



AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Annual Report
2009–10



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AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

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The Hon Bill Shorten MP
Assistant Treasurer
Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation

Dear Minister,

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ending 30 June 2010.

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 text for printing.

Geoff Allen
Chairperson

28 September 2010

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.



The Australian Statistics Advisory Council meeting in Canberra on 25 May 2010

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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, the Australian Bureau of Statistics is referred to as the ABS and the National Statistical Service is referred to as the NSS.

Foreword

The role of the Council is to provide guidance to the Minister and the Australian Statistician on the directions and priorities of official statistics. This includes the improvement, extension and coordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia.

The Council met in November 2009 and May 2010 with discussions covering a broad range of topics including:

- the National Statistical Service;
- data integration;
- the ABS work program and resources including international collaboration with other National Statistical Offices;
- the Australian Health Survey; and
- preparation for the 2011 Census.



The Chair of ASAC, Geoff Allen

In particular, approaches to the better utilisation of administrative data, while protecting the security of individual and personal information, have occupied much of ASAC's discussion during the year.

Despite some easing of resource pressures for the ABS following the 2009 federal budget, ASAC remained conscious that there were ongoing unmet needs for data for optimum public and private sector decision-making. These include quality data in areas such as social inclusion, transport and infrastructure, and the impacts of climate change and policies to address it.

ASAC noted a tendency for agencies to address some gaps by introducing new ad-hoc collections for a single purpose. This doesn't take account of their potential within a cohesive and integrated national statistical collection framework. Despite the efforts of the ABS with regard to the NSS, Council members expressed concerns about an increase in the duplication of data collection, including technical work, across various agencies at all levels of government, and the need to further improve the coordination and leverage of administrative data.

Members noted that similar concerns around the need for better coordination had led to the appointment of the Crisp Committee on Integration of Data Systems in 1974. The Crisp Committee identified the need for improved 'conceptual coordination' (the use of standard data concepts, definitions, classifications and so on, within a general framework), and 'physical coordination' (coordination of data collection and processing) and subsequent Commonwealth and State statistical agreements had re-affirmed this.

However, despite the gains made since the Crisp Committee made its recommendations, the need for conceptual and physical coordination of data remains pertinent today.

In the context of these general concerns, ASAC sought to better understand the complex data needs of the COAG Reform Council (CRC) as it establishes and reviews government performance indicators, and is seeking to collaborate with the CRC and the ABS to improve coordination and efficient and effective use of key national statistical resources.

Membership

The Council has seen a number of changes to its membership this year. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of Dr Peter Crossman, Mr Tony Pensabene, and Mr Andrew Rayner who resigned from the Council in the past year. The work Council members undertake to support the activities of the ABS, and further the development of the NSS, including membership of other statistical advisory groups, is certainly appreciated.

I would also like to welcome Dr David Gruen, Mr Michael Taylor, Mr Peter Yu, and Ms Serena Wilson who have all joined the Council in the past year. Their combined experience and expertise with regard to the economy, the environment, issues affecting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and social policy issues will certainly add many benefits to the Council.

Ms Glenys Beauchamp and Professor Graeme Hugo have agreed to be a part of the Council for a further three years and their experience, knowledge and expertise will certainly be appreciated.

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

I look forward to working with the Council, the Assistant Treasurer, the Statistician and other key stakeholders in the National Statistical Service to continue to build stronger and richer official statistics within Australia.

This report will be available on the Council web site (www.asac.gov.au), which also contains information about the Council, including meetings, functions and membership.

Geoff Allen AM
Chairperson

CHAPTER 1

ABOUT ASAC



Chapter 1

About ASAC



ASAC 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 and/or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of Council on these matters. The Council works closely with the Australian Statistician and the Council Chair meets regularly with the Minister to ensure advice and assistance is readily available to them.

The Act provides that the 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 State Premier or Territory Chief Minister. The responsible Minister appoints the Council Chair for five years and members for periods of up to three years. Members are eligible for reappointment when their membership expires. The membership of the Council as at 30 June 2010 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 2009–10



Chapter 2

Summary of activities for 2009-10

The Council held two meetings during 2009-10 on 17 November 2009 and 25 May 2010. (See Appendix 3 for full agenda listings).

National Statistical Service (NSS) and ASAC's role

Members have discussed extensively the Council's role regarding the further development of the NSS. Council agreed that a clear, longer-term vision for the future was essential. As the role of the NSS is to provide a framework for the coordination of statistics across all levels of government, it is essential that both owners and users of statistics are involved in the further development of the NSS.

Council agreed that buy-in from governments was essential, but also noted the importance of involving other producers of statistics such as academia and private sector organisations. Council recognised that engaging with non-Government statistical producers was outside the scope of ABS's legislated role and resources. However, this was an area in which the Council itself could provide some leadership and assistance. Council agreed to discuss this further at a high level workshop scheduled for early 2011.

