

AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Annual Report

2007–08

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
Dear Minister,

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ended 30 June 2008.

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

14  August 2008

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.



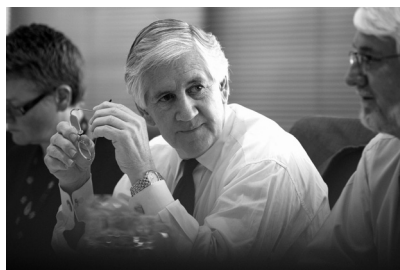
FOREWORD

As set out in the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*, the role of Council is to advise the Minister and the Statistician in relation to:

(a) the improvement, extension and coordination 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.



During 2007–08, the Council reviewed the ABS' official statistics program for the period 2008–09 to 2010–11. In the recent past, the drive for effectiveness has enabled the maintenance of programs, while absorbing costs and funding pressures. However, the ABS has now reached a turning point in its history where it has had to make a decision to reduce its work program due to financial constraints. Due to tight time deadlines, the Statistician discussed his proposal for a reduced work program with me, and then informed Council members of the tightening of the ABS financial situation and the planned savings initiatives. The Statistician has confirmed with Council that, if further savings need to be found for future years, he expects that he will have time to consult more closely with Council.

The Council is concerned about a number of issues now facing the ABS, Australia's primary provider of official statistics. First, while acknowledging the competing pressures on government for funds, Council members expressed disquiet about the level of resources allocated for official statistics. There are a number of areas needing more investment by governments, including the environment, children and youth, transport and infrastructure. Council members noted that there are major data gaps in these and other areas that are desirable to address, so that governments and the Australian community have the best quality information for policy development, implementation and evaluation purposes.

Council members expressed concern that budget pressures are impeding the ABS' ability to continue improving the way statistics are collected, for example, by enhancing the methodology and processing of the 5-yearly Census of Population and Housing, or by increasing the use of administrative data. Greater use of administrative data, such as data collected by schools and child care providers, would be, for example, a valuable data source for Council of Australian Governments (COAG) initiatives. Householders and businesses will also benefit from more efficient and effective collection methods, and the Council believes it is essential the ABS continues to put improvements in place. It is increasingly difficult for the ABS to respond adequately to the increasing demands on official statistics within its existing funding.

There are also serious inefficiencies arising from continuing inadequately coordinated approaches to statistical activities across the country. Council has agreed with the ABS strategy to seek to ensure that better use is made of information already collected by governments, so that there is an increased volume of high quality statistics available for evidence based decision making. The ABS' approach to the development of a National Statistical Service is strongly supported by Council members.

Finally, the Council is uneasy about the effect on official statistics of potential difficulties recruiting and retaining up-and-coming professional statisticians. Council members have stressed the need for the ABS to be in a position to recruit appropriate numbers of university graduates to build capability for the future.

The Statistician, Mr Brian Pink, and I met with the new Minister responsible for the ABS, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, in February 2008 to discuss statistical priorities. I will continue to brief the Assistant Treasurer after each meeting of Council, and have given a standing invitation for the Minister to join the Council at any time according to his convenience. I would like to thank him for his support of the Council.

The Council has seen a number of changes to its membership this year. I would like to welcome all new members to Council. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who have retired or resigned, for their contribution to the work of the Council.

During 2008–09, I look forward to working with the new members and those members reappointed to the Council. 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 convey my appreciation to Mr 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 goes to the ASAC Secretariat, without whose support the Council could not function in an effective manner.

I look forward to working with the Council and the Statistician, along with the Assistant Treasurer, to continue the provision of an effective and responsive national statistical service for Australia.

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

Geoff Allen
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 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 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 the Council as at 30 June 2008 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 2007–08

The Council held two meetings during 2007–08:

- 20 November 2007, and
- 24 June 2008.

Detailed agendas for the meetings are provided at Appendix 2.

The Council considered a number of issues during 2007–08 including the following:

Forward Work Program and Saving Initiatives

Early in 2008, the Australian Statistician informed Council members of the tightening financial situation, primarily due to the rising costs of conducting survey programs and the additional two per cent efficiency dividend applied to all Australian Government agencies. Members were advised the current work program could not continue to be delivered within its 2008–09 funding, and were informed of the substantial cuts that this required to the ABS work program for 2008–09. These cuts had been made by the Statistician after discussions with the Chair of the Council, the Treasury and the Department of Finance and Deregulation. In addition, the ABS advised that it would no longer be able to expand the current work program to meet key policy initiatives, such as environment, transport, early childhood education, and social inclusion without being appropriately resourced.

