

**Expert Group Meeting on
Setting the Scope of Social Statistics**
United Nations Statistics Division
in collaboration with the Siena Group on Social Statistics
New York, 6-9 May 2003

Current Efforts in the Systematic Development of Social
Statistics in Australia *

by

Barbara Dunlop **

* This document is being issued without formal editing.

** Australian Bureau of Statistics The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Production of social statistics in Australia.....	3
ABS strategies for developing and integrating social statistics.....	4
Broad conceptual framework for social statistics.....	5
Detailed frameworks for particular fields of social statistics.....	7
A framework for progress indicators.....	7
Statistical standards and other information infrastructure.....	8
National Information Development Plans.....	9
National Statistics Service (NSS) initiative.....	11
Other developments in ABS social statistics.....	12
(a) Expanded social survey program.....	12
(b) Implementation of an Indigenous statistics strategy.....	13
(c) Stronger focus on understanding and meeting user needs.....	13
(d) Increasing the availability and use of microdata.....	14
(e) Enhanced analysis.....	14
(f) Development of social capital framework and measures.....	15
(g) Labour underutilisation measures.....	15
(h) Household income measures.....	16
(i) Disability measures.....	16
(j) Other developments linking social, economic and environment statistics.....	17
International activities.....	17
Concluding comments.....	18
References.....	20

CURRENT EFFORTS IN THE SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL STATISTICS IN AUSTRALIA

Barbara Dunlop
Australian Bureau of Statistics

Introduction

1 This paper outlines the key features of the Australian social statistics system and discusses the strategies being adopted to develop and integrate these statistics. The roles and responsibilities of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other agencies in the production and development of Australia's social statistics system are identified. Collaborative approaches and a focus on policy drivers and issues are key themes underpinning directions for these statistics.

2 The paper describes the frameworks which are used for organising the collection and reporting of social statistics and outlines the important role of statistical standards. It reports on a number of strategic initiatives to improve the range, quality and use of data. It also provides an overview of Australian participation in activities which are shaping international directions in social statistics.

Production of social statistics in Australia

3 Australia has a comprehensive range of social statistics and a well-established infrastructure for production and dissemination of these statistics, resulting from a high level of collaboration and cooperation between government agencies and across Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions.

4 As the national statistical agency, ABS plays a leading role in the national collection and reporting of information about the social and economic circumstances of the Australian population. The ABS is responsible for a broad range of economic and population statistics. It conducts a five-yearly population census, compiles statistics relating to the demographic and other characteristics of the population using data recorded in administrative records and registers, and conducts an extensive range of household-based surveys. It also collects data from businesses and other bodies that deliver services impacting on or linked to social outcomes.

5 A number of other agencies also play important roles in producing social statistics in particular fields. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is responsible for providing an extensive set of health and welfare statistics and information. It compiles data from systems involved in the delivery of health and welfare services, disease registers, and a wide range of other sources. It also makes extensive use of health data collected by the ABS, and conducts some surveys. The AIHW and ABS

work collaboratively to maximise the consistency, coverage and use of the data that they each produce.

6 Similarly, there are agencies in fields such as education, training, employment, family and community, crime and justice, health administration and insurance, immigration and Indigenous affairs that undertake data collections and produce and disseminate statistics. These statistics may be derived from administrative records or from social surveys. The ABS works collaboratively with these agencies, providing support and assistance for their statistical activities where appropriate, such as advice on methodology and outposting of statisticians.

7 In a number of fields there are formal arrangements (eg intergovernmental agreements, partnerships and committees) to ensure a coordinated approach to statistical activity and to promote adoption of nationally agreed standards. In some cases there are also national information development plans. For example, under the National Health Information Agreement, a national health information development plan sets out agreed national priorities for health information and statistics and a National Health Information Group oversees implementation of the Agreement. ABS, along with various other agencies, is a member of this group. ABS is looking to establish national information development plans of this kind in a wide range of other subject fields, as discussed later in this paper.

ABS strategies for developing and integrating social statistics

8 ABS directions for both social and economic statistics reflect the broad objectives and strategies contained in the ABS corporate plan. These directions recognise the importance of delivering a statistical service that is relevant to current, emerging and continuing needs of users and that takes into account the various inter-related aspects of contemporary social and economic debate. ABS aims to provide a statistical service that covers and connects the many aspects of interest and helps to monitor changing circumstances, behaviours and outcomes over time.

