

# ABS Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Data Availability and Use

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## 1. Executive Summary

Data is a valuable asset. Maximising the value of that asset requires its quality (including appropriate uses) to be robust and the data to be accessible, while also adhering to any privacy, commercial-in-confidence and trust commitments in the use of the data.

There are multiple owners and users of data in the private and public sector. Within the public sector, information is collected from private and public sources and used to inform public policy decisions, service delivery and compliance enforcement.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is the central statistical authority for the Australian government and a provider of statistical services to the states and territories. The ABS has a crucial role to play in maximising the value of its information assets, through the key dimensions of:

- sustained high quality, timely and relevant official statistics that inform economic, social, population and environmental policy decisions and program evaluation
- sustaining the high level of community trust to protect the privacy and confidentiality of personal and business information required under legislation (which in turn is fundamental to the ABS's ability to collect high quality information from businesses and people)
- maximising effective use of data through: 1) encouraging informed use by governments, businesses, researchers and the community; 2) making use of new data integration opportunities; and 3) enhancing access to information
- ensuring cost-effective operations, including looking for ways to make better use of existing administrative data and collecting information more efficiently, streamlining business practices and reducing the regulatory imposition on providers of information
- coordinating and advising official bodies, including developing and ensuring compliance with statistical standards

The ABS sources over half of its data from public and private sector administrative data sources, with around 45 per cent from surveys of businesses and people. The ABS is seeking to enhance the use and accessibility of its data through:

- enhancing communication and advice about statistical information
- collaborating with users to ensure the relevance of statistical information and
- a trial with government agencies and researchers under a five safes framework that allows access to micro (unit level) data through in-postings into the ABS and a virtual data laboratory that can be accessed in home agencies (with up to 60 current licences for the virtual laboratory)

The ABS has been safely and expertly integrating data for ten years, and is well placed to facilitate cost-effective data integration for public value purposes within its existing legislation.

- The ABS's legislation allows for the integration of a range of data including business and personal tax, Medicare, pharmaceutical, human services, business and employee data with ABS survey and census data to yield a powerful policy and program evaluation tool enabling governments to better assess the effectiveness of government policies.

- The legislation appropriately ensures protection of the privacy of businesses and people while still enabling effective use of and accessibility to the data for statistical and research purposes.
- The ABS possesses the trust of the public to collect and protect information – the ABS operates consistently with its social licence.
- Key data sources essential to cost effective and enduring data integration are held by the ABS, namely the population census, business register and geo-spatial data.
- The Government is investing \$257 million over five years in the modernisation of ABS business processes and IT infrastructure that will enhance the ABS capacity to handle large datasets and acquire information cost-effectively.
- ABS staff possess the statistical and methodological expertise necessary for data integration and safe handling of sensitive information from households and businesses.

Pre-requisites for realising the value of the growing private and public sector data assets will include:

- effective governance and institutional settings to ensure an enduring public sector data asset and integrity measures to ensure the quality and security of sensitive information
- having regard to the social licence from the community in how their information is collected, stored, shared and released
- quality assurance and maintenance of data assets, and ensuring appropriate use according to that quality
- enhancing the accessibility of data and sharing data in appropriate ways to enable cross-sectoral and cross-domain analysis

## 2. ABS Institutional and Governance Setting

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*, the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, and the *Statistics (Arrangements with States) Act 1956* set out the functions, duties and powers of the ABS (see Appendix 1 for details), including:

- being the central statistical authority for the Australian Government and, by arrangement, providing statistical services to state and territory governments
- collecting, compiling, analysing and disseminating statistics and related information
- coordinating and advising official bodies engaged in statistics, particularly in relation to maximising use and minimising duplication
- developing and ensuring compliance with statistical standards, including liaison with international organisations

Crucially, the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*:

- empowers the collection of statistics on a broad range of topics, including the Census of Population and Housing every five years
- requires the ABS to disseminate the results of its statistical activity while protecting the identity of those from whom the data was collected

The ABS also complies with other Commonwealth legislation, such as the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, the *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013*.

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) is established under the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* to be the key advisory body to the Minister and the ABS on statistical services. Specifically, the Council advises the Minister and the ABS on the improvement, extension and coordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia; 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 any other matters relating generally to those statistical services. Council members are chosen to represent a broad cross-section of perspectives, covering Australian and state and territory governments, business, academic and community interests. All states and territories are represented on ASAC.