At the June 2008 meeting, the Council was updated on the difficult financial situation facing the ABS. The Statistician indicated that given the financial pressures, he expected deficits in all the out-years, which had implications for the ABS work program beyond 2008–09. He also indicated that the ABS would be unable to meet new demands without additional funding.

Council members acknowledged that some short-term reductions in the ABS' work program were required to keep within budget for 2008–09, but were very concerned about the resultant impact on the quality of ABS statistics, and the decrease in the statistics that are so necessary for informed decision making. Members were particularly concerned at the reductions required in areas such as the Population of Census and Housing, Labour Force statistics and Retail statistics.

To secure the ABS work program into the future, the Department of Finance and Deregulation and the Treasury will be conducting a review of the long-term funding of the ABS. This review is expected to be completed in early 2009. If this review does not support the provision of additional funding for the ABS, Council members expressed their serious concern about the ABS' ability to continue to deliver the existing program of official statistics needed by both governments and the community, or to meet current demands to expand the program. Council was made aware that users had been disappointed by the announcement of the 2008–09 savings initiatives, but there was a great deal of goodwill directed to the ABS in this situation. Council members noted that this goodwill will dissipate rapidly if savings are required past 2008–09.

Council members accepted the Statistician's assurance that the ABS will consult widely should any further savings initiatives be required, and will consider the longer term impacts of any reductions in the work program.

The ABS informed Council that, as the ABS must continue to work within the appropriations provided by the Government, it would only be able to undertake new work with further funding, or by ceasing some work in the existing work program. This means the ABS will be unable to expand its program into areas where high priority data gaps are evident. The Council members were concerned to ensure the ABS is adequately resourced to deliver statistical information to support the new policies proposed by the Australian Government, including social inclusion and climate change, as well as the policy program arising from the revitalised COAG agenda and the 2020 Summit.

Members also reinforced the fact that ABS statistics are produced for the public good, not only for use by governments, and considered this a very strong rationale for the government to ensure that the agency be funded appropriately. Members suggested that the current budget situation could be seen as an opportunity for the ABS to obtain additional funding to collect data for policy development, implementation and evaluation purposes.

The ABS is also facing a challenge in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of statistical graduates to build a strong capability for the future. There are two aspects to this problem. Firstly, Australia does not seem to be training enough people with statistical qualifications in our tertiary sector. This is complicated by the current financial pressures the ABS is facing, as it is not able to offer competitive rates of remuneration for staff at all levels.

National Statistical Service

Council members were pleased to see that the National Statistical Service (NSS) is at the core of ABS strategic directions over the next three years, especially given the financial constraints. To improve the strength and coherence of the NSS as a whole, the Council continues to support the ABS' plans to build a rich statistical picture, for a better informed Australia, by developing a community of government agencies. This statistical picture is 'painted' by the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of information obtained from administrative data sources or from specially commissioned surveys.

The NSS, in which the ABS has a legislated leadership role, is the set of arrangements to:

- deliver a high quality, up-to-date, comprehensive, coherent statistical picture of the economy, society and the environment to assist and encourage informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the wider community
- provide a world class official statistical service that retains the confidence and trust of the Australian society as both providers to, and users of, the resultant official statistics
- maximise the use for official statistical purposes of data available within government administrative systems by government agencies and instrumentalities
- minimise the burden of statistical reporting at all levels of the Australian community
- document and retain, as an enduring national resource, key statistical outputs and their underlying data sources.

Council members noted that the NSS, as it currently exists, falls far short of meeting its full potential and believe more funds should be made available to the ABS for NSS initiatives. The existing NSS activities could be substantially improved, and the NSS could be significantly expanded to encompass a greater range of current, and potential, statistical activities of government. To realise this full potential, Council understands there is an imperative to further develop a community of government agencies involved in official statistical activities by:

- developing, conducting and disseminating official statistics on the basis of shared values, principles and policies
- maximising comparability of official statistical sources by shaping and adopting national (and where appropriate international) statistical standards, such as concepts, classifications, methods, metadata and data definitions

- making strategic use of existing information held within government administrations for statistical purposes, rather than treating it as a secondary resource
- building a community of professional statistical staff working across all levels of government by providing access to appropriate mechanisms to share their knowledge and experience, and appropriate professional development opportunities
- minimising the overall investment required to support the NSS and facilitating the availability and accessibility of information resources of the NSS by way of shared technical statistical infrastructure
- managing and maintaining Australia's key official statistical resources as an enduring national resource, by developing appropriate archival mechanisms.