9 To help meet this goal, ABS has put in place a number of broad strategies for maintaining and developing an integrated system of social statistics that both complements the integrated system for economic statistics based on the international standards in the *System of National Accounts (SNA)* and facilitates analysis of the complex interactions between economic developments and societal wellbeing. These strategies include:

- Articulating an overall conceptual framework that describes the purpose and scope of the ABS system of social statistics and more detailed conceptual frameworks for each area of social concern.
- Developing data item standards for uniform application throughout ABS data collection systems and, wherever possible, by other agencies who compile statistics of national importance.

- Organising population censuses, a suite of household surveys and other collections that serve identified needs across areas of concern, using the conceptual frameworks for guidance.
- Ensuring that data are collected in standard ways to enhance the reliability of statistics compiled from different collections and to provide multidimensional views on social issues.
- Developing national information development plans for all statistical fields.
- Working to provide a national statistical service which aims to capitalise on the information collected through administrative as well as survey systems by government agencies. This includes technical assistance and active promotion of statistical standards to enhance the reliability of data from different collections.
- Producing annual strategic directions statements for the development of ABS social statistics, including a general statement and more particular statements for each area of concern.
- Ensuring the development of social statistics is relevant to emerging needs by building and maintaining close working relationships with government, research institutes and relevant community organisations.
- Actively turning the data collected into information through social analysis and reporting activities and generally improving access to data for use by the broader research community.

Broad conceptual framework for social statistics

10 The broad framework ABS uses to develop and organise its social statistics program was published in *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics* (ABS Cat. no. 4160.0) in 2001. This framework describes the scope of social statistics and the linkages both within this field of statistics and with other fields of statistics. It also describes commonly used counting rules, classifications and definitions. Its systematic approach supports the identification and analysis of data needs and helps to ensure that a comprehensive and well balanced array of data items are collected across the social statistics program.

11 The concept of wellbeing is central to the framework. This multifaceted concept recognises a range of fundamental human needs and aspirations, each of which can be linked to an area of social concern. These needs and aspirations are the focus of government social policy and service delivery, and are reflected in many of the structures of government.

12 A number of key areas of social concern form one dimension of the framework. The areas identified are: Population; Health; Family and community; Education and

training; Work; Economic resources; Housing; Crime and justice; and Culture and leisure. Each of these areas has its own more detailed framework, or set of frameworks, and is explored through a series of questions:

- How does this area relate to wellbeing?
- What are the key social issues that need to be informed?
- What groups are at risk of disadvantage?
- What detailed frameworks relate to this area?
- What definitions, classifications and units of measurement will result in effective social indicators?
- What data sources relate to this area?

13 Another dimension of the framework focuses on a variety of population groups which are of special interest to the community and to governments. These groups include, for example, older people, children, youth, families with children, the unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities, carers, recipients of various government benefits, low income earners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people whose language background is other than English.

14 These two basic dimensions of the framework are brought together in the form of a matrix showing areas of social concern by population groups. The scope of social statistics in Australia is broadly defined by reference to this matrix and the relationship of its elements to the various aspects of human wellbeing, both at the level of the individual and for society as a whole. The ABS aims to provide information about the elements of this matrix over time through its work program activities. By having standards for identifying key population groups in the various areas of concern, focused collections (health, income and expenditure, housing and so on), and standards for collecting key variables, there is the potential for greatly enhancing the power of available data for analytical purposes.

15 A practical illustration of the analytic application of the framework is the annual ABS publication *Australian Social Trends*. It is structured according to the framework's areas of concern and draws on a wide range of data, sourced from both ABS and other agencies, to present a contemporary picture of Australian society. For each area of concern it provides a set of national and State/Territory indicators which describe how key aspects of wellbeing have been changing over time and how circumstances differ between geographic areas. It also provides comparisons with other countries.

16 The framework has been central to ABS work in social statistics for many years and has evolved to accommodate changing perspectives and information needs over that time. Its flexibility suggests it will maintain its value well into the future. While very different from the accounting frameworks used in describing the economy and the environment, it has performed an important complementary role as an integrating tool in social statistics.

Detailed frameworks for particular fields of social statistics

17 Detailed statistical frameworks have been developed, or are under development, for each area of social concern to support analysis of particular social issues. These map the conceptual terrain for that area and provide, along with detailed statistical standards, the foundations on which integrated statistical datasets can be built. Frameworks of this kind have been developed and published for areas such as health, labour market, learning, and household income, expenditure and wealth. Frameworks are also under development in areas such as social capital, crime and justice, and sexual assault.