In 2015, the Government issued the ABS with a Statement of Expectations (see Appendix 2), the key features of which include:

- independence and accountability
- the ABS's contribution to the Government's deregulation agenda
- effective provision of key statistics and use of data
- engagement with stakeholders and collaboration with other bodies
- relationships with the responsible Minister and Treasury
- organisational governance and financial management

Specific to the provision of key statistics and use of data in the statement of expectations:

*The Government expects the ABS to prioritise its resourcing to ensure the maintenance of core statistics. This includes the economic, social and population statistics that stakeholders consider to be the most important.*

*The Government expects the ABS to deliver high quality, objective and flexible official statistical solutions and to improve the accessibility, timeliness and relevance of Australia's statistical information. The ABS should also work to improve the management of official statistics and promote their informed use.*

*The ABS should, where possible, avoid the duplication of statistical data collection and help to minimise such duplication by other agencies or researchers. In particular, the ABS should work collaboratively to unlock public sector, transactional and other 'big data' holdings.*

The ABS published a Statement of Intent in response to these expectations (see Appendix 2). The statement, amongst other things, acknowledges the ABS's intent to be open in engagement with stakeholders and build collaborative partnerships, while being responsive to the statistical needs of governments and the community. Of relevance to this Inquiry, the ABS agreed to

*...work collaboratively across the Australian Government to unlock public sector data holdings. Through this mechanism, the ABS will avoid duplication of statistical data collection. By actively promoting the compatibility between, and the integration of, statistics*

*compiled by official bodies, the ABS will maximise the possible utilisation of information for statistical purposes.*

The UN Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics are an international set of principles governing the production and dissemination of official statistics to which the ABS adheres. In addition, the OECD's Recommendation on Good Statistical Practice applies to the ABS and Australia's statistical system. The OECD Recommendation is the first OECD legal instrument concerning statistics, recognising the quality of statistics is fundamental for the quality of evidence-based analytical work. Both the UN Principles and the OECD Recommendation on Good Statistical Practice are important to the integrity of an official statistical system and the official statistics on which markets, governments, and the community trust and depend.

### **3. The ABS informs decision making by Governments, business, the community and the research sector**

The ABS's key role is to inform decisions. Our mission is to unleash the power of statistics for a better Australia. This role and mission spans several key functions.

#### **3.1 High quality, timely and relevant official statistics for the nation**

The ABS has been Australia's national statistical agency for over 100 years, informing economic, social, population and environmental policy decisions and program evaluation. ABS data is key to the effective functioning of our democracy and contributes to key decisions made by governments, businesses and across the community.

The ABS produces over 500 statistical releases each year, including:

- economic and population statistics, such as net overseas migration, regional population estimates, national accounts, Consumer Price Index and labour force statistics to inform, amongst other things, monetary and fiscal policy, the distribution of GST amongst the states and territories, the distribution of electoral boundaries and the planning of key infrastructure
- health, education, social services, Indigenous and industry statistics to inform significant public policy decisions
- statistical information that is of value to businesses, community organisations, households and individuals

ABS statistics are underpinned by a quality framework comprised of seven dimensions:

- institutional environment
- coherence
- accuracy
- relevance
- timeliness

- accessibility
- interpretability

The ABS Data Quality Framework provides standards for assessing and reporting on the quality of statistical information. Data quality is generally accepted as a ‘fitness for purpose’ concept, where data is assessed with reference to its intended objectives or aims. Data quality is therefore also a multidimensional concept which not only includes the accuracy of statistics, but also stretches to include other aspects such as relevance and interpretability. The ABS Data Quality Framework is internationally recognised and is based on the Statistics Canada Quality Assurance Framework and the European Statistics Code of Practice. The ABS prides itself on ensuring our official statistics set a very high standard in all seven of these dimensions and are fit for their many uses.

For our economic and market sensitive statistics, coherence is of particular importance. A key mechanism for ensuring coherence, particularly coherence with international comparisons made by the OECD, IMF and UN, is our adoption of internationally agreed statistical standards and frameworks. Some recent examples include the implementation of the 2008 System of National Accounts, changes to international labour statistics standards, and a new international Government Finance Statistics standard to ensure the consistency and transparency of governments’ financial statements.

