital Reform group, with a specific focus on diabetes. The ABS prepared three reports for the COAG skills shortage project. One of these reports included a survey instrument that could be used to collect information on skills shortages for particular regions and industries. In December 2006, this instrument for regional surveys was posted on www.skillsinfo.gov.au.

○ Department of Health and Ageing

The ABS and the Department of Health and Ageing entered an agreement that sets out the strategic framework for optimising investments in health statistics.

○ Suicide Coding Working Group

A Suicide Coding Review Working Group was established by the ABS Health and Vitals Statistics Unit, in conjunction with key stakeholders, to address discrepancies in coding cause of death as suicide. Key organisations involved in this group include the National Centre for Classification in Health, the Australian Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention, the Queensland State Coroner and a representative of the Victorian State Coroner's Office, the National Coronial Information System, and the Queensland Child Death Review Team. This initiative has resulted in greater understanding of ABS data amongst key users.

○ Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

In 2006–07, ABS continued to contribute to a steering group for the Longitudinal

Study of Indigenous Children, convened by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The ABS played an important role in progressing two pilot studies, which have now changed as a result of funding decisions.

- Victorian Department of Human Services

The ABS worked with the Victorian Department of Human Services to redesign the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ) which provides vital data on the health, safety, development, learning and wellbeing of young children in Victoria, and is a component of the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System. The ABS also provided advice on variables required to enable data linkage between SEHQ and the Victorian Perinatal Data Collection.

- NSW Department of Community Services

The ABS worked with the Department of Community Services to provide information needed to review early intervention practices relating to the Families First initiative.

- National Water Commission

In 2006–07, the ABS worked closely with the National Water Commission and other government and non-government agencies as part of the Australian Water Resources 2005 project. The purpose of this project was to prepare a baseline assessment of Australia's water resources. The ABS provided water use data for inclusion in several Australian Water Resources 2005 outputs. This entailed releasing existing ABS products earlier than planned, undertaking new collections, and adding value to existing data.

In addition, the National Water Commission, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Department of Environment and Water Resources funded the ABS to 'mesh block' code the 2005–06 Agricultural Census, in order to deliver more flexible geographical outputs, such as for natural resource management areas and river basins. For more information on mesh blocks see Chapter 15 Statistical standards and infrastructure.

- Social Economic National Coordination Committee

The ABS has continued engagement with the Social Economic National Coordination Committee of the National Land and Water Resources Audit. The ABS has been invited to contribute to a 'land managers' capacity to change' research project, to attend national resource management regional forums, and to contribute to relevant National Land and Water Resources Audit information products.

- Executive Steering Committee for Australian Water Resources

The ABS' continued engagement with water policy and information stakeholders has led to greater involvement in whole-of-government and multi-jurisdictional forums such as the Executive Steering Committee for Australian Water Resources. It has also led to closer working relationships with key stakeholders such as the National Water Commission, Department of Environment and Water Resources, Bureau of Meteorology and the Water Accounting Development Committee.

- National Land and Water Resources Audit and the Bureau of Rural Sciences

The ABS has worked closely with the National Land and Water Resources Audit and the Bureau of Rural Sciences to contribute knowledge and statistical

information to support the development of the Signposts project. This project aims to provide Australian agricultural industries with a tool to assess, illustrate and demonstrate how their activities contribute to ecologically sustainable development in Australia.

- Productivity Commission

The ABS worked with the Productivity Commission and examined the diversity of farm irrigation practices and management, which culminated in the publication of **Characteristics of Australia's Irrigated Farms, 2000–01 to 2003–04** (cat. no. 4623.0). This report provided a detailed statistical description of farms that used and traded irrigation water in the period 2000–01 to 2003–04, and provided estimates of the contribution of selected irrigated activities to the gross value of Australia's agricultural production. It is intended that the statistical and other descriptive information provided in this report will support wider analyses to identify farm management and resource use practices that contribute to the productivity and efficiency of irrigation water use.

- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

The ABS worked with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to develop questions for inclusion in the 2006–07 Natural Resource Management survey. This survey will collect information on farmers' perceptions of changed climate, providing much needed input into climate change policy and decision making processes by Australian Government and state and territory government agencies, as well as the COAG Climate Change Group.

- Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics

The ABS and the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics assessed the fitness-for-purpose of the Survey of Motor Vehicle Use and found that it meets the broad needs of the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics. The partnership strengthened the relationship between the two agencies; increased the analytical understanding of data quality and the use of the data in policy and decision making; and improved the quality of ABS publications relating to the survey.

- Australian Innovation Research Centre

The ABS provided conceptual and methodological advice to staff working in the Australian Innovation Research Centre as part of the Centre's development of an experimental survey which plans to measure innovation amongst businesses in Tasmania.

- South Australian Government

The Statistics Program South Australia is an ongoing partnership between the ABS and the government of South Australia, with the aim of enhancing the analytical skills of state government employees. Six government agencies have officers working with ABS officers on statistical projects of strategic value to the state. The ABS officers provide statistical advice on the projects, as general statistical training. On returning to their own agencies, the state government officers are encouraged to share their statistical skills with colleagues and further develop state government statistical capability.

The ABS in South Australia has also worked closely with the state government to create standard regional boundaries for South Australia's strategic plan.

INFORMATION DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Information Development Plans (IDPs) involve a review of the needs of users in a particular area of statistics, a review of the available sources of data, an assessment of the gaps and overlaps in information available, and recommendations (agreed with other data users and holders) on a future work program. In 2006–07, development began on an IDP for innovation, and two IDPs were released:

- **Information Paper: Improving Statistics on Children and Youth—An Information Development Plan** (cat. no. 4907.0), released on 8 December 2006, and
- **Information Paper: Emergency Management Information Development Plan** (cat. no. 1385.0), released on 31 October 2006.