18 For example, earlier this year ABS published *Measuring Learning in Australia: A Framework for Education and Training Statistics*. The concepts, scope, data models and definitions in the framework were developed through extensive consultation with major stakeholders and they represent a consensus of views across the key agencies involved in producing and analysing learning statistics. ABS expects the framework to be a key building block for medium to longer term improvement of education and training statistics, and in this context it is already proving valuable in assessing how well the various education and training sectors are served statistically. As it is the first framework to be produced for this field of statistics, it will be revisited in a few years time to see whether any modifications are necessary.

19 Another example is the comprehensive description of the concepts, sources and methods used in compiling Australian labour statistics, published by ABS in 2001 in *Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods*. This describes the broad scope of labour statistics and presents the overall labour force framework together with a number of inter-related frameworks for specific topics such as underemployment, persons not in the labour force, and wages. It discusses a large number of measures and their relationship to each other and to international standards.

A framework for progress indicators

20 In April 2002 ABS released a new publication, *Measuring Australia's Progress*, which uses an analytic framework to display and comment on 90 indicators that span 30 key aspects of the Australian economy, society and environment. In developing this publication, ABS drew on the expertise of economic, social and environmental statisticians in Australia and abroad and examined many framework documents and indicator suites relating to progress, wellbeing and sustainability. Design of the publication involved choosing a presentational model, identifying the dimensions of progress, selecting the indicators that would give statistical expression to those dimensions, and deciding on a more compact subset of 15 headline indicators.

21 With no definitive national or international approach to measuring progress, three possible presentational models were considered: the one-number approach; the integrated accounting framework approach; and the suite of indicators approach. The suite of indicators approach was the one chosen.

22 The framework of indicators was organised into 3 broad dimensions covering the economy, society and the environment. Each of these broad dimensions contained a number of finer dimensions. For example, the society dimension has separate dimensions for key areas of social concern - health, education and training, work, economic disadvantage and inequality, housing, crime, and social attachment. It also has separate dimensions for other expressions of or influences on social progress, specifically communication and transport, culture and leisure, and governance, democracy and citizenship. In forming the dimensions of progress, the key ingredient was extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the Australian community.

23 Decisions on which indicators to present within each dimension were made after reviewing thousands of potential indicators and assessing them against a number of criteria. For some dimensions of progress (e.g., social attachment), it was not possible to compile an indicator that satisfied all of these criteria. In such cases proxy measures were used as interim indicators pending further statistical development work.

24 Distilling all the indicators down to a more compact headline set was easier for the economic dimension of progress than for the social and environmental dimensions. For example, it was not possible to select just a couple of indicators to encapsulate progress across the key areas of social concern, so separate headline indicators have been included for each area. As a result, the headline suite shows 2 economic dimensions, 7 social dimensions and 6 environmental dimensions.

25 ABS is continuing to develop the framework and suite of progress indicators, in consultation with government, academic, community and other representatives. The outcomes of this work will be reflected in the second edition of the publication in early 2004.

Statistical standards and other information infrastructure

26 In addition to statistical frameworks, the infrastructure supporting the collection and dissemination of comparable data and the provision of a cost effective information system includes a number of other fundamental elements.

27 National standard definitions, classifications and question modules for commonly surveyed variables are one such element. They provide the integrating force across all areas of social statistics. The current standards are published on the ABS website in the Statistical Concepts Reference Library and are promoted through internal ABS governance structures and externally through information management groups, survey steering committees, outpostings to other agencies, consultancies and the like. In some areas, such as health and community services, the relevant standards have been incorporated into agreed 'national data dictionaries' and there are plans to extend this approach to other areas, such as education and training and courts statistics.

28 Practitioner groups have been formed in some areas, such as crime and justice, to support the implementation of standards in administrative systems and these are proving

useful. Endorsement of standards by ministerial councils on which all jurisdictions are represented can also assist implementation. For example, standard ABS questions and coding procedures for particular demographic and education variables are being implemented in education collections following such endorsement.

29 The ongoing development of national statistical standards is necessary to reflect changes in the external environment and the need for new measures, as well as to improve the quality and comparability of social statistics over time and across various collection vehicles (census, survey and administrative collections). Over the last couple of years ABS has released several new national standards for use in classifying social statistics - relating to education, culture and leisure, drugs of concern, and criminal offences - and these are currently being implemented in a range of data collections. A major undertaking over the next few years is the development of a revised occupation classification, jointly with Statistics New Zealand.

