



Census Time Capsule

99
years



It's your
chance
to be
remembered!



www.abs.gov.au/census

Introduction

The Census Time Capsule is being conducted as part of the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. People can elect to have their personally-identified 2006 Census information kept on microfilm and securely held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA) for 99 years.

This information will not be made available to anyone until the year 2105.

The first national Census was conducted in 1911. Until 2001, the practice in Australia had been to destroy all personally-identified information from a Census once the statistical processing had been completed and no personally-identified information exists from any Australian Census before 2001.

For the 2001 Census, everyone was given the opportunity to have their personally-identified information kept by National Archives of Australia. Census information from 2001, for those people who gave their consent, is now securely stored and awaiting release in 2100 when the time capsule is opened.

The Census Time Capsule is not a “capsule” as such, but secure storage areas within the NAA’s purpose built repositories where the films will be stored in archival quality containers. These special areas are accessible only to authorised NAA staff.

99 years

Value of the Census Time Capsule

Information held in the 2006 time capsule will be publicly available after 8th August, 2105. Those accessing the information could include genealogists, historians, academics, social analysts and other researchers in the twenty-second century. Individuals will also have access to enable them to research their family history.

According to genealogists, when the time capsule information is released in the year 2105 it will give families a much clearer picture of their forebears; who they were and how they lived at the beginning of the twenty-first century. If you choose to be involved, you will make a valuable contribution to preserving a part of Australia's history for future generations.



Confidentiality and Privacy

The Census is conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and involves the collection of information relating to each person and household in the country. The public expects that the information provided in the Census will be kept confidential. The confidentiality of the information provided is guaranteed under the provisions of the Census and Statistics Act 1905.

To ensure public confidence and cooperation with the Census is maintained, and that the wishes of those who do not want to participate in the Census Time Capsule are respected, personally-identified Census information will only be kept for those people who explicitly consent to having it retained.

If a person does not explicitly agree to their personally-identified Census information being kept, their name and address will be destroyed once statistical processing has been completed.

For privacy reasons, the personally-identified Census information for those individuals who elect to have it retained, will not be available for any purpose (including to courts and tribunals) within the 99 year closed access period.

After the information has been produced on microfilm and stored by the NAA, it will remain in the time capsule. The NAA will examine the microfilm from time to time, to ensure that there is no deterioration, but will not read the information within the 99 year period.

It's your choice

Question 60 on the household Census form (question 54 on the personal Census form) has been designed as an optional question to ensure that personally-identified Census information will only be kept for individuals who elect to participate in the Census Time Capsule.

This means that if you answer “Yes, agrees”, and the form is signed, then your personally-identified Census information will be preserved by the NAA until 2105.

If you leave Question 60 (question 54 on the personal Census form) blank, answer “No, does not agree”, or there is no signature on the form, then all forms and computer records capable of personally identifying you will be destroyed after the Census statistical processing has been completed.

Differing opinions in one household

Question 60 is asked for each individual in a household. If only one individual within a household wants to participate in the Census Time Capsule, only that person's information will be kept.

If one individual within a household **does not** wish to participate in the Census Time Capsule then they should answer “No, does not agree” or leave the question blank and their information **will not** be retained, even if all other members of the household have elected to participate.

The person completing the Census form should consult with each person in the household and accurately indicate the view of each person on the Census form. The person completing the Census form must also sign the form to indicate that they have done so. For people whose views are not known to them, the answer should be left blank.

Children and teenagers

Parents and guardians who complete the Census form on behalf of children can complete this question for them.

However, it is expected that older children and teenagers would be involved in household discussions on this issue and that their views would be taken into consideration by their parents or guardians.

For people who are legally unable to make a choice, their legal guardians can answer on their behalf.

The question is entirely optional and will be processed for each member of the household accordingly.

Can information be added to or removed from the time capsule?

No information will be added to or removed from the time capsule after the 2006 Census forms have been collected.

Individuals who consented to their Census information being kept in the time capsule will not be able to have their information removed once the forms have been collected.

However, individuals will be able to advise the NAA in writing if they wish to withdraw consent for their information to be made publicly available in 2105 and beyond. This request will be kept on file and their Census information will not be made available to the public at any time in the future.

Storage of Census information

Once all the Census forms have been collected, they are transported, under secure arrangements, to the Census Data Processing Centre where images of the forms will be prepared. Information from these images is then processed to produce computer data files. After statistical processing of these files to ensure the validity of the data, responses to the time capsule question will then be examined.

When a response to this question clearly indicates that an individual wishes to have their name, address and Census information retained, and the form has been signed, the images relating to this person's information will be transferred onto microfilm. This microfilm is then delivered, under secure arrangements, to the NAA where it will be stored inside vault repositories.

The microfilm specified for the Census Time Capsule is silver halide, a polyester based film which has an expected life of over 500 years.

The location in which it will be stored is subject to strict temperature and humidity controls.

It is intended that several sets of the films will be maintained to guard against a major natural disaster. Each set will be stored in appropriate secure environments, but at different locations.

The exact location of the vault repositories will not be made public to comply with the NAA's security measures.

The buildings in which the Census Time Capsule information will be stored are solid concrete structures with sophisticated fire protection features in place. These include sprinkler systems, smoke detectors and automatic alarm systems with a direct connection to the fire brigade.