Council members concurred with the ABS position that securing NSS aspirations will mean governments and the community value and support high integrity information. Under an NSS, encompassing producers and users of statistics, Australian governments will be able to manage data, make it accessible, and use it well. The NSS will also contribute to public information sources being fully used to provide a statistical picture of the economy, society and the environment. Infrastructure such as statistical standards, policies and tools, will be shared in the NSS to maximise the value of investment and support integrated statistics.

The Council strongly supports the ABS' approach to improved coordination of official statistics, including strategic use of administrative data. A coordinated approach will assist governments to overcome information gaps, so that more evidence based decision making can occur.

Administrative data: from secondary to strategic directions

The Council considers strategic use of administrative data, held by the Australian and state/territory governments, to be a statistical priority. At the June 2008 meeting, Council received a presentation on the statistical use of administrative data, which outlined how holders of administrative data could move to thinking about the statistical use of administrative data as a strategic use, rather than a secondary use. Administrative data is data collected for regulatory purposes (e.g. birth and death registration) or for the administration of various government programs (such as social security benefits, education, and health).

The Council will be working closely with the ABS during 2008–09, taking action to increase the usefulness of administrative data, and developing a set of principles, including:

- i. ASAC and the ABS will set up a working group, to assist the ABS develop a set of principles for statistical integration of administrative data and prepare strategies to implement the principles (for example, demonstration projects).

These principles will be brought back to the November 2008 meeting of the Council

- ii. ASAC to consider identifying the principles as the 'gold standard' for integration of administrative data
- iii. The State Statistical Forum, which includes the state and territory government members of ASAC, to consider actions the state and territory governments can take on this issue, at their workshop in November 2008. In preparation for this meeting, members will develop an understanding of why problems arise with using administrative data for statistical purposes and identify solutions, and
- iv. ASAC Secretariat to place 'statistical integration of administrative data' on the agenda for the next few meetings, so progress is made in a timely manner.

Members also confirmed the need to modify the role of governments, from gate-keeper of administrative data to its custodian, and noted the following:

- the recent trend towards people having greater rights to information kept by governments
- the changing approach to intellectual property rights for government information
- administrative data sources cannot fully replace surveys, as they generally only provide information about people engaged with the government service, for example, owning a car or paying taxes
- administrative data may not always be as cost effective as surveys, although survey response rates always need to be carefully monitored to ensure that quality is maintained.

Standard Business Reporting

The Council was advised by the ABS that the main purpose of the Australian Government's Standard Business Reporting (SBR) program was to reduce administrative, regulatory and statistical reporting costs to business. The ABS has two roles in this program. As a participating data collection agency, the ABS advised the Council that SBR offered significant opportunities for the ABS to realise its National Statistical Service objectives through the development of standards and shared statistical infrastructure, and to take a key role in influencing the development of data collections nationally. SBR provides the ABS with the potential for reducing provider load, increasing data quality and possibly improving the timeliness of reporting. The second role will be for the ABS to develop a Data Definitions Repository, as part of the SBR core infrastructure.

Some Council members saw the potential for SBR to be used by the private sector (such as bank loan applications) and to assist in collecting data from the farm sector. However, concern was expressed that an increased number of data collections could result in an increased cost to business. The Council encouraged the ABS to develop a five year plan for all ABS collections to use SBR. It was noted that the implications for privacy would also need to be considered. The ABS advised that, with regard to privacy issues, it was intended that the existing confidentiality arrangements between data provider and agency be maintained.

Census of Population and Housing

2011 Census of Population and Housing

Council received a report on the significant revisions for the 2011 Census forward work program due to the 2008–09 work program cuts. As a result of the reduced funding, there will be minimal change to the questionnaire, systems and procedures that were used for the 2006 Census with development work being limited in 2008–09. While the work program for the 2011 Census has been reduced, the ABS' strategic directions have not changed, with the primary goal being to improve overall coverage, and in particular, Indigenous coverage, especially in northern Australia.

Council members expressed serious concerns about the impact the work program cuts will have on the 2011 Census. In particular, they were disappointed that critical new questions could not be included, such as journey to place of education.