30 Another element in the information infrastructure is 'national minimum data sets'. These have particular application in areas where comparable State and Territory administrative data are needed to compile national statistics. Such data sets have been developed in the health, community services and crime and justice areas.

31 Internationally endorsed standards are also adopted where appropriate. For example, definitions of employment, unemployment and underemployment follow ILO and OECD recommendations. Health classifications endorsed by WHO (e.g., ICD10 and updates) have been adopted in cause of death statistics, with Australian modifications where necessary. Definitions of household income and wealth, and associated distributional measures, follow the recommendations of the Canberra Group which were endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission. These definitions are also linked to national accounting standards in the System of National Accounts.

32 A recent addition to the statistical infrastructure has been the development of 'best practice guidelines' and a detailed supporting manual for producers of statistics. ABS developed this material with two aims in mind: first, to assist government organisations at various levels to exercise their responsibilities with respect to producing and publishing important statistical information that results (or could result) from their own activities; and second, to promote key principles and best practice in managing statistical operations and attaining high standards in the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics.

National Information Development Plans

33 ABS is committed to the development of National Information Development Plans (IDP) for each statistical field in close consultation with relevant key stakeholders. As an IDP is created for each field, the intention is that it will be an important guide for statistical development work, including collection activity, use of administrative databanks, and data modelling and analysis. Once IDPs are created for all the main areas, they will constitute a principal means whereby the ABS, major users and data custodians

establish a shared understanding of priorities for enhancing the national statistical service and a shared responsibility for the collaborative work that will address statistical needs.

34 An IDP embodies three kinds of knowledge and shared commitment to statistical development activity. First, it encapsulates the demand for statistics in a given field. Through close consultation with users - government agencies, business, academics and community organisations - a picture is developed of the statistics that would, ideally, support informed design and evaluation of policy, other decision making, research and community discussion.

35 Second, an IDP encapsulates the supply of statistics (and of raw data that might be used to create statistics) in the given field. Through close consultation with data custodians - chiefly government service agencies but also some business and other organisations - a picture is developed of the databanks that exist and that might be considered part of the national statistical service. As an IDP matures, it would be possible to develop these demand and supply dimensions into a fully articulated information demand model and information supply map.

36 Third, an IDP encapsulates the agreed statistical development activity in the given field. The comparison between demand and supply of statistics will reveal:

- Information gaps - such as key variables arising in policy, decision making, research or debate that have not yet been given statistical expression. In principle such gaps might be addressed by new or expanded statistical collection activity. But they might also be addressed by distilling statistics from administrative by-product databanks or by data modelling. Not all information gaps can be addressed; resources would be directed to those gaps that have the most serious consequences for policy, other decisions, research and community discussion. And not all gaps need to be addressed by ABS; some of the gap-filling activity will be undertaken by colleagues in other agencies or in universities.
- Information overlaps - such as variables for which competing or inconsistent measures are available. Such overlaps might be addressed by undertaking a data confrontation study to understand the differences between the statistical pictures painted by the multiple data sources and, perhaps, to construct statistics that make the best use of the information embodied in all the sources. Again, not all information overlaps will be addressed, and not all need to be addressed by the ABS.
- Other information deficiencies - such as missing disaggregations by region or industry or subpopulation, differing definitions or counting rules, or only rough approximations to the desired concept. Direct collection, distillation from by-product databanks, data modelling and development of national standards and minimum datasets might be used to address such deficiencies.

37 The IDP concept arose originally in reference to complex fields such as health and education, but it is also relevant to other domains such as a jurisdiction or region, an

issue such as sexual assault, or a subpopulation such as children, or the elderly. IDPs span social, economic and environmental fields and an individual IDP may address social, economic and environmental issues. For example the education and training IDP addresses the need for statistics describing educational participation and attainment of the population, as well as education expenditure flows within and across sectors and education satellite accounts based on the SNA.

38 Currently IDPs are in place for the fields of health (with more detailed plans for public health and Indigenous Health) and community services, and are well advanced for education and training and sexual assault. IDPs are at various stages of development for a wide range of other social and economic fields, including crime and justice, culture and recreation, household income, housing, ageing, families, labour market and population estimates and projections.