The ABS has a number of key governance fora for managing the relevance of ABS statistics. These include the Economic Statistics Advisory Group and the Population and Social Statistics Advisory Group, consisting of membership from governments, the private sector and academia. In addition to these fora, topic specific groups such as the Labour Statistics Advisory Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Demography Experts Group advise the ABS on the relevance and quality of ABS statistics and methods.

From 2012 to 2013, ABS undertook an extensive consultation process to collaboratively identify a list of 74 Essential Statistical Assets (ESA), underpinned by over 200 datasets. The 2013 list of ESA for Australia represents the first holistic assessment of high value data to meet current user information needs. The list was developed through consultation with the community, Commonwealth government and state/territory governments, representing both users and producers of official statistics in Australia. Essential statistical assets are a core subset of official statistical assets that, due to their application and importance, should be given priority in order to provide a high quality and trusted statistical service.

The ABS is representing Australia on the UNECE Task Force on the Value of Official Statistics. This taskforce aims to define the value of official statistics for users, stakeholders and society; develop a measure for understanding this value; and assess the feasibility of a framework and indicators for valuing the impact of official statistics.

### **3.2 A trusted enduring national data agency**

The ABS is a trusted data agency required, under legislation, to protect the privacy and confidentiality of personal and business information. This is fundamental to the ABS’s ability to collect high quality information from businesses and people.

Critical to the quality and sustainability of the ABS and ABS's official statistics is the maintenance of a high level of trust in the integrity of managing information assets. This is particularly relevant where integrity relates to the security of information and the need to maintain confidentiality of that information; and the independence and consistency of information with national and international standards.

Results from an independent 2015 survey showed that 81 per cent of the general public and 100 per cent of informed users trust the ABS<sup>1</sup>. Levels of trust in ABS and ABS products amongst the general community showed a slight increase from 2010 to 2015, but remained unchanged for informed users. There were also high levels of confidence in the general community and informed users in the usefulness and accuracy of future ABS statistics. A 2010 comparison of Australia's results with the European Commission's Eurobarometer series of surveys suggest Australia's trust of ABS products compare very favourably to that in the European Union. For example, trust in ABS products by informed users was over 80 per cent compared with trust in UK products of less than 40 per cent. Scandinavian countries had the highest levels of trust in Europe, at around 70 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

The ABS collects information from individuals, households, businesses and governments directly through the Census and our extensive survey program, and indirectly through partnership arrangements with the public and private sector. In 2015, the ABS sourced over half of its data from public and private sector administrative data sources (53 per cent), with around 45 per cent sourced from surveys of businesses and people.

The Census of Population and Housing is the largest statistical collection undertaken by the ABS and one of the most important. It is the basis of all Australian population estimates and a key source of Australia-wide comprehensive statistical information on matters of significant importance such as Indigenous life expectancy, homelessness and housing, as well as for small geographic areas and small population groups. The Census is used as a critical input into legislative requirements such as the *Federal Financial Relations Act 2009* which administers the distribution of government funds like GST revenue and the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* which allocates seats in the House of Representatives between states and territories. The Census is also widely used to inform local infrastructure and services planning. Increasingly this is by complementing and integrating other data with Census data to expand the range of available information on a wide variety of topics such as the settlement outcomes of migrants to Australia and the educational outcomes of students.

To many, the Census is the ABS' brand. With response rates above 95 per cent, the Australian community engages actively in the Census.

The ABS also has an extensive program of surveys covering topics as diverse as household income, personal safety, economic activity, capital expenditure, energy use, housing and innovation. With response rates exceeding 80 per cent to achieve the statistical quality expected of a high integrity statistical organisation, the trust placed in the ABS by the business and community is substantial. For example, the response rate for the ABS Labour Force Survey in 2015 was 93 per cent. This is higher

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015, Trust in ABS and ABS Statistics – A survey of informed users and the general community, cat. no. 1014.0, ABS, Canberra

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010, Trust in ABS Statistics, October 2010, *National Statistical Service*, online <[http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/0/553dde916ab833e9ca2577b50072bf2f/\\$FILE/Trust%20in%20ABS%20and%20ABS%20Statistics.pdf](http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/0/553dde916ab833e9ca2577b50072bf2f/$FILE/Trust%20in%20ABS%20and%20ABS%20Statistics.pdf)>

than the response rate for the labour force surveys of other countries such as the UK, where the response rate is about 55 per cent.

