

Friends of the Chair Brief

2. The future system of economic statistics (Moderator Konrad Pesendorfer)

d) Potential mechanisms to ensure priority areas for development are identified and acted upon. (Australia and UNECA to provide discussion document on institutionalizing collaboration between economists and statisticians)

Domestic stakeholder engagement mechanisms

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has established forums for engaging with domestic stakeholders. These include advisory groups (see Table 1) and user groups.

Advisory groups provide the ABS with the opportunity to seek views from stakeholders on current and future priorities. Apart from the Australian Statistical Advisory Committee these are based on themes. Membership typically comprises representatives from Commonwealth agencies, state and territory government agencies, academia and private sector organisations.

User groups are focussed on particular areas and discussions focus on published estimates, methods and sources. Examples of user groups are the: productivity reference group, state accounts user group and input-output user group.

Table 1: ABS domestic advisory groups

Stakeholder Advisory Groups	Objectives
Australian Statistical Advisory Committee	The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) was established under the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975 to be the key advisory body to the Minister and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on statistical services. This includes addressing the importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of official statistics, as well as providing valuable input to the directions and priorities of the ABS work program.
Economic Statistics Advisory Group	Provide strategic advice on the development of the suite of economic statistics.
Labour Statistics Advisory Group	Provide advice to the ABS on its program of labour statistics and priorities for labour statistics.
Population and Social Statistics Advisory Group	Provide strategic advice on the development of the suite current and planned developments in the field of population and social statistics.
State Statistical Forum	The SSF provides a mechanism for states, territories and ABS statistical program areas to engage directly to maximise the value and use of statistics across the national statistical system.
Methodology Advisory Committee	The function of the MAC is to provide expert advice to the Chief Methodologist on selected methodological issues that arise across the production of official statistics, including: questionnaire development, survey design, data collection, data linkage, estimation, index and account compilation, analysis (including time series analysis and other modelling approaches), confidentialisation and dissemination.

In 2017 the ABS created a Chief Economist role. One of the key responsibilities is to engage with a range of stakeholders across Government, States, Territories, the media and other industry bodies to enhance the informed use of economic data and identify statistical areas which could be developed. The Chief Economist is also responsible for overseeing the consistency and coherence of ABS economic data which is ensured by actively engaging in all data clearance and quality assurance processes, and staying attuned to the economic views of commentators, Treasury and the RBA..

Outside of formal engagement mechanisms the ABS has regular discussions with the Commonwealth Treasury and Reserve Bank of Australia, including through tri-lateral engagements to agree priorities for economic measurement.

An active engagement with other public sector agencies and other organisations is also maintained, with a Senior Executive assigned as the key relationship manager. Around 1-2 times per year Executive to Executive meetings involving the head of agency and the Australian Statistician and deputies are held. A number of agencies also make use of in-postings and secondments (domestic and international) to build relationships and learn from others.

International stakeholder engagement mechanisms

To ensure the ABS is represented at relevant international meetings, workshops and conferences, within a fixed budget, an annual prioritisation process is undertaken. Staff who attend these meetings are required to communicate key messages to appropriate areas across the ABS.

Process - agreeing domestic priorities

Following consultation with stakeholders, the ABS develops and publishes a Forward Work Programme (FWP). The FWP development includes considerable internal and external consultation to understand statistical priorities in an increasingly challenging financial environment and an evolving economy and society. To date, this has resulted, for a small number of statistical collections in: additional user funding, cessation of collections, changes to the frequency of publications, and new approaches such as increased use of transaction data in the production of the Consumer Price Index or new products such as the labour accounts.

Through the established domestic stakeholder forums and specific prioritisation workshops the ABS agrees priorities for maintaining the relevance of economic statistics. Recently, to enable the prioritisation discussions, the ABS carried out: (a) an internal review of National Accounts data sources and methods; and (b) horizon scanning activities with key stakeholders.

Some examples of outcomes

- Developed Annual and Quarterly Labour Accounts
- Introduced a cross-sectional Linked Employer Employee Dataset (LEED)
- Reduced direct Consumer Price Index (CPI) price collection by increasing the use of transaction and webscraped data.
- Introduced constrained optimisation for National Accounts supply and use balancing.
- Produced experimental disease based output measures for hospitals
- Produced experimental digital activity estimates
- The Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP) which is a partnership among Australian Government agencies to develop a secure and enduring approach for combining information on healthcare, education, government payments, personal income tax, and population demographics (including the Census) to create a comprehensive picture of Australia over time.
- The Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE) combines business tax data and information from ABS surveys with data about the use of government programs, to provide a better understanding of Australian businesses and the economy.

Future challenges

The key future challenges are:

1. Balancing: maintaining the relevance of economic statistics with a reducing budget.
2. Measuring an increasingly complex economy and society.
3. Delivering core statistical outputs and staying relevant in an increasingly 'data' world.
4. Increasing stakeholder demands for more detailed and/or timely information.
5. Engaging internationally when different international organisations are organising similar themed meeting/events e.g. globalisation and digital activities.

Reflections

The ABS engagement mechanisms could be applied internationally, resulting in streamlined prioritisation and more focused activity across international organisations.