39 The documentation associated with this range of IDPs will, in itself, be a valuable information base, facilitating improved understanding of available data (both ABS and non-ABS), data priorities of users, and future statistical directions.

National Statistics Service (NSS) initiative

40 The ABS and a number of other agencies that are major contributors of statistical information in Australia are currently forming a coalition to progress an initiative that will deliver a better range of statistical information for social and economic policy, research and decision making. This National Statistics Service (NSS) initiative recognises that the depth and breadth of information that is supplied by the ABS and other statistical producers falls short of meeting the total needs for statistical information. The NSS initiative aims to narrow this gap and produce a better information base for all Australians. This information base will include important statistics generated as a by-product of the administrative processes of government, as well as the outputs of direct statistical collections conducted to support government activities.

41 Delivering a more comprehensive range of statistics to decision makers will require groups of agencies from across jurisdictions to work together with the goal of increasing the availability, accessibility, and useability of information derived from key administrative and survey data sets. In some fields, such as health, community services and education and training, such groups already exist and have made significant advances in coordinating statistical activity.

42 The NSS encompasses:

- a shared set of high principles by which quality statistical information should be managed and supported, and the efforts of agencies to apply these principles;
- a commitment to improving both the range and availability of statistical information; and
- the avenues available for users to obtain high quality statistical information, and for producers of statistics to improve the quality of their statistical information.

43 A coordination forum of key Commonwealth government stakeholders has been set up to guide the progress of the NSS. A NSS liaison network is also being established to assist in promoting the initiative at the operational level. The range of NSS support materials includes the 'best practice guidelines' and associated 'detailed operational manual' referred to earlier, a central directory of statistical sources (containing metadata for both ABS and non-ABS data sets), and an NSS web site providing access to these materials and links to other statistical producers' websites. The purpose of the directory is to assist policy analysts, researchers and decision makers to target useful statistics. It will include a description of the available statistics, how they were produced and how they can be accessed. The IDP initiative, also referred to earlier, will provide an important avenue for progressing subject specific NSS activities.

44 Various collaborative arrangements with other agencies underpin the ABS work program in the social statistics field. Such arrangements are critical to the success of many initiatives, especially those involving administrative by-product collections or provision of specialised expertise or funding. ABS will be seeking to strengthen and extend this collaboration as it progresses the national statistical service in this field, with the aim of providing a stronger evidence base for research, discussion and decision making on social issues.

Other developments in ABS social statistics

45 Each year the ABS reviews its strategic directions for social statistics as part of the ABS planning process and produces a statement describing its development plans. As the IDP and NSS initiatives progress, they will have an increasingly important influence on future directions for these statistics. The following paragraphs outline some of the more important developments affecting other aspects of the statistics and illustrate the practical approaches being adopted.

(a) Expanded social survey program

46 ABS has a comprehensive and integrated system of population censuses and surveys to provide information on the various dimensions of life in Australia. There is a 5 yearly population census which provides a wide range of social data at fine geographical level and an extensive program of population surveys. Social data is also collected in some surveys of businesses or other organisations, such as surveys of training expenditure and practices, employee earnings and hours, health establishments, prisons and cultural venues. (Similarly, some of the data items collected in social surveys are primarily for use in economic analysis.)

47 The population survey program for 3 years ahead is decided as part of the annual ABS forward planning cycle. This 3 year program sits within a longer term indicative program stretching over 10 years. Each year the program and its budget is reviewed and updated. The program has two main elements. First, it includes monthly population

surveys, designed primarily to obtain monthly data on employment and unemployment, but also to provide regular information on a range of other topics relating to specific social, economic and environmental issues. Second, it includes special social surveys designed to obtain detailed information in particular fields.

48 Following an extensive review several years ago, the special social surveys element of the program was substantially expanded. Some new social surveys were introduced, closing some important gaps in the program; other surveys were better integrated; and some survey frequencies were adjusted. Also, provision was made for greater flexibility to respond to contemporary issues as they arise.

49 The revamped program provides for regular social surveys on health (to be run 3 yearly), Indigenous health (6 yearly), disability, ageing and carers (6 yearly), crime victimisation (3 yearly), education and training (4 yearly), household income, expenditure and wealth (income 2 yearly and the rest 6 yearly), time use (8 yearly), and employment arrangements, retirement and superannuation (6 yearly). It also includes a new general social survey to provide data on inter-related social issues (6 yearly), an Indigenous social survey (6 yearly), and a multipurpose survey to provide data on topical and emerging issues (annual).

