



AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

**Annual Report
2005–06**

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AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

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The Hon Chris Pearce, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ended 30 June 2006.

The Annual Report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under sub-section 24(2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Annual Report is dated on the day I approved the finalised text for printing.



Professor Sandra Harding
Chairperson

1 September 2006

Australian Statistics Advisory Council

Mission

To ensure that, in keeping with Council's statutory charter, the advice furnished to the Minister and the Statistician in relation to the collection and dissemination of statistics has due regard to relative priorities, is objective, relevant, timely, constructive and practical, and that it is sensitive to the needs of both suppliers and users of statistical data.

FOREWORD

The role of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (the Council) is to provide guidance to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer and the Australian Statistician on the directions and priorities of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) work program.

The ABS mission statement and the ABS Corporate Plan provide the context and high level framework for making decisions on the ABS forward work program. The role of the Council is to provide guidance on the directions and the priorities of the ABS work program, including the Corporate Plan.

Aspects of the proposed forward work program and resource estimates were considered by the Council at the November 2005 meeting. The statistical work program was then finalised by the ABS following analysis of the advice received from the Council.

Most members of the Council were also consulted individually or in small groups about the future strategic directions of the ABS during preparation of the revised ABS Corporate Plan. The ABS notified the Council that it was grateful for the sound advice received, which is reflected in the new Corporate Plan that was released in December 2005.

The ABS reached its centenary as Australia's national statistical agency on 8 December 2005. This is a great achievement for the ABS. The ABS must also be congratulated for the release of the history book, *Informing a Nation*, to mark the occasion of its centenary. This impressive publication is full of interesting stories and anecdotes from ABS people throughout the past 100 years.

A major feature of the centenary event was the announcement by the Treasurer, the Hon Peter Costello MP, that all ABS publications will be available on the ABS web site at no cost. This decision followed strong advice from the Council to this effect and the Council looks forward to seeing this information taken up by key users of ABS statistics, as well as the broader community.

I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon Chris Pearce MP, for his support of the Council and the opportunity to meet with him and discuss statistical priorities.

The Council continues to have a full complement of members, and I acknowledge the valued contribution of all members. The work done by Council members to support the activities of the ABS, including membership of other ABS advisory groups, is also appreciated.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Peter Dawkins and Mr Wayne Jackson for their contribution to the work of the Council as they concluded their terms during the year. Ms Pam Davoren and Ms Glenys Beauchamp have joined the Council and I am looking forward to working with them during the remainder of my tenure as Chair of the Council.

I would also like to convey my appreciation to Mr Dennis Trewin, the Australian Statistician, and his team for their positive approach to working with the Council and to the advice we have provided during the last year. Thanks also goes to the ASAC Secretariat, without whose support the Council could not function in an effective manner.

I trust you find the report informative.

Professor Sandra Harding
Chairperson

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Note: After the first reference in this report, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council is referred to as the Council or ASAC, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics is referred to as the ABS.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

Under subsection 18(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- (a) *the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;*
- (b) *annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and*
- (c) *any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.*

The Act enables the Minister or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of Council on these matters. The Council also offers advice to the Minister or the Australian Statistician when it considers it appropriate to do so.

The Act provides that Council shall consist of a part-time Chair, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between ten and twenty two part-time members, including one nominee from each of the State Premier and the Chief Minister Departments. The Chair and members are appointed by the responsible Minister for periods of five years and up to three years respectively, and are eligible for reappointment. The membership of Council as at 30 June 2006 is detailed at Appendix 1.

Subsection 24(2) of the Act provides that: *the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act.*

Chapter 2 Summary of Activities for 2005–06

The Council held two meetings during 2005–06:

- 22 November 2005, and
- 30 May 2006.

Detailed agendas for the meetings are provided at Appendix 2.

The Council considered a number of issues during 2005–06 including the following:

Forward Work Program

The Council was consulted on the ABS Forward Work Program and suggested that the ABS continue to strengthen its approach to identifying emerging issues when planning for the future. There was particular support from the Council to increase effort in the following areas:

- upgrade statistics on migrants, particularly their employment experiences (see below for more detail)
- industrial relations arrangements: the changes being implemented, and the impacts of these changes
- the non-profit sector, where there has been limited information available to assist the sector
- improved statistical leadership (see below for more detail)
- improved access to, and use of, microdata (see below for more detail)
- development of community statistics

The Council suggested that the ABS also needs to re-think population statistics so they become better aligned with planning needs. The Council noted that many people spend a great deal of time away from their principal place of residence, for example, daytime versus evening, and holiday areas, and there can be a considerable difference between residential and service populations.