Progress of COAG Reforms

Ms Mary Ann O'Loughlin, Executive Councillor and Head of Secretariat of the COAG Reform Council (CRC), provided ASAC members with an update on COAG issues at the May meeting.

Ms O'Loughlin noted in particular the work being done on performance monitoring and reporting as outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement of Federal Financial Relations, with a focus on the effectiveness of the CRC's work to date. Some of the key issues identified for the CRC were:

- identifying the conceptual frameworks underpinning the National agreements and the links between performance indicators and outcomes;
- rationalising outcomes and performance indicators measuring the need for, and quality of, services improving data availability and reliability; and
- unlocking the potential of administrative data held by governments for improved reporting.

Ms O'Loughlin also discussed the Heads of Treasury review of National Agreements, which would provide an opportunity for a systematic information planning and development process across all sectors of the COAG reform agenda. The review would also provide an opportunity to discuss the issue of developing performance measures from existing administrative datasets.

ASAC discussed issues facing the CRC in its important work on performance indicators, in the context of its ongoing concern for enhanced data integration and better coordination and use of administrative data.

It was noted that the CRC was very appreciative of the expertise and ideas that the ABS provided and the continued support of the ABS was vital to their work.

Data Integration

ASAC strongly supports enhanced data integration and the better use of administrative data, and is encouraged by the work of the Cross Portfolio Statistical Integration Committee (CPSIC), of which the ABS is a co-chair. The CPSIC is working towards creating an Australian Government approach to facilitate e-linkage of social, economic and environmental data to support statistical and research purposes, based on clear principles of operation and a clear legal and institutional framework.

Council noted the ABS is undertaking two roles in the area of Government data integration initiative; firstly as a leader in establishing a safe and effective environment for data integration involving government data, and secondly as an integrator of key enduring datasets in areas of strong policy interest.

Council members made a number of constructive suggestions and encouraged the ABS to involve the private sector, as holders of some key datasets, in the initiative.

ABS Great Innovations Competition

The ABS Great Innovations program was held in early 2010 with two ASAC members providing their support as judges. Mr Clem Doherty and Dr James Moody looked at a wide range of initiatives across all ABS offices. The entries demonstrated a committed, innovative and highly skilled workforce at the ABS. The ABS has set up a team to implement many of the ideas and innovations put forward in the competition.

Other matters

International collaboration and the Information Management Transformation Program

ASAC noted ABS's involvement with the international statistical community in a number of new collaborative statistical projects. These projects were aimed at increasing National Statistical Offices' capacity to pursue innovation, and improving their ability to meet the needs of the statistical community, through the collaborative development of statistical infrastructure. Working with other National Statistical Offices will provide the ABS with resources and expertise not currently available in Australia, and give ABS staff opportunities to share their professional skills and experience.

Australian Health Survey

ASAC was pleased to note that the ABS will conduct the Australian Health Survey in 2011, with the aim of collecting health information to meet significant data gaps in areas such as nutrition, physical activity and biomedical risk factors. Members asked a number of questions to reassure themselves that appropriate arrangements would be in place to collect and safeguard the biomedical information needed for the survey.

Electronic survey reporting

ASAC members have encouraged the ABS to move as quickly as possible within technological, data provider and other limitations while maintaining quality.

The ABS advised ASAC members of an initiative that allows businesses that are participating in a number of ABS surveys to submit survey data electronically. This should progressively lead to productivity improvements by reducing manual processing. This initiative, also keep the ABS in line with other agencies that use the Standard Business Reporting system.

CHAPTER 3

THE YEAR AHEAD – 2010–11



Chapter 3

The Year Ahead – 2010–11



Council members have agreed on the following issues as specific Council priorities in 2010-11:

- The Council plans to advise the Statistician and the Minister on statistical services and priorities on the work program for 2011-12 to 2014-15. The Council will also advise the ABS on the directions and priorities it should be considering in the longer term, to enable it to remain relevant as Australia's National Statistical Office.
- The Council will also continue to monitor and support COAG initiatives. Council will keep abreast of the reform program across Commonwealth and State/Territory governments, and provide advice aimed at ensuring that needs are considered in the context of overall statistical priorities.
- ASAC Chair, Mr Geoff Allen, has initiated a high level workshop to be held in early 2011, co-convened by CRC Chair Mr Paul McClintock AO. The workshop will consider the functioning of the overall NSS and how to further its objectives. This will involve a small group of invited experts and stakeholders in the system including academic and non-government participants.
- The workshop will aim to produce a long-term vision of the national statistical system, with well understood objectives, taking into account that both owners and users of official statistics need to be involved for the NSS to be successful. Members agreed that a more detailed understanding of official statistics as a 'distributed system' is needed, and this will be discussed ahead of the workshop at the November 2010 ASAC meeting.
- The NatStats 2010 conference was held in Sydney just before this report went to print. The conference brought together an array of leaders and high profile commentators, researchers and policy makers from all levels of government, academia, community and business. A number of Council members participated in the conference:
 - Dr Lynne Williams presented a paper on "Session planning for a more proactive future."
 - Professor Graeme Hugo presented a paper on "Immigration, ageing and the changing population."
 - Dr David Gruen participated in the panel discussion on "Measuring Progress: from theory to practice."
 - Mr Geoff Allen discussed "Beyond the Numbers: Strengthening our National Statistics" and provided a summary of the conference recommendations on the last day of the conference. These recommendations will be further considered at the November 2010 meeting of ASAC.