The Council agreed that improving Indigenous coverage was important, not just in northern Australia, but in urban areas as well. Council members sought information about strategies being developed for northern Australia and Indigenous communities. The ABS advised that an internal working group had been set up, with plans for an external advisory group meeting to be established. The advisory group will hold its first meeting in Darwin in August 2008.

Council members expressed satisfaction with the ABS' preparations for improved coverage in difficult collection areas, including its review of the strategy used in 2006 and its plans to improve coverage. Discussions will be held with state and territory representatives about their support for community involvement in the 2011 Census.

Council members supported the decision made by the ABS to pursue strategies to improve the take up rates of the eCensus.

Members also sought more information on the ABS' plans to release census data by mesh blocks. The ABS advised that population and dwelling counts by mesh blocks have been released on the ABS website, and that the ABS was working through options for releasing more detailed information based on mesh block data.

The Census Data Enhancement project

The Council had previously contributed to discussions about the Census Data Enhancement (CDE) project. Members expressed strong support for the project with the potential for increased population research and analysis through the Statistical Longitudinal Census Dataset, as well as the quality studies being conducted.

During 2007–08, the ABS informed the Council that it was reviewing the CDE project for the 2011 Census. The ABS commented that an option to retain an encoded version of name (which would not enable a link back to a unique name) would be considered, if the quality studies showed that linking without name information did not provide data of an acceptable quality. If this option is considered, it will be subject to a separate public consultation process. Another proposal was to explore the potential to seek consent to link specific household surveys with 2011 Census data (and linked back to 2006 Census data).

In light of potential risks to the ABS, Council discussed the value of the linkage work used in the CDE project. Council noted that more than half the community supported the retention of their census information for 99 years, and that community attitudes may be changing in regard to the retention of some information. The Statistician advised Council that the ABS is taking a very conservative approach to this exercise. He noted that Council had previously agreed that the sample of 5 per cent of the population was small enough not to be a statistical risk, while large enough to be useful for a range of analytical purposes.

Council members advised the ABS that, if the option of an encoded name were to be considered in future, the message to the public must be very clear, assuring them that the information will be encoded, protected and safe.

Environment statistics

The ABS provided the Council with an update of its environmental statistics strategy, emphasising that improving and enhancing Australia's environment statistics system is considered a very high priority by users for the ABS. It outlined proposals to address critical gaps in the information that is available, particularly measures of the interconnections between the environment and human activities.

Council members agreed that information, including statistics, about the environment was inadequate. While acknowledging that the ABS has a significant task ahead to provide greater leadership and coordination in the field of environment statistics, the ABS was encouraged to promote itself as a leader in the field of environment statistics. It was suggested that the ABS should draw on its credentials as a trusted and valued collector of information in this process.

As a first step, the Council approved the ABS' strategy for improving environment statistics. The Council also strongly recommended that the ABS seek additional funding for its environment work program, as it is a priority for governments, as well as the Australian society. In addition, Council noted that the ABS was engaging with the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on a joint working group to develop a business case to improve environmental information. As well as acknowledging the role of state/ territory governments as environment data custodians, Council members also suggested that a proposal be put forward for a data sharing framework, which would include metadata.

The Council sought information about the amount of work that needs to be done on the framework for environment statistics, and whether the ABS would be concentrating on the collection and dissemination of data. The ABS advised that there were a number of frameworks in existence, including statistical frameworks, but there was a need to make these frameworks transparent. The statistical framework the ABS draws on is the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts being developed through the United Nations Statistical Commission. The ABS informed the Council that the economic-environmental accounts produced by the ABS are gaining international recognition, an example being the *Water Account, Australia* (ABS cat. no. 4610.0).

The ABS acknowledged that environment accounts are not well understood and can mean different things to different people. It advised the Council that the Wentworth Group had approached the ABS to discuss their proposal for a national environmental account, and the ABS would use that opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings about the different accounts being developed.

Members discussed how whole-of-government integration can best be achieved between the multitude of partners in the field of environmental information. Various options were discussed, and Council members suggested that a Cooperative Research Centre model may be a useful approach to explore.

The need to look at the interaction between economic, social and environment data was reinforced. Members suggested that the ABS look at better utilisation of administrative data, which is available in an uncoordinated form from a range of government sources. The Statistician advised that significant amounts of public funds have been, and are being, directed to improving scientific understanding of the environment, such as funds to the Bureau of Meteorology. However, there are limited funds available for the collection of broader information, such as statistical measures relating to interconnections between the environment, the economy and human activity.