The Council is looking forward to continuing to work with the ABS on setting their agenda for the future.

2006 Census of Population and Housing

The Council was kept fully informed on the progress of planning for the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, scheduled to be held on 8 August 2006.

There was particular interest taken by the Council in the work done to implement the inaugural eCensus, including consideration of the experience of countries such as New Zealand and Canada, which held their first online censuses earlier in 2006. The Council expressed interest in the ABS' assessments of the capacity of the system to cope with likely demand on the night of the Census and were supportive of the analysis of likely demand.

The Council contributed to discussions regarding the Census Data Enhancement project. Members supported the project, but advised the ABS to proceed slowly and with caution and was happy with the decision to use a small sample. The Council agreed that five per cent was small enough not to be a risk while large enough to be of use. It was recommended that the scope should not be changed in the future without another round of consultations. The Council provided advice to the ABS on the potential reaction to this project and recommended that the ABS be proactive in communicating the benefits of the proposal to the general community.

Statistical leadership

The Council recognised the progress being made by the ABS in the area of statistical leadership and the development of a national statistical system.

The Council fully supports objective one in the ABS Corporate Plan, *an expanded and improved national statistical service*, and the strategies identified to achieve the objective:

- develop and communicate a shared understanding of Australia's statistical service and lead the implementation of this vision
- ensure that statistical priorities are directly linked to stakeholders' needs, including policy directions of governments
- develop a strong community of those interested in statistics within government
- continue to work with partners to implement the National Data Network.

The Council received regular updates from the ABS on the strategies developed to advance the national statistical system including the establishment of a new unit within the ABS; the National Statistical Service Leadership Branch (NSS Leadership Branch). There was particular interest taken by the Council in the projects selected to demonstrate the value of a national statistical system and the Council urged the ABS to use the NSS Leadership Branch to draw the strategic issues out of the following projects:

- improving environment statistics
- addressing population wellbeing data gaps
- upgrading available regional statistics
- enhancing census data, and
- implementing the National Data Network.

The Council asked that the ABS clarify and define the terms used in the ABS' National Statistical Service framework. The ABS advised that:

Australia's national statistical system is formed by the organisations and arrangements, formal and informal, which together provide statistics

Australia's national statistical service is the range of services that are collectively provided for Australia.

There was strong support from the Council for the National Data Network (NDN). The network provides the infrastructure, protocols, standards, and services to support the sharing and integration of data across Australia, while at the same time ensuring security and privacy. The Council noted that the NDN is currently in demonstration phase: testing network feasibility; estimating costs of participating in the network; exploring issues around the secure management and sharing of data; and identifying potential interest amongst government agencies. The Council emphasised the necessity of the demonstration phase of the NDN to show the benefits of connecting data to outcomes, particularly to those agencies that do not regard statistics as a core function.

The Council was pleased to see that the ABS continues to be committed to developing Information Development Plans (IDPs) in collaboration with other agencies. IDPs are seen by the Council as a valuable way of bringing together the key users of statistics and developing better business cases for any investment in statistics.

The Council acknowledged that the NSS Leadership Branch is well placed to build relationships with a wide group of users of statistics including Australian government agencies, state and territory governments, and local governments, as well as non-government organisations. The Council agreed that there is a need for strong leadership both from the ABS and state/territory governments in promoting the national statistical system and the availability of credible statistics.

The Council was pleased to see strengthening of the relationship between Australian government agencies and the ABS. There is still work to be done, however, on developing a strategic approach to working arrangements. The Council also acknowledged the important contribution that the ABS can make in support of the decision making processes of the Council of Australian Governments.

The Council has taken a keen interest in statistical training at all levels. The ABS was asked by the Council to engage with those collecting and maintaining data at state/territory and local government level. The ABS advised the Council that they are well aware that there is a serious shortage of people with the combination of statistical and social science skills for analysis of data and policy development using data. The ABS will be taking a lead role and fostering training and information sharing to alleviate the lack of knowledge and skills in these areas. The Council was pleased to note that the ABS is working with the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training and the Statistical Society of Australia to encourage more people to study statistics and statistical analysis.

Pricing review

The Council was consulted about the ABS policy on cost recovery. It advised the ABS to remove any ambiguity in the terms being used, including 'marginally costed' and 'incrementally costed', and that care needs to be taken when defining types of products and services as commercial. In addition, the Council suggested that the ABS policy on secondary providers should be reconsidered following a review as this is likely to be a growth area.

