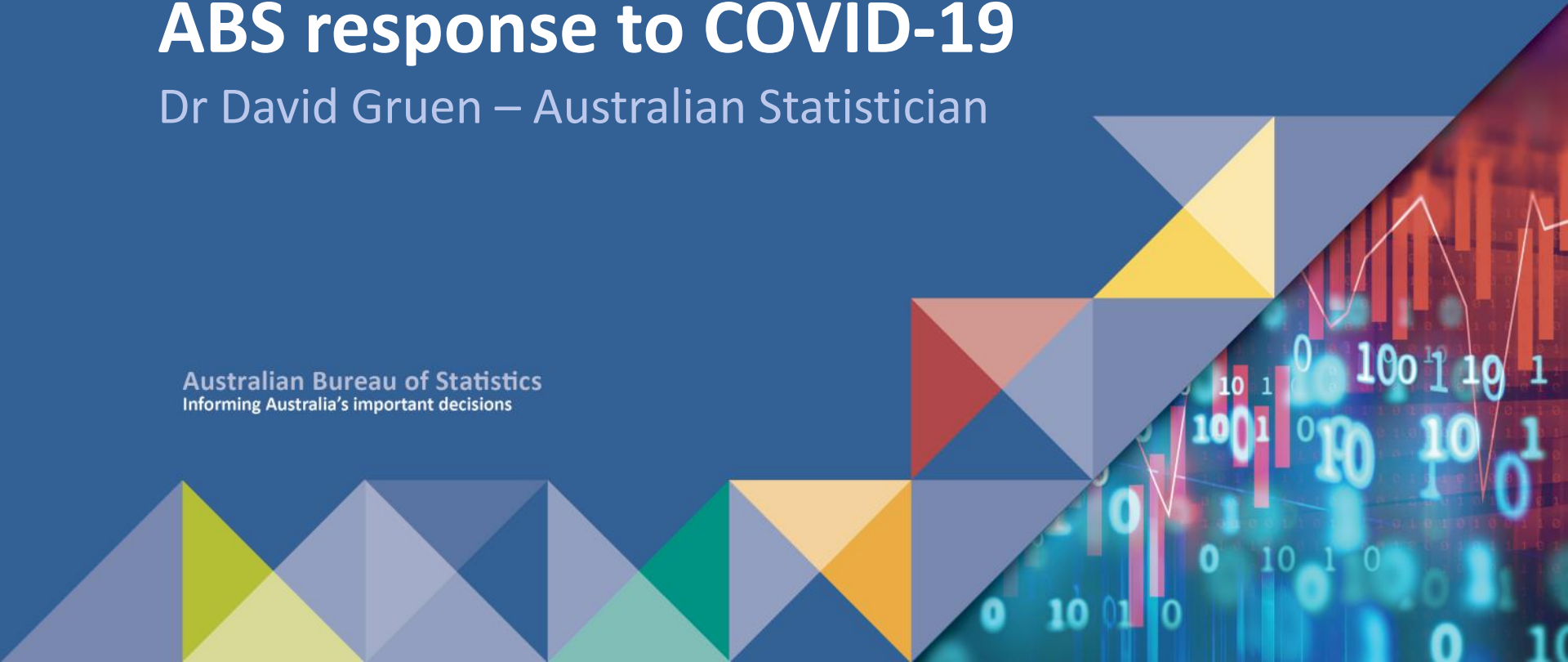


ABS response to COVID-19

Dr David Gruen – Australian Statistician

Australian Bureau of Statistics
Informing Australia's important decisions



The gathering storm

- ▶ Events in Italy and Iran in mid-to-late February suggested the virus was spreading fast, and would be very disruptive when it arrived
- ▶ ABS brainstorming session at end February
 - Felt like mid 2008: a rapidly evolving crisis makes near real-time information enormously valuable
 - We were in a unique position
 - What statistical information could we provide faster?
 - Knew there would be enormous interest – from government and the community

Used the crisis to

- ▶ Redeploy internal resources to core activities and new products (no time for normal consultation processes)
- ▶ Give the organisation permission to innovate
- ▶ Empower teams to learn from each other – this brought forward a flood of ideas for new faster products
 - We implemented most of them
- ▶ Speed up process of getting access to new datasets
 - Enormous goodwill to help from both public and private sectors