- **Census of Population and Housing 2011**
Next year's Census of Population and Housing marks 100 years of national Census taking in Australia, and it remains the most comprehensive way of providing a snapshot of Australia, helping Australians understand how our nation is changing.
- ASAC members will continue to receive regular updates on the progress being made towards the 2011 Census and provide feedback on developments. Members also assist the ABS with Census preparation by providing contacts and ensuring their constituents are kept up to date on Census matters.

APPENDICES



Appendix 1

Membership of Council



Membership of Council at 30 June 2010 and Date of Initial Appointment

Member	Date first appointed
Mr Geoff Allen Director, The Allen Consulting Group	1 March 2007
Mr Brian Pink Australian Statistician (ex officio)	5 March 2007
Ms Glenys Beauchamp Deputy Secretary, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	27 April 2006
Mr Grant Belchamber Economist, Australian Council of Trade Unions	24 July 2008
Ms Pam Davoren Deputy Chief Executive, Policy Division, ACT Chief Minister's Department	18 November 2005
Mr Clem Doherty Chairman, Like Minded Individuals Pty Ltd	1 May 1997
Ms Elaine Henry OAM Chief Executive Officer The Smith Family	15 May 2005
Professor Graeme Hugo University Professorial Research Fellow Professor of Geography, and Director of the National Centre for Social Application of Geographic Information Systems. The University of Adelaide	15 May 2005
Dr James Moody CSIRO General Manager Government and International	15 May 2005
Mr David Smith Executive Director, (Economic) Western Australian Department of Treasury and Finance	15 February 2005
Mr Tony Stubbin Deputy Under Treasurer, Northern Territory Treasury	9 April 2009
Ms Louise Sylvan Commissioner, Productivity Commission	15 May 2005
Mr Peter Verwer Chief Executive Officer, Property Council of Australia	24 July 2008
Dr Lynne Williams Deputy Secretary, Economic and Financial Policy Division Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance	30 October 2007

Member	Date first appointed
Mr Ben Wilson Director, Competition and Regulation, Office of Intergovernmental Relations, Cabinet Office, South Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet	12 June 2007
Mr Peter Horn Director, Fiscal Strategy, New South Wales Treasury	01 May 2003
Mr Michael Taylor Chairperson, Murray Darling Basin Authority	22 February 2010
Mr Peter Yu Chair, Nyamba Buru Yawuru Ltd	22 February 2010
Ms Serena Wilson Deputy Secretary, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	22 February 2010
Dr David Gruen Executive Director, Macroeconomic Group, Australian Treasury	18 June 2010

Changes in Membership since 30 June 2009

22 February 2010	Appointment of Ms Serena Wilson
22 February 2010	Appointment of Mr Michael Taylor
22 February 2010	Appointment of Mr Peter Yu
18 June 2010	Appointment of Dr David Gruen
22 February 2010	Reappointment of Ms Glenys Beauchamp
22 February 2010	Reappointment of Professor Graeme Hugo
8 October 2009	Resignation of Mr Tony Pensabene
4 March 2010	Resignation of Dr Peter Crossman
19 April 2010	Resignation of Mr Andrew Rayner

Appendix 2

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.

Secretariat services for ASAC are provided by the ABS. The office of ASAC Secretary is held by the Assistant Statistician, Office of the Statistician. Secretariat support provided by the ABS includes organising and recording meetings, administering membership and the members' web site, and the preparation of the Council's Annual Report.

All costs outlined above are met from within the ABS Budget.

Appendix 3

Agendas for ASAC Meetings



17 November 2009 Meeting – Agenda

1. Summary record of previous meeting
2. Chairperson's report
3. Statistician's report
4. Key initiatives impacting on the ABS Work Program
5. Future allocation of resources
6. Scorecard of the NSS (achievements and roadblocks)
7. Bringing forward member issues
8. Update on 2011 Census of Population and Housing

25 May 2010 Meeting – Agenda

1. Summary record of previous meeting
2. Chairperson's report
3. Statistician's report
4. Overview of National Statistical Service
5. ASAC's role with respect to the NSS
6. Update on COAG issues
7. Data integration
8. Australian Health Survey update
9. NatStats 2010 update
10. Bringing Forward Member Issues

Appendix 4

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 8.30am and 4.30pm, to -

Secretary
Australian Statistics Advisory Council
c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics
Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616
Telephone 02 6252 5533.