Council members concluded that the ABS needed to take a stronger leadership role in the field of environmental statistics. As already noted in the section on administrative data, Council sees improved use of administrative data to be a priority, so will be taking steps to improve the statistical usefulness of data held by the Australian and state/territory governments.

Social Inclusion Agenda

Statistics on families and children

At the November 2007 meeting, Council considered a paper intended to bring together activities that relate to information about families and children.

Members noted that they were looking forward to receiving the ABS' draft framework for family statistics, which is being developed in collaboration with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Council members queried the current focus on a narrowly defined dwelling bound family concept and whether this was sufficient in today's society and economy, especially in situations where both resident and non-resident grandparents are significant carers of their grandchildren, and older parents were increasingly being cared for by their children. In the review of the framework for family statistics, Council members were satisfied that the ABS is taking a wider view of family, beyond the family home (which had been a focus for geographic survey frames). The new framework for family statistics would be expected to flow into any future Families and Children Survey.

In relation to families and children metadata, Council noted that there was a great opportunity for the NSS approach to be used to take steps forward across the many activities of both producers and users of statistics in this field. Again, Council was made aware that the ABS will need additional funds to carry out any new work in the area of families and children statistics.

Council was advised that the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey had been extended to include children, and that Council of Australian Governments funding had been received for this expansion.

Future priorities for information about early childhood education and training

At the June 2008 Council meeting, the Council welcomed Ms Wendy Jarvie, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and Ms Gabrielle Phillips, Branch Manager, Performance and Analysis Branch, DEEWR, to the Council discussion.

The ABS introduced the session by noting that early childhood education was a high priority, at the state/territory and national government levels, and while a significant amount of other data collection is taking place across the country, it is very fragmented. The Council was advised that the ABS is undertaking a number of new activities aimed at providing a richer information base in education, including new survey output and a proposal to enhance and expand the National Schools Statistics Collection. It is also looking to obtain access to unit record files for the education sector, as only high level information is currently provided by government agencies.

Council members discussed the need for higher quality administrative data in education. They acknowledged that the current administrative data collections have some quality issues, and good data is needed for modelling and longitudinal monitoring purposes. Members also noted that, as there is a need for 'place-based' or small area data, random sample surveys are not the answer for improving education data unless the samples are designed to support state/territory estimates. The increasing use of student identifiers was put forward as a means of improving longitudinal data, but greater national coordination may need to be put in place. Along with Ms Jarvie, Council members supported the ABS taking a leading role in bringing together administrative, survey and census data, so that reliable and valid information is available for decision making purposes. They also recommended that the ABS be the first port of call, when data gaps are identified.

In addition, members also commented that the ABS needs to continue to develop partnerships with other government agencies, to improve availability of information. The Council was interested to hear that the Statistician has proposed to the central agencies that a data needs impact statement be required for any new proposal for government funding. The Statistician is asking agencies to identify the evidence needed to measure the effectiveness of any new policies, ie what is required to measure outcomes, is the information available or is new data need to overcome the data gaps.

As future state/territory funding for education will be based on performance indicators (PIs) to be established through the COAG process, members agreed that there are opportunities for the ABS to be more involved in establishing the data needed to demonstrate that these PIs have been met. The PIs are intended to show the community that public fund expenditure is making a difference.

Transport statistics: Strategic directions

At the June 2008 Council meeting, the ABS introduced a refreshed work program for transport statistics for the next 5 to 10 years. Mr Phil Potterton and Mr Gary Dolman, from the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE), were invited to participate in the discussion.

The ABS noted that the refreshed work program is designed so the ABS can 'value add', as well as work in partnership with others. The program is broken into two parts: building statistical infrastructure; and data collection. The Council was advised that the proposal has been discussed with the Australian Transport Statistics Network, which comprises representatives from different levels of government and the private sector.

The Council noted that BITRE welcomed the paper, with particular support for the level of priority and urgency given to the transport issue by the ABS.

Following some discussion about transport issues, members advised that transportation of people should be given more focus by the ABS, ie in addition to freight transport. It was noted that transport fits the social inclusion and health/well-being agendas (for example, accessibility to public transport for older people), as well as infrastructure and climate change. Council members also recommended that the ABS consider collecting information about people not being transported, by any means. Accessibility issues and congestion are priorities for most governments. Members also considered the impact of changing petrol consumption habits on transport data.