The Council's advice will be considered during the preparation, by the ABS, of the periodic report to the Government on the effectiveness of its cost recovery policy.

The Council strongly supports the Australian Government initiative to make ABS data freely available to the community.

International activities

The Council was very supportive of the three international engagement strategies pursued by the ABS: technical assistance with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region; collaboration to improve knowledge and methods; and enhancing comparability of data internationally, mostly through work on international standards.

In particular, the Council expressed an interest in the ABS' involvement with enhancing comparability of data in a number of areas of international work. The Council agreed that a lack of economic and social data is a major constraint to improving conditions for people in developing countries. The Council noted that the 2010 world round of population censuses would present a major opportunity for the ABS to play a key leadership role in assisting other countries in the region to obtain data fundamental to their development.

Development and implementation of revised International Standards for Macro-economic Statistics were also discussed by the Council. The Council will continue to monitor developments in that area, including assessment of the impact of implementation on Australia.

Access to unidentified microdata for research and analysis purposes

The Council is well aware that the ABS is seeking ways to be more responsive to clients' needs including making more and better use of existing data sources, particularly microdata.

Confidentialised population survey microdata has been released for research and analysis purposes since the 1980s but there have been restrictions, as a result of confidentiality issues, on the release of business microdata. The ABS entered into trial collaborations to expand the range of analyses undertaken with ABS business data. As part of these collaborative projects, and under strict legislative provisions, staff from four government agencies and one university were given access to de-identified business survey microdata on ABS premises for projects assisting the Australian Statistician.

The Council was advised that a review of these trial projects found that there were benefits to both national statistics and the project partners, and that collaborative projects of this type should continue. The benefits included increasing users' understanding of the data, enabling complex analyses that would otherwise not be possible, producing publications that address key policy issues, increasing ABS' knowledge of the value to the ABS of the datasets and user interests, and improving survey methodology.

Costs, in particular staff time and computing capacity, of undertaking such collaborative projects is significant and the Council noted that these must be balanced with the benefits.

The Council supported both continuation of these type of collaborative projects and the release of microdata, where this is possible. The Council recommended that there should continue to be scope to accommodate exceptions to cost sharing arrangements, such as for non-government organisations, and that the ABS provide some indication to applicants of the expected costs of a project to assist researchers seeking grants. It was also the view of the Council that projects with demonstrable public good or national statistical benefit should not be eliminated as a result of cost considerations.

Migrant statistics

The Council strongly supported the development of the National Migrant Statistics Unit and considers it to be a very important and timely initiative. It was recommended that the unit utilise existing survey and administrative datasets, and how they can be linked to produce a more comprehensive picture of migrant experiences including a longitudinal view.

Monitoring the performance of Australian businesses

The Council was very supportive of the Business Longitudinal Database being developed by the ABS. Policy makers will have access to de-identifiable micro level data within the database to enable them to analyse the nature and characteristics of businesses, both small and medium businesses, and large businesses. The Council was interested to hear that the states and territories will have access to better information as a result of this initiative. It was recommended by the Council that the business community be engaged as much as possible in the surveys contributing to the database.

Chapter 3 The Year Ahead – 2006–07

The ABS is well positioned to continue its strong contribution to Australia as it enters its second century.

The Council believes that achieving the objectives articulated in the ABS Corporate Plan will build on the ABS' already strong reputation as one of the world's leading statistical agencies. These objectives are:

1. An expanded and improved national statistical service
2. ABS services that are timely, relevant, responsive and respected for their integrity and quality
3. Informed and increased use of statistics
4. A key contributor to international statistical activities that are important to Australia or our region
5. An organisation that builds capability to continually improve its effectiveness
6. The trust and cooperation of providers, and
7. ABS is a respected and strongly supported organisation.

Processing of the data collected during Australia's fifteenth national Census of Population and Housing, conducted on 8 August 2006, will be a priority for the ABS during 2006-07. The Council will continue to provide the ABS with advice on the output from the 2006 Census so that it reflects the current information needs of Australians. It will take a particular interest in ensuring good use is made of the 2006 Census for research and analysis purposes.

The Council will take a particular interest in the achievements of the newly established NSS Leadership Branch during 2006-07. This area has great potential but it will need to demonstrate that it can be effective in bringing about improvements in the national statistical system.

The Council will also provide advice across the broad range of the ABS work program and anticipates continuing and strengthening this role throughout 2006–07.