(b) Implementation of an Indigenous statistics strategy

50 Several years ago ABS developed, in consultation with stakeholders, a broad strategy for improving statistics about Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. There are a number of elements to the strategy and implementation is continuing. Key aspects are improved Indigenous population estimates from the 5 yearly Census, regular surveys on the health and general wellbeing of the Indigenous population, improved data on Indigenous labour force experience from the monthly population survey, and improved quality and accessibility of Indigenous data derived from a wide range of administrative systems. Improving the data from administrative systems (eg births and deaths records) has involved extensive collaboration with other organisations and a shared commitment to action, particularly the adoption of the Indigenous standard question. Encouraging progress is being made.

51 A further element has recently been added to the strategy. ABS is establishing a network of Indigenous Liaison Officers operating out of its regional offices to ensure appropriate engagement with Indigenous peoples in collecting data and feeding back results. This initiative will underpin efforts to improve the quality of reporting in the various collections that seek data from the Indigenous population.

(c) Stronger focus on understanding and meeting user needs

52 In developing directions for social statistics, ABS works closely with an extensive network of external bodies, both bilaterally and through user advisory groups, reference groups, management boards and inter-agency multi-jurisdictional data groups and

committees. This close contact helps to ensure that user needs and priorities are well understood and that work programs and outputs are relevant and responsive. External reference groups are established for all large social surveys conducted by the ABS. Also ABS provides advice and assistance to other agencies that undertake surveys. For example, the Department of Family and Community Services is responsible for two new longitudinal surveys of the Australian population - one on income and labour dynamics and another one on children. ABS is providing advice and support for these initiatives through membership of steering and technical committees, direct advice on methodology, and outposted officers.

53 Recent changes to organisational structures in the ABS have, in part, been designed to strengthen the national statistical leadership role ABS can play and to encourage a broad, outwards focus, looking across ABS and non-ABS data sets. National statistics centres have been established for this purpose in all subject fields. Also, new units have been set up covering population ageing and children and youth, reflecting the increasing attention being given to social and economic issues emerging in these fields.

(d) Increasing the availability and use of microdata

54 There is increasing demand for access to microdata to support a range of research and secondary data analysis. ABS has recently reconsidered its approach with the aim of increasing access to microdata while maintaining the organisation's high reputation for safeguarding privacy. While continuing to release Confidentialised Unit Record Files (CURFs) on CD-ROM from most of its special social surveys, ABS is now also releasing more detailed CURFs through remote and on-site data laboratory arrangements. These data laboratory arrangements will be further enhanced over the coming months in the light of initial experience with their use. They still only provide access to unidentifiable data but more detailed release is possible because of greater control over prevention of matching with external databases.

55 ABS envisages that the data laboratories will also be an avenue for providing access to linked data sets, especially where one of the data sets is held externally. There is increasing interest in using data matching techniques to bring together unit records from different collections to form composite data sets, and thereby expand their analytic potential. In the field of health administrative data, record linkage by other agencies under strict ethical and confidentiality provisions has already become accepted as an invaluable tool in monitoring health services and outcomes. ABS is currently developing policies and procedures for its involvement in data linking activities.

(e) Enhanced analysis

56 As previously mentioned, a wide range of social indicators and articles on social issues are presented in the annual ABS publication *Australian Social Trends*. Two further analytic publications have recently been developed to provide insights into social and

economic issues and developments in particular fields – labour market statistics (a quarterly release) and education and training indicators (a biennial release). Both publications present key measures and draw on a variety of data sources to present an overall picture of the field of interest.

57 Over the last few years the research and analytic capacity of the ABS has been expanded to progress a program of priority projects involving the development and application of methodological and analytical techniques to particular datasets across the social, economic and environment fields. One major output of this program was the *Measuring Australia's Progress* publication discussed earlier in this paper. Other 14 important research work has included the development of experimental estimates of the value of human capital in Australia and experimental estimates of the distribution of household assets and liabilities by stage of household lifecycle. ABS is also more actively pursuing collaborative arrangements with researchers, particularly to add value to existing data through analytic techniques.

