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Australian Bureau of Statistics Submission to the Draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission on the draft *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*. We commend the Commissioner for the draft Strategy and we support its guiding principles which place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges at the centre of priorities and programs that affect them.

Action 5: Agencies should ensure that they have access to, or are able to collect, the data they need to effectively undertake evaluations under the Strategy

The availability of broad, high-level statistical data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a key part of the policy and program evaluation process. Good data needs to be available through every stage of policy development and evaluation. To be fit for purpose, data needs to be available at both high levels of geography such as state and territories and lower levels of geography such as regional and local areas. The availability of reliable regional and local level data is an ongoing challenge for data collection and analysis. To address this will require further work to explore opportunities with communities to improve and utilise their data assets and work with data custodians to improve the quality and use of administrative data.

As well as being responsible for the estimation of official population figures, the ABS collects and publishes a range of key demographic, life expectancy, economic and social information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Australia. This is drawn from both ABS run collections, such as the 5-yearly Census of Population and Housing and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Social Surveys, and from administrative data collections. Additionally, through the [Multi-Agency Data Integration Project \(MADIP\)](#), the ABS facilitates research about the health and social and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Data governance framework

The central principles of the *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* must also extend to the practices around the collection and use of data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The ABS seeks ongoing guidance from the [ABS Round Table of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics](#) and from other key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, to align ABS activities with the information needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The ABS supports the development by agencies of culturally safe practices around collection, governance, and release of data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Accordingly, the ABS would support and assist any moves in the Commonwealth to develop and implement a common Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data governance framework. This work could be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives from Peak Bodies, community and research organisations.

The ABS is working towards elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty principles in our governance processes. The ABS recently embedded data sovereignty principles into our organisation-wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy. ABS plans to continue this work and enhance the relevance and transparency of all aspects of the data development cycle, including staff recruitment, data prioritisation, collection of data, and the availability and presentation of data outputs.

When considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples data development, as in all areas of data sharing and use, there needs to be sufficient levels of data capability to embark on new data collection and to ensure proper data governance. There are challenges for users in gaining access to existing data held by other data custodians. Even if there are no legislative barriers, other barriers can prevent access such as limited knowledge about the existence of the data, limited capability of the custodians and/or the user to share safely, or a culture of unwillingness to share data. These are known issues in the data landscape and are the focus of agencies such as the Office of the National Data Commissioner, but should be addressed in any Indigenous-specific data governance strategies.

Action 6: A data dictionary should be developed to guide agencies on collecting and using data on core outcomes that are important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The ABS is aligned with the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in supporting the development of a dedicated data dictionary, built in partnership with stakeholders. The ABS would welcome involvement in collaboration with other government stakeholders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the data dictionary development.

It is important in reporting to ensure clear and consistent data definitions so that narratives can be consistent across reports and agencies. The ABS works closely with partner agencies to support the production of data for evaluation purposes and has observed inconsistencies with data definitions across various evaluation frameworks. Agreed, consistent and clear definitions will enable the ABS to support this work more effectively, particularly in helping users understand data comparability over time and between data sources.

The ABS appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and looks forward to working with the Productivity Commission and other agencies on the implementation of the *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*.

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