Administrative data has been a significant source of information used in the compilation of statistics for a very long time. For example, information from the state and territory Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages has been used in the ABS's official population estimates since the 1900s; trade in goods and services from the Department of Immigration and Border Control is used extensively in ABS international trade statistics; aggregate financial transactions reported by financial institutions is used in ABS financial statistics; and personal and business tax data from the ATO are used extensively by the ABS in our statistical infrastructure as well as economic series.

On the private sector front, retail scanner data from the supermarkets provides the ABS with real time information on the prices of key items that represent about 25 per cent of the input into the Consumer Price Index. See section 3.4 for additional detail.

The ABS has statistical expertise from over a century of delivering and maintaining official statistics. The organisation produces coherent estimates over time, while improving the quality of our key estimates, and reporting transparently on proper use and caveats of the data.

### **3.3 Maximising effective use of data across domains**

#### **3.3.1 Encouraging and enabling informed use**

The ABS must make available any statistical information it collects or acquires under its legislation. In practice, this means the ABS has a culture of making available statistical information in a way that nurtures and maintains high integrity and trust by data providers and the user community.

All ABS official statistics are publically available and predominantly free. The Government enabled this free service through an investment in 2005 that recognised the public value of the service provided by the ABS. ABS official statistics are available in publications, via social media, on websites, via spreadsheets, and through self-help infrastructure such as TableBuilder that keep secure the private information of people and businesses.

ABS official statistics are made available at a pre-advertised date and time (11.30am on of the release date) to build and maintain trust in Australia's official statistical system, which is particularly important for market sensitive information released by the ABS. Users, particularly governments and the financial market, trust the ABS to meet these dates and time so they can plan accordingly and have trust in the integrity of ABS data.

Similarly, a vast array of ABS microdata (also known as unit record data) is publically available in a manner which upholds our legislated requirement to protect secrecy. Access is via a range of mechanisms including CD-ROMs, DataLab (both virtual and onsite), infrastructure such as TableBuilder and staff exchanges.

A study by the ABS in 2010 found that over 80% of the users of ABS products and services are compiling tables and tabular output. With this in mind, the ABS has invested in a TableBuilder product that is now extensively used with 41,016 registered users of the free TableBuilder version and 5,469 active users across 311 organisations of the cost-recovered version. TableBuilder covers Census and survey outputs including the Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset. The ABS is working



with other Commonwealth Government agencies, including the Department of Social Services, to include non-ABS datasets into TableBuilder.

### 3.3.2 Making use of new data integration opportunities through partnerships

Data integration is a growing domestic and international technology for realising the demands for cross-sectoral information that supports reporting on activity, outputs and outcomes. The ABS and our international counterparts have recognised that many of today's information priorities cannot be met by individual data collections or the re-use of existing data.

The ABS became an accredited Integrating Authority in 2012<sup>3</sup>, building on steps taken over the last decade to build this capacity at the ABS. The ABS is well placed to facilitate cost-effective data integration for public value purposes within its existing legislation.

The ABS's data integration capability:

- leverages existing arrangements with partners in Australia's statistical system to access high value datasets including business and personal tax, Medicare, pharmaceutical, human services, business and employee data
- uses ABS's existing legislation to integrate these high value datasets with ABS survey and census data to yield a powerful policy and program evaluation tool that allows governments to assess the impact of multiple policy instruments on different household, individual and business types
- uses existing legislation that appropriately balances the need to protect the privacy of businesses and people with the use and accessibility of data
- possesses the trust of the public to collect, protect and safely use information – the ABS operates consistent with its social licence
- leverages existing ABS data sources essential to cost effective and enduring data integration already held by the ABS, particularly population census, business register and geo-spatial data
- includes a separation approach where names or identifying personal information are kept separate from content information as a part of the data integration infrastructure to provide safeguards around the safe and effective use of existing data
- is enabled by a \$257 million Government investment over five years to modernise ABS business processes and IT infrastructure that will enhance the ABS capacity to handle large data sets and acquire information cost-effectively
- possesses statistical and methodological expertise already available in ABS staff that is essential for quality, safe and efficient data integration

The ABS data integration effort focuses on providing information about groups or cohorts of people and businesses, but not individuals or specific businesses. Consistent with our mandate