(f) Development of social capital framework and measures

58 In Australia, social capital has emerged as an area of considerable interest to policy makers, social analysts and researchers. This interest has led to a demand for measures of social capital to enlarge understanding of society, its functioning and social wellbeing and to inform policy development and research. Measures of social capital have the potential to provide additional explanatory variables for social outcomes that the current range of socioeconomic and demographic indicators may not adequately explain. ABS has been undertaking a range of investigation and development work in this field.

59 The initial work has focussed on understanding, describing and defining social capital in the context of other types of capital (natural capital, produced economic capital, and human capital) and as a contributor to wellbeing. Following consultation with stakeholders, ABS is using the definition of social capital adopted by the OECD to guide its work.

60 Current effort is centred on developing and refining a framework covering the different dimensions and components of social capital in a way that will facilitate their measurement, and on developing indicators that capture these elements. A range of ABS and non-ABS collections are being analysed for potential indicators and to identify data gaps. A paper describing the framework and defining the indicators will be published later this year. Data items to support priority indicators will be specified for inclusion in an ABS survey to be conducted in 2005/06.

(g) Labour underutilisation measures

61 Estimates of the number of people unemployed represent a relatively narrow measure of available labour resources which are not being used in the economy.

Recognising the interest in broader concepts of underutilised labour and to assist in understanding the structure and dynamics of the labour market from both social and economic perspectives, ABS has developed supplementary underutilization measures. In addition to the existing headline measure of unemployment based on the international standard definition recommended by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), two new underutilisation measures are now being produced: one which takes account of underemployment (defined consistently with ILO guidelines) as well as unemployment; and a wider measure which also includes people outside the labour force but with a close attachment to it, such as discouraged job seekers.

62 These new measures have been developed within the ABS conceptual framework for labour statistics. Investigations are continuing into further possible enhancements, such as the development of hours-based underutilisation measures.

(h) Household income measures

63 ABS is undertaking a major program of work to upgrade its measures of household income, including measures of income distribution across the population and over time. It is aiming to improve the methodology for collecting, deriving and presenting these measures and provide greater comparability with data on income benefits from administrative sources. In undertaking this work, consideration is also being given to implementing the recommendations of the Canberra Group on household income statistics and to improving the measurement of an extended income concept - final income - which adjusts disposable income (private income plus direct government benefits less direct taxes) to include the net effect of indirect government benefits and indirect taxes.

64 Investigations are also proceeding into the treatment of non-cash income and salary sacrificing across a range of surveys with the aim of clearer delineation of the concept being measured and more accurate and consistent reporting.

(i) Disability measures

65 ABS is currently exploring the possibility of collecting disability data in the next (2006) population census. While an extensive range of data on disability, ageing and carers is collected in 6 yearly social surveys, these surveys can not provide the fine level of geographic detail available from a census. Such detail is particularly important for planning service delivery. In undertaking investigations into this issue, ABS is drawing on other countries' experiences in this field and the deliberations of the Washington Group on disability.

(j) Other developments linking social, economic and environment statistics

66 The interlinkages between social, economic and environment issues are reflected in the overlapping dimensions of statistics relating to each of these fields. For example, there is general recognition of the important economic as well as social dimensions to statistics associated with employment and employee earnings; household income, expenditure and wealth; human and social capital; and provision of services in fields such as health, education, family support, culture and recreation. A number of the statistical developments already mentioned have highlighted the need to bring statistics from across the different fields together to inform the wider debate on complex issues such as progress, sustainability etc and to provide deeper insights into the functioning and overall wellbeing of society.

67 Within the broad national accounting framework provided by the SNA, ABS is progressing the development of satellite accounts in a number of areas and new measures and treatments of economic variables that will assist analysis ranging across the different fields. Particular developments include:

- publication of unpaid work measures and investigations into household satellite accounts;
- publication of satellite accounts for tourism and for non-profit institutions;
- publication of environmental accounts;
- scoping of satellite accounts for education and training, and (as already mentioned) development of human capital measures;
- scoping of satellite accounts for culture and leisure; and
- development of a knowledge based economy framework and indicators.

International activities

68 The international drive to more fully develop and standardise concepts, methods and measures of social and economic conditions has gained considerable impetus at the international level over recent years. The ABS has been an active participant in many of these developments.

69 In the social statistics field, it has been actively involved in the work a number of city groups which report to the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC). It is currently a member of the Siena Group on social statistics, the Washington Group on disability statistics, and the Rio Group on poverty statistics. It was also a member of the former Canberra Group on household income. In the health field Australia provides input through the AIHW to the development of international health standards and classifications by World Health Organisation (WHO).