The ABS advised Council that it would need to seek additional funding from the government for the work program. Council members accepted that good value could be obtained from investing \$1m to improve the quality of state and territory data, which is a good example of the gains that can be obtained from better use of administrative data. Members noted that an additional \$34m was required to fund the entire work program. Council members supported investment in this area, so that critical gaps in information for decision making are overcome. Council members also appreciated that BITRE offered to work with the ABS to prepare the request for funds, and that the agencies should look at a range of funding options.

Other Issues

Statistical literacy

At the November 2007 meeting, the ABS outlined moves to improve communication and education in the field of statistics, and to support an increased understanding and use of statistics for informed decision making. The ABS advised that particular groups being targeted include: students; teachers; opinion leaders, such as journalists; decision makers, including parliamentarians; small business owners; and community groups.

While Council supported the ABS' efforts in developing statistical literacy, it acknowledged that it could be very resource intensive, and cautioned the ABS against taking on too much in this area.

The importance of statistical literacy was acknowledged by Council members, but it was felt that the topic was broad and more work needs to be done to identify and address priorities in the area. Members noted that there seemed to be two streams - general awareness of statistics, and the education of professional statisticians.

Council members made a range of suggestions, including the increased education of teachers, enlisting champions that students could look up to, providing statistical scholarships, and promoting the value of interpreting statistics correctly. An increased focus on the training of ABS statisticians, in order to increase their ability to tell statistical stories, was also mentioned. The ABS informed the Council that the ABS does have teachers on staff, and is working to develop curricula that will assist in getting the messages out to the education sector.

The need for information on why statistical subjects are not undertaken by more people was also raised, as well as the need to look at traditional pathways into statistical areas and how they have changed over time.

As already noted, Council members see statistical literacy as important, and is concerned that the ABS will not be in a financial position to recruit and develop sufficient numbers of statisticians for the future official statistics program.

Communication of statistics

The ABS provided Council with an update on its approach to communication of statistics. It highlighted the introduction of free statistics on the web, and the consequential changes to the ABS business model for dissemination, as the main catalyst for the significant increase in the usage of ABS statistics in recent years.

Council was made aware of the ABS' plans to introduce the 'creative commons' licensing framework for its free content on the website by the end of 2008, with this initiative adding greater transparency about the re-use of statistics published on the ABS website. Re-use of data was a critical issue moving forward, and the ABS was starting to turn its attention from internal re-use to enabling greater external re-use of ABS statistics. Council was informed that spatially enabled data, data visualisation and the architecture of the ABS website were also key issues, but due to the ABS financial position, they can only be addressed opportunistically in the near future, and this may hamper progress in some areas.

While noting that the ABS is still considered a world class leader in dissemination/communication strategies, Council members acknowledged that the rest of the world is catching up with the ABS and that community expectations are rising rapidly. This underpins the need for continuous investment in dissemination. The Council agreed that the move to free access on the Internet had been a 'watershed event'.

Council noted that there have been significant improvements to the ABS website in recent years, including the introduction of Google search. As a number of members commented that searching the ABS website remains difficult and that improving search performance should be a high priority issue, the ABS advised it is looking for a medium term replacement for the current Google search, which is no longer supported by Google. However, it noted that the long term solution will require significant ongoing investment in new search technology.

Council members advised the ABS that the shift from 'dissemination' to 'communication' of statistics could also have implications for the staff skills and training required by the ABS. The ABS acknowledged that the ABS staff need to become 'better story tellers'. The need for improved statistical literacy was also noted to be a critical factor in ensuring that the community continues to make better and increased use, of official statistics. The ABS agreed and noted that the information skills program is being broadened to provide more training to website users, and that there is much more work to be done on the statistical literacy front.

An update on the ABS' plans for testing the waters on web 2.0, noting that sharing ABS statistics will be a key component of the ABS response to web 2.0, was provided. The ABS also commented that there are increasing number of tools available to facilitate the sharing and presentation of data, which takes pressure off the ABS and will allow it to focus on improving the distribution of data through dissemination 'partners'.

Chapter 3 The Year Ahead – 2008–09

Council members acknowledged the significant financial constraints facing the ABS in the coming year, and the challenges that this presents to the Council in advising the Statistician and the Minister. The ABS Forward Work Program for 2008–09 to 2010–11, along with the 2008–09 savings initiatives, will provide the framework for the Council's deliberations during the next financial year.