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL AND ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Membership of Council at 30 June 2006 and Date of Initial Appointment

Member	Date first appointed
<i>Professor Sandra Harding</i> Deputy Vice Chancellor (International and Development) Queensland University of Technology	1 March 2002
<i>Mr Dennis Trewin</i> Australian Statistician (ex officio)	5 July 2000
<i>Prof. Tony Barnes</i> Director Economic and Social Analysis Northern Territory Treasury	1 October 2004
<i>Mr Roger Beale</i> Senior Associate The Allen Consulting Group	15 May 2005
<i>Ms Glenys Beauchamp</i> Deputy Secretary Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	27 April 2006
<i>Ms Leith Bouly</i> Director Bouly Pastoral Co Pty Ltd	15 May 2005
<i>Dr Peter Crossman</i> Assistant Under Treasurer and Queensland Government Statistician Office of Economic and Statistical Research Queensland Treasury	11 March 1999
<i>Ms Pam Davoren</i> Deputy Chief Executive Cabinet and Policy Group ACT Chief Minister's Department	18 November 2005

Mr Clem Doherty Chairman Like Minded Individuals Pty Ltd	1 May 1997
Dr Adam Graycar Head Cabinet Office Government of South Australia	1 December 2003
Ms Elaine Henry Chief Executive Officer The Smith Family	15 May 2005
Mr Peter Horn Director Fiscal Strategy New South Wales Treasury	1 May 2003(a)
Prof. Graeme Hugo Professor of Geography The University of Adelaide	15 May 2005
Mr Vin Martin Director Economic, Social and Environmental Group Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance	1 October 2004
Dr James Moody Director Divisional Business Strategy CSIRO Land and Water	15 May 2005
Mr David Parker Alternate Executive Director Macroeconomic Group Department of the Treasury	15 May 2005
Mr Greg Philp Assistant Director Economic Policy Branch Department of Treasury and Finance Tasmania	1 June 2005
Mr Michael Potter Director Economics and Taxation Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	15 May 2005

Mr Leigh Purnell Executive Director (International) Australian Industry Group	15 May 2005
Mr David Smith Executive Director (Economic) Department of Treasury and Finance Western Australia	28 January 2005
Mr John Spasojevic Secretary Commonwealth Grants Commission	15 May 2005
Prof. Fiona Stanley AC Director Telethon Institute for Child Health Research	1 April 2003
Ms Louise Sylvan Deputy Chair Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	1 March 2005

- (a) Attended as an observer at the May 2006 meeting while awaiting formal reappointment.

Changes in Membership since 30 June 2005

28 October 2005	Dr Peter Dawkins resigned
18 November 2005	Ms Pam Davoren appointed
27 April 2006	Ms Glenys Beauchamp appointed
13 February 2006	Mr Wayne Jackson resigned

Meetings of Council 2005–06

22 November 2005

30 May 2006

Attendance at Meetings

		Attendance
Chairperson	Professor Sandra Harding	2
Australian Statistician	Mr Dennis Trewin	2
State and Territory Representatives		
South Australia	Dr Adam Graycar	2
Queensland	Dr Peter Crossman	1
	Mr Anthony Skinner	1(a)
New South Wales	Mr Peter Horn	2(b)
Northern Territory	Professor Tony Barnes	1
	Ms Jenny Coccetti	1(c)
Victoria	Mr Vin Martin	2
Tasmania	Mr Greg Philp	2
Western Australia	Mr David Smith	2
Australian Capital Territory	Ms Pam Davoren	2
Other Members		
	Mr Roger Beale	2
	Ms Glenys Beauchamp	0(d)
	Ms Leith Bouilly	1
	Mr Clem Doherty	1
	Ms Elaine Henry	2
	Professor Graeme Hugo	2
	Mr Wayne Jackson	2(d)
	Dr James Moody	1
	Mr David Parker	2
	Mr Michael Potter	2
	Mr Leigh Purnell	1
	Mr John Spasojevic	1
	Professor Fiona Stanley	1
	Ms Louise Sylvan	2

- (a) Attended as proxy for Dr Crossman at the November 2005 meeting.
- (b) Attended as an observer at the May 2006 meeting while awaiting formal reappointment.
- (c) Attended as a proxy for Professor Tony Barnes at the May 2006 meeting.
- (d) Ms Beauchamp was unable to attend the May 2006 meeting of ASAC and Mr Wayne Jackson attended as a proxy.