70 In response to a project established by the UNSC in 2001 which aimed to 'conduct an assessment of the statistical indicators derived from United Nations summit meetings' the ABS provided input to various expert group ('friends of the chair') proceedings, including work on indicators in the 'economic and poverty' and 'other social' domains.

The Australian Statistician is also a member of the Advisory Committee on Indicators set up by UNSC to take this work forward.

71 ABS has also been involved in meetings of statisticians and experts in other global and regional forums. These activities have included discussions on labour, income and poverty statistics sponsored by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and labour statistics sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Other agencies in Australia are also active in a range of forums where particular areas of social statistics are discussed. For example, AIHW and the Department of Health and Ageing have been active in health statistics activities sponsored by the WHO; the Department of Education, Science and Training has been active in education statistics activities sponsored by the OECD; and the Australian Institute of Criminology in crime and justice activities sponsored by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI).

72 One of the areas of concern with international measures of income has been the use of exchange rates and purchase price parity ratios. Australia is strongly committed to the work of the World Bank and others in sponsoring the 2003 International Comparison Project (ICP) for producing a revised set of Purchasing Power Parities (or PPPs) with the aim that these be adopted in adjusting national income statistics for purposes of international comparison. It sees that a successful 2003 ICP will remove some of the confusion surrounding the poverty/inequality debate by providing access to a better means of making international comparisons.

73 ABS is continuing to support and assist other countries in the development of their social statistics systems, with a particular focus on countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It is also continuing to develop networks in particular fields with the aim of exchanging views, sharing experiences and keeping abreast of developments and best practice in social statistics in other national statistics offices.

74 Where possible, Australian statistical standards are aligned with international standards endorsed by bodies such as the UN, OECD, ILO and WHO to support international reporting obligations and facilitate international comparisons. However, there is a need for more collaboration at the international level to ensure conceptual frameworks and standards are compatible and that international surveys are soundly based. It is essential that the relevant international agencies work with the national statistical agencies in each country to improve the overall performance of the international statistical system.

Concluding comments

75 The development of social statistics in Australia is underpinned by a broad framework based on the concept of wellbeing. Complementing this framework is a range of more detailed frameworks, some well established and others being articulated. National standards play a key role in ensuring the integration of data within and across

different sources and the consistent presentation of results. National information development plans build on these frameworks and standards to identify national priorities and guide efforts to improve the range, quality and availability of statistics in particular fields.

76 The interlinkages between social statistics and economic and environmental statistics are of increasing importance as policy makers and researchers explore policy interactions, focus on cross-cutting issues that affect people's wellbeing, and seek a balanced picture of national progress. Reflecting this changing perspective, the development of social statistics is also considered within a broader program of statistical work and a number of initiatives have been taken by ABS to bring together the social, economic and environmental dimensions in a systematic way to better inform research, discussion and decision making.

77 As other agencies as well as ABS have responsibilities for producing social statistics in Australia, the integrated and systematic development of these statistics requires close, ongoing collaboration between agencies. This is achieved through various coordination forums, management groups and the like. The current ABS initiative to gain a shared commitment to the concept of a national statistical service involves these agencies as part of a wider coalition of statistical producers covering all fields of statistics. It is designed to strengthen and widen the current collaborative approaches with the objective of delivering better statistical outcomes for Australia from the wide range of survey and administrative data sources that are available.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Measuring Learning in Australia: A Framework for Education and Training Statistics*, Cat. no. 4213.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Australian Social Trends, 2002*, Cat. no. 4102.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Education and Training Indicators, Australia*, Cat. no. 4230.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Social Capital and Social Wellbeing*, Discussion Paper, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Potential Development of Education and Training Satellite Accounts*, Scoping Paper, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Measuring a Knowledge-based Economy and Society - an Australian Framework*, Cat. no. 1375.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Measuring Australia's Progress*, Cat. no. 1370.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Measures of Labour Underutilisation*, Cat. no. 6296.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Measuring Wellbeing: Frameworks for Australian Social Statistics*, Cat. no. 4160.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods*, Cat. no. 6102.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED)*, Cat. no. 1272.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Australian Culture and Leisure Classifications*, Cat. no. 4902.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000, *Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy, 1997*, Cat. no. 5240.0, ABS, Canberra

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2002, *National Health Data Dictionary Version 11*, AIHW, Canberra