Council members agreed that they needed time at each meeting to bring forward any issues they want to discuss at future meetings, so the members can take a stronger role in identifying and promoting statistical priorities. As well as having responsibility for identifying statistical priorities, Council members expressed the need to communicate the costs associated with not having data for decision making purposes.

Following some general discussion, members put forward the following as Council priorities:

- i. data for national key performance indicators (noting that there may be options for rationalising data), especially in the areas of schools; skills; disability; and housing
- ii. statistics for the social inclusion agenda, especially statistics to demonstrate the differences between groups in the community
- iii. longitudinal data, so that policy evaluation can take place
- iv. data gaps, with leadership to overcome these provided by the ABS
- v. spatial data for better planning purposes
- vi. national environment accounts
- vii. education and criminal justice information
- viii. more information on innovation
- ix. visualisation and communication of statistics
- x. electronic data collection
- xi. fit-for-purpose data (Rolls Royce v Holden Astra), as well as fit-for-purpose advice/assistance to policy agencies
- xii. statistical capability, for the ABS and for the community.

In 2008–09, the Council will continue to provide advice to the Statistician and the Minister in relation to the ABS' major statistical collections, but the above mentioned areas will be of particular focus. Council is aware that additional funding will be needed to take many of these priorities forward, and will be including the need for funding in any recommendations put to the Minister and the Statistician. Discussions during the coming year will continue to offer ideas and solutions to the ABS in regard to balancing the ever increasing demand for statistical data, and the ABS' ability to meet these demands within its budget.

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL AND ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Membership of Council at 30 June 2008 and Date of Initial Appointment

Member	Date first appointed
<i>Mr Geoff Allen</i> Director, The Allen Consulting Group	1 March 2007
<i>Mr Brian Pink</i> Australian Statistician (ex officio)	5 March 2007
<i>Professor Tony Barnes</i> Senior Director Economic and Social Analysis Northern Territory Treasury	1 October 2004
<i>Ms Glenys Beauchamp</i> Deputy Secretary Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	27 April 2006
<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 Policy Division ACT Chief Minister's Office	18 November 2005
<i>Mr Peter Horn</i> Director Fiscal Strategy New South Wales Treasury	1 May 2003
<i>Mr Andrew Rayner</i> Assistant Director Economic Policy Branch Department of Treasury and Finance Tasmania	1 June 2008

Professor Fiona Stanley AC

Director

Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

1 April 2003

Dr Lynne Williams

Deputy Secretary

Economic and Financial Policy Division

Victorian Department of Treasury and

Finance

30 October 2007

Mr Ben Wilson

Director

National Competition and Policy

Intergovernmental Relations

Cabinet Office

Government of South Australia

12 June 2007

Changes in Membership since 30 June 2007

29 September 2007	Mr Vin Martin retired
30 October 2007	Appointment of Dr Lynne Williams
1 February 2008	Mr Michael Potter resigned
14 May 2008	Retired - Mr Roger Beale; Ms Leith Bouilly; Mr Leigh Purnell; and Mr John Spasojevic Term expired - Mr Clem Doherty; Professor Graeme Hugo; Ms Elaine Henry; Dr James Moody; Mr David Parker; and Ms Louise Sylvan
31 May 2008	Mr Greg Philp retired
1 June 2008	Appointment of Mr Andrew Rayner

Meetings of Council 2007–08

20 November 2007

24 June 2008

Attendance at Meetings

		Attendance
Chairperson	Mr Geoff Allen	2
Australian Statistician	Mr Brian Pink	2
State and Territory Representatives		
South Australia	Mr Ben Wilson	2
Queensland	Dr Peter Crossman	2
New South Wales	Mr Peter Horn	2
Northern Territory	Professor Tony Barnes	2
Victoria	Mr Vin Martin	1(a)
	Dr Lynne Williams	1
Tasmania	Mr Greg Philp	1
	Mr Andrew Rayner	1
Western Australia	Mr David Smith	1
	Ms Marina Leybourne	1(b)
Australian Capital Territory	Ms Pam Davoren	1
	Mr Dan Stewart	1(c)
Other Members		
	Mr Roger Beale	1(d)
	Ms Glenys Beauchamp	2
	Ms Leith Bouilly	0(d)
	Mr Clem Doherty	2(e)
	Ms Elaine Henry	1(d)
	Professor Graeme Hugo	2(e)
	Dr James Moody	2(e)
	Mr David Parker	0
	Mr Jason Allford	1(f)
	Ms Jan Harris	1(e)
	Mr Michael Potter	1(g)
	Mr Leigh Purnell	0(d)
	Mr John Spasojevic	1(d)
	Professor Fiona Stanley	2
	Ms Louise Sylvan	2(e)

(a) Attended as a proxy for Dr Lynne Williams at the November 2007 meeting.