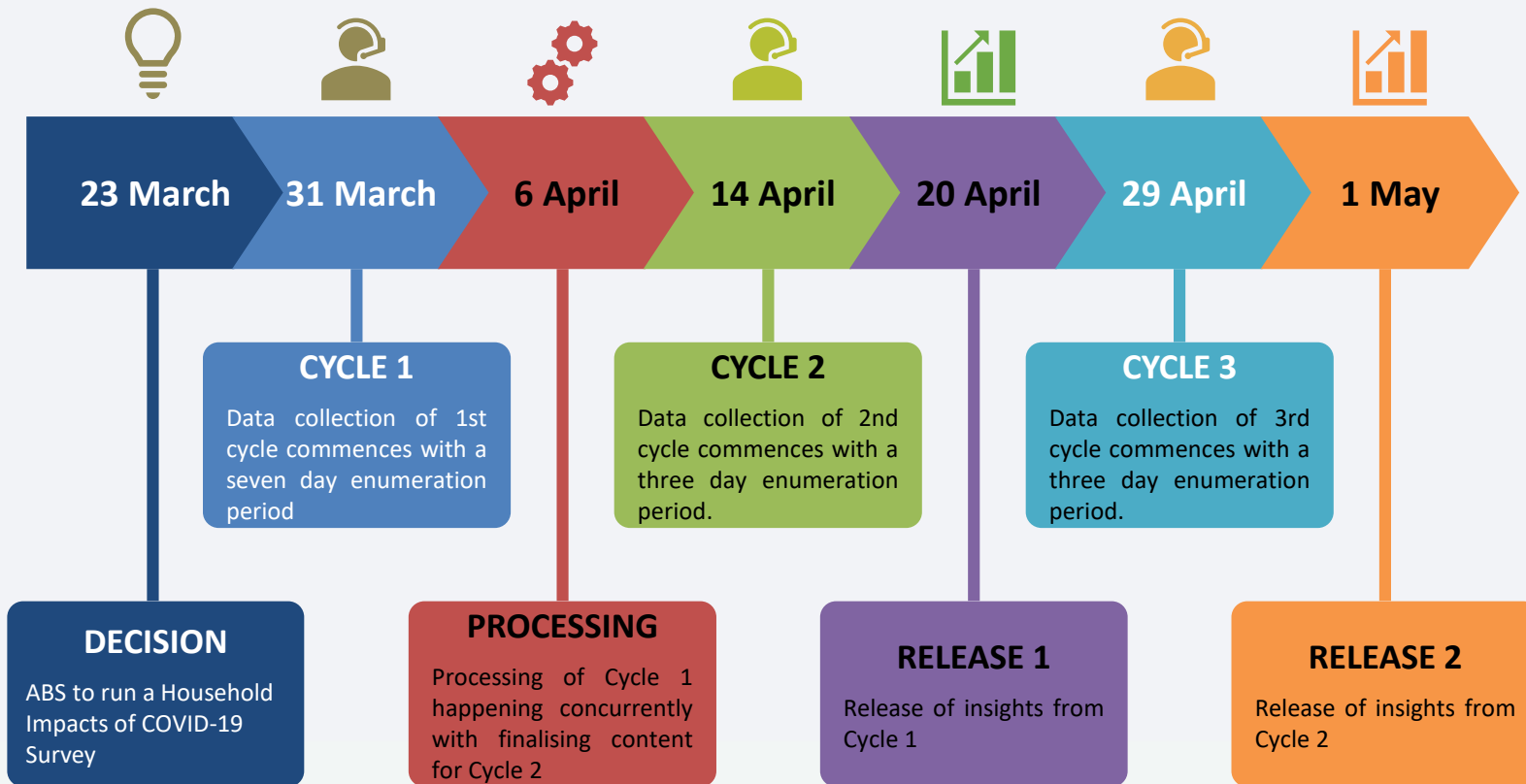
Key elements

- ▶ Didn't seek funding for new products at the time
 - Would have slowed down our response – time was of the essence
- ▶ Logic: Demonstrate how useful our new products could be; funding would come later
 - This logic paid big dividends
- ▶ Also provided free access to our microdata products (for a time) – again to speed up access
- ▶ Needed to make arrangements for organisation to work from home

Statistical response – new rapid surveys

- ▶ Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey
 - Approx. 1,000 households
 - Insights into impacts on employment, stimulus packages, financial stress, lifestyle changes et al.
- ▶ Business Impacts of COVID-19 Survey
 - Survey of 3,000 businesses, with approx. 1,200 responding
 - Insights into impacts on workforce, operations, impacts of support measures et al.
- ▶ For both surveys, questions updated after each cycle to ensure their continued relevance (in consultation with government departments)

Initial Household Survey Cycles



Other new statistical products

- ▶ **Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia**
 - Near real-time data extracted from Australian Tax Office (ATO) Single Touch Payroll system (new web-based system by which employers interact with ATO)
 - Captures employees from 99% of ‘substantial employers’ and 71% of small employers
 - Results published with a 17-day lag
- ▶ Preliminary and provisional publications – retail trade, international trade, overseas travel, mortality and cause of death
- ▶ Additional analysis in existing publications
- ▶ Interactive maps
- ▶ Securing new data sources to support official statistics – e.g., bank transactions data for National Accounts



Questions?