The Census information will be stored on microfilm and will not occupy a significant amount of space. In the case of damage to the building in which the microfilm is stored it can be easily and quickly moved to another part of the building, or to another of the NAA's secure repositories.

Recycling and destruction

When the processing and microfilming has been completed and the paper Census forms are no longer needed they will be, under supervision, pulped and used to make recycled paper and cardboard.

All the computer images of the Census forms used during processing and microfilming will also be destroyed under supervision.

The computer data files, which do not contain names or addresses, are used to provide Census products for users. Census information is released in files and tables that do not allow the identification of individuals.

Processing of Census forms prior to and including delivery of information to the NAA

If an individual agrees to have their personally-identified Census information retained, the ABS will assemble a data file for that person, which includes details relating to that individual's responses only. This data file will then be transferred to a Digital Archive Writer, and written to microfilm. A single roll of microfilm will hold the data files for many individuals.

Prior to microfilming, each batch of film will undergo quality assurance tests to ensure it is suitable to be used for the long-term retention.

When the roll of film is completed, it is removed from the Archive Writer and transferred to a darkroom, where it is processed.

After being processed, the film is handed to the ABS quality assurance staff. They sample a selection of the data to ensure the transfer has been successful and also ensure that the correct number of images has been transferred.

Once through the quality assurance process, the films will be hand-delivered, in secure transfer containers, to NAA staff. These staff will confirm receipt of the films, and then handle any other transfer of these films to their final secure storage places within NAA.

Informed consent

The ABS is conducting a public information campaign prior to the 2006 Census. A key objective is to ensure that the public everywhere in Australia understands as much as possible about the 2006 Census and the Census Time Capsule.

Special attention is being given to ensure that people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are well-informed on all matters pertaining to the 2006 Census.

Additionally, the Census guide provided with every form and details in the Census form itself, remind signatories on Census Night about the background to the 2006 Census and the relevance of each question.

In signing the Census form, people are acknowledging that the information they have provided is complete and accurate to the best of their knowledge.

The Census Time Capsule and the ABS

The ABS is pleased to be part of the 2006 Census Time Capsule project especially in view of three special factors.

They are:

1. The ABS recognises the historical value of information from the Census Time Capsule to historians, researchers and genealogists of the future.
2. The question relating to the retention of identifiable information for 99 years is purely voluntary - on an opt-in basis.
3. The ABS is satisfied with the measures taken to ensure that the information retained by the NAA will be safely and securely held.

Provisions introduced in the Census Information Legislation Amendment Act 2000 enabled 2001 Census information, for those who gave their consent, to be transferred to the NAA and protected from disclosure in the 99 year closed access period. This Act made changes to relevant legislation only in relation to the 2001 Census. Given the general acceptance of these provisions, they are now being extended to the 2006 Census and all future Censuses.

The Australian Government's decision to retain identifiable information required amendments to the Census and Statistics Act 1905 and the Archives Act 1983.

It also necessitated - in collaboration with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner - the design of an appropriate Census question.

To enable the transfer of Census information (for the 2006 Census and future Censuses) to NAA, the Census Information Legislation Amendment Bill 2005 was passed by Parliament. This Bill will amend both the Census and Statistics Act 1905 and the Archives Act 1983.

These changes in the Census Information Legislation Amendment Bill also ensure that Census information, while in the custody of the ABS and NAA is protected from compulsory or voluntary disclosure before a court, tribunal or agency throughout the 99 year closed access period. This protection is in addition to the more general protection provided under the Census and Statistics Act.

The main change to the Archives Act ensured that the information would be completely protected throughout the 99 year closed access period.

The role of the Census Collectors in the Census Time Capsule

Whilst the ABS is promoting the opportunity to participate in the 2006 Census Time Capsule, it recognises that it is the decision of each individual as to whether or not they take part.

Collectors are trained **NOT** to interfere in any way with how individuals fill in their forms.

Collectors must meet strict selection criteria and undergo thorough training. Beyond certain administrative notations on the back of forms, Collectors are not permitted to write on the forms unless help is specifically requested by the householder.

Collectors and other field staff are recruited as ABS staff in the lead-up, duration and aftermath of Census Night. This is done to ensure that, as employees, they fall under the same legislative requirements on confidentiality and probity as any other ABS Officer.

There are heavy fines and imprisonment penalties for abuse of this trust. Census Collectors are party to a legally binding confidentiality agreement.

The Census Time Capsule and the NAA

The NAA is the Australian Government's archival authority and cares for records created by Commonwealth agencies.

As the 2006 Census is a responsibility of the Commonwealth, the NAA will be the custodian of the records once the ABS has completed its work.

The Archives Act (section 30A) specifically prohibits NAA staff from divulging or releasing any Census information for a period of 99 years. Once the information has been transferred to the NAA, access is prohibited (in accordance with the Act) for 99 years.

For more information about the National Archives of Australia's arrangements for the Time Capsule, visit www.naa.gov.au/about_us/census

How much is the Census Time Capsule Costing?

The Australian Government provided approximately \$18 million for the project. This amount covers the public information campaign and the costs of transferring the Census information onto microfilm. The project has added approximately 90c per person to the Census costs which are calculated over five years.

Beyond the 2006 Census

The Government's decision to provide all Australians with the option to retain personally-identified Census information will apply to all future Censuses.

For more information about the 2006 Census visit www.abs.gov.au/census

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