APPENDIX 2

AGENDAS FOR ASAC MEETINGS

22 November 2005 Meeting – Agenda

- 1. Summary record of previous meeting**
Paper: Summary record of 31 May 2005 meeting
- 2. Chairperson's Report**
Verbal Report
- 3. Statistician's Report**
Paper tabled at the meeting
- 4. 2006 Census Developments**
Paper: a) Update on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing
b) Census Data Enhancement Statement of Intent
- 5. Statistical Leadership**
Paper: Developments in relation to Statistical Leadership
- 6. Pricing Review**
Paper: Outcome of assessment of ABS Pricing Policy against Government Policy on Cost Recovery
- 7. ASAC's role in Priority Setting**
Paper: ASAC's role in supporting ABS Priority Setting
- 8. ABS Forward Work Program**
Paper: Forward Work Program
- 9. Monitoring the performance of Australian businesses**
Paper: ABS Business Longitudinal Database

30 May 2006 Meeting – Agenda

1. **Summary record of previous meeting**
Paper: Summary record of 22 November 2005 meeting
2. **Chairperson's report**
Verbal Report
3. **Statistician's Report**
Paper tabled at the meeting
4. **2006 Census developments - Update**
Verbal Report
5. **National Statistical Service**
Paper: National Statistical Service
6. **ABS Forward Work Program**
Paper: ABS Forward Work Program
7. **The ABS approach to collaborative work**
Paper: Cooperative Analytical Projects and Microdata Release
8. **Migrant statistics**
Paper: Directions and Forward Work Program for the National Migrant Statistics Unit
9. **Global developments in international statistics**
Paper: ABS International Engagement
- 10 **Revised international standards for macro-economic statistics**
Paper: Development and Implementation of Revised International Standards for Macro-economic Statistics

APPENDIX 3

INVOLVEMENT OF ASAC MEMBERS IN OTHER ABS ACTIVITIES/USER GROUPS

ASAC Member	Committee / Group / Activity
Dr Peter Crossman	State Statistical Forum Queensland State Statistical Consultative Committee Rural and Regional Statistics Advisory Group National Data Network Governing Board
Mr Peter Horn	State Statistical Forum New South Wales Statistical Coordination and User Forum ABS@NSW Government Implementation Steering Committee Economic Statistics User Group
Prof. Tony Barnes	State Statistical Forum Northern Territory Statistical Liaison Committee Northern Territory Statistical Priorities Advisory Committee Population Estimates Technical Workshop General Social Survey Reference Group
Mr Vin Martin	State Statistical Forum Victorian Statistics Advisory Forum Economic Statistics User Group
Dr Adam Graycar	State Statistical Forum South Australian Statistical Policy Group South Australian Government Agencies Statistical Committee Statistics Program South Australia National Data Network Governing Board
Mr Greg Philp	State Statistical Forum Tasmanian Statistical Policy Committee Tasmania Statistical Advisory Committee
Ms Pam Davoren	State Statistical Forum
Prof. Graeme Hugo	Rural and Regional Statistics Advisory Group
Mr Michael Potter	Economic Statistics User Group Labour Statistics Advisory Group
Prof. Fiona Stanley AC	National Data Network Governing Board
Mr David Smith	State Statistical Forum Western Australia Statistical Policy Committee

APPENDIX 4

OPERATION OF ASAC

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Chairperson of the Council receives an annual fee, set by the Remuneration Tribunal, and members are reimbursed their travel costs, where applicable. Apart from the Chairperson, no members receive remuneration for serving on the Council. Direct expenditure on ASAC during 2005–06 was \$62,994. These costs are met from the ABS budget.

Secretariat services for ASAC are provided by the ABS. The office of ASAC Secretary is held by the Assistant Statistician, Office of the Statistician, ABS. Secretariat support provided by the ABS includes organising and recording meetings, administering membership and the members' online Discussion Forum, and the preparation of Council's Annual Report. The cost of these services was estimated to be \$76,351 during 2005–06.

APPENDIX 5

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION STATEMENT

Below is a statement, as required by section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, about the structure of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by it.

Establishment, organisation and functions

For information regarding the establishment, organisation and function of ASAC see Chapter 1.

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. It does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS so that a broad range of views and interests are reflected in the advice that it offers to the Minister and the Australian Statistician. For membership details see Appendix 1.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may participate in the Council's policy formulation by making representations to the Minister or the Chairperson on matters of concern to them.

Categories of documents

The ASAC Annual Report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from all ABS offices. Files are maintained which contain documents relating to: the administration of the Council; papers discussed at Council meetings; summary records of proceedings of meetings; and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

Freedom of information procedures and initial contact points

All inquiries concerning access to documents, including inquiries under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, may be directed on weekdays, between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm, to the Secretary, Australian Statistics Advisory Council, c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 45 Benjamin Way or Locked Bag 10, Belconnen, ACT 2617 – telephone (02) 6252 5533.