The ABS worked in partnership with Biotechnology Australia on the Biotechnology Statistics Information Development Plan, which was published in December 2006. ABS and Biotechnology Australia jointly convened the Biotechnology Statistics User Group and consulted extensively with members of the group in developing the IDP. A key gap identified in the IDP will be addressed through an experimental biotechnology survey. In the first half of 2007, the ABS provided specialist advice to the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, as part of the survey's development process.

National Statistics Centres

Many areas in the ABS participate in discussions with users of statistics, particularly through the National Statistics Centres (NSCs). The NSCs were established to provide expert assistance to users in a designated field of statistics, and to ensure that ABS developments in each of these fields are forward looking and aligned with key user needs.

Staff have expertise in matters of policy issues and developments in their field, and build close links with relevant clients. Their role is to contribute to the development of statistics in national and international contexts, within their field.

Some examples of user consultation undertaken by NSC staff include:

- Business Demographics NSC staff worked with the Department of Agriculture and the Office of Small Business to provide counts of businesses in drought-declared areas.
- Family and Community NSC staff reviewed drafts of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2007 publication titled **Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing**. Staff of the Children and Families Household Survey Centre also provided input on the development of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research's 2008 Child Health and Wellbeing survey, and are represented on their survey development group.
- The Economic Conditions NSC conducted a user review of products associated with Retail Trade (cat. no. 8501.0), **Business Indicators** (cat. no. 5676.0) and **Private New Capital Expenditure and Expected Expenditure** (cat. no. 5625.0).

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

The ABS worked with a range of agencies, particularly at the state and territory level, to develop and prepare community indicators. In addition to the projects outlined below, this work also involved bringing many parties together, from within Australia and overseas, in a Community Indicator Workshop.

The ABS hosted the Community Indicator Workshop on 5–6 September 2006, in Melbourne. The aim of the workshop was to share Australian and international experiences in the development of progress measures, community and wellbeing indicators, and to clarify future development of this activity in Australia. This was a valuable opportunity for networking and understanding how the different levels of government develop, implement and use community indicators.

Outcomes of the workshop include additional input as a result of the discussions into regional, national and international development in this field of statistical work, as well as consideration of the ABS' leadership role in the community indicators' area.

The following projects all relate to community indicators.

Agency partner	Project
<i>New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet</i>	An outposted officer worked with the Department of Premier and Cabinet on the development of statistical indicators for the New South Wales State Plan.
<i>Queensland Spatial Information Council</i>	The ABS collaborated with the Queensland Spatial Information Council on a workshop which promoted integrated data sharing between government agencies. The workshop assisted the development, identification, collection and application of Healthy Communities indicators which will strengthen regional and community planning processes.
<i>Western Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of the Attorney General</i>	The ABS is working in partnership with the Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of the Attorney General to develop the Western Australia Indicator Framework System (WAIFS) which will store metadata and data associated with State Government Performance Indicator Frameworks. The main objectives of the project are to reduce the reporting burden to state government; to increase comparability and data quality across multiple indicator frameworks; and to ensure regular maintenance and reporting against these frameworks. In the longer term it is expected that the project will lead to increased sharing of metadata and data across Western Australia government agencies for research, reporting, decision making and policy formulation purposes.
<i>Tasmania Together Project</i>	The ABS has continued its support for the Tasmania Together Project, assisting with the development of goals, benchmarks and indicators. ABS has also provided assistance in identifying existing data sources for these indicators, or methods for collecting and reporting data to fill existing gaps.

PROVIDING OUTPOSTED OFFICERS TO KEY CLIENTS

Another way the ABS achieves its objective of engaging with users and producers is by outposting statistical officers to Australian Government and state and territory government agencies. The purpose of many of the longer-term ABS outposted officer positions in Australian Government agencies is to ensure a strong and effective working relationship between the ABS and those agencies. As such, ABS outposted

officers contribute to informed decision making by those agencies. The primary objectives of these longer-term relationship-focused outposts are to:

- strategically engage the host agency on emerging issues, to identify opportunities for the ABS to assist in making informed policy decisions in the future
- feed knowledge of emerging issues back to ABS to ensure that agency needs are understood and considered as part of the ABS Forward Work Program
- promote strong statistical capabilities and structures within the agency to improve their ability to understand and effectively use data
- enhance cooperation between the host agency and ABS
- support the agencies' current and future information and analytical needs, and
- ensure coordination between agency statistical activities including collecting and disseminating information to reduce duplication of effort and to promote standards. This will improve the comparability of data and cost effectiveness of data gathering activities.

Other outposts have a different focus, such as facilitating access to, and an understanding of, statistics. Outposts can also be short-term, to assist with a particular project or issue, such as the ABS outpost to assist with the Productivity Commission's 2007 **Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage** report. The outposted officer supported the compilation of statistics from ABS collections, and associated analysis.

Each ABS outpost is tailored to suit the needs of the agency.

The ABS outposted officer in the New South Wales Premier's Department has assisted with improving the quality of statistical indicators used for the New South Wales State Plan. Subsequent to this, ABS has been working with the department on a number of issues towards a more integrated statistical service and assessment of the tasks required to improve the statistical data base for New South Wales.

An outpost is currently underway at the Department of Queensland Transport, which is responsible for developing and managing the land, air and sea transport environment in Queensland. The ABS officer is assisting the agency to: improve compatibility and consistency in classifications used and treatment of data; conduct research on data quality issues; and promote standards and statistical training.

ABS statistical advice, provided by an outposted officer to Mineral Resources Tasmania (MRT), led to an improved understanding of the quality and limitations of MRT data and provided the agency with a process to increase the accuracy and timeliness of data, including the data provided to the ABS.