(b) Attended as a proxy for Mr David Smith at the June 2008 meeting.

(c) Attended as a proxy for Ms Pam Davoren at the June 2008 meeting.

- (d) Term expired on 14 May 2008.
- (e) Attended the June 2008 meeting as observers.
- (f) Attended as a proxy for Mr David Parker at the November 2007 meeting.
- (g) Resigned in February 2008.

APPENDIX 2

AGENDAS FOR ASAC MEETINGS

20 November 2007 Meeting – Agenda

- 1. Summary record of previous meeting**
Paper: Summary record of the 5 June 2007 meeting
- 2. Chairperson's Report**
Verbal Report
- 3. Statistician's Report**
Paper: Statistician's report
- 4. 2011 Census of Population and Housing**
Paper: 2011 Census of Population and Housing
- 5. Standard Business Reporting**
Paper: ABS involvement in Standard Business Reporting
- 6. Introduction of the updated ANZSIC Classification**
Paper: Introduction of the updated ANZSIC Classification
- 7. Census Data Enhancement Project**
Paper: Census Data Enhancement - Update on progress
- 8. Statistics on Families and Children**
Paper: Statistics on Families and Children
- 9. Statistical Literacy**
Paper: Statistical Literacy
- 10. Update on Environment Statistics**
Paper: Improved and enduring Environment Statistics

24 June 2008 Meeting – Agenda

1. **Summary record of previous meeting**
Paper: Summary record of 20 November 2007 meeting
2. **Chairperson's report**
Verbal Report
3. **Statistician's Report**
Paper: Statistician's report
4. **Future Directions for the ABS: Possible scenarios**
Paper: Integrated planning and budgeting in the ABS
5. **Future Priorities for Information about Early Childhood Education and Training**
Paper: Future priorities for information about early childhood education and training
6. **Bringing Forward Member Issues**
Paper: Bringing forward member issues
7. **Transportation Statistics: Strategic Directions**
Paper: Future directions for the ABS transport statistics program
8. **Administrative Data: from secondary to strategic directions**
Presentation
9. **Update on Dissemination of Data**
Paper: Update on dissemination of data
10. **NatStats08 Conference**
Paper: NatStats08 conference - working together for an informed Australian society
11. **Progress towards the 2011 Census of Population and Housing**
Paper: 2011 Census of Population and Housing

APPENDIX 3

INVOLVEMENT OF ASAC MEMBERS IN OTHER ABS ACTIVITIES/USER GROUPS

ASAC Member	Committee / Group / Activity
Dr Peter Crossman	State Statistical Forum NatStats08 Organising Committee Development of a Northern Australia Enumeration Strategy for the 2011 Census ABS Website Client Forum Queensland Statistical Table 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 Economic Statistics User Group
Professor Tony Barnes	State Statistical Forum Northern Territory Statistical Liaison Committee Northern Territory Statistical Priorities Advisory Committee Population Estimates Technical Workshop
Mr Vin Martin	State Statistical Forum Victorian Statistics Advisory Forum
Mr Ben Wilson	State Statistical Forum South Australian Government Agencies Statistical Committee
Mr Greg Philp (a)	State Statistical Forum Tasmanian Statistical Policy Committee Tasmania Statistical Advisory Committee
Ms Pam Davoren	State Statistical Forum
Professor Graeme Hugo	Australian Standard Geographical Classification Expert Committee
Mr Michael Potter	Economic Statistics User Group Labour Statistics Advisory Group
Professor Fiona Stanley AC	National Data Network Governing Board
Mr David Smith	State Statistical Forum Western Australia Statistical Policy Committee

(a) replaced by Mr Andrew Rayner from 1 June 2008.

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 2007–08 was \$74,072. 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' web site, and the preparation of Council's Annual Report. The cost of these services was estimated to be \$79,599 during 2007–08.

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, Locked Bag 10, Belconnen, ACT 2616 – telephone (02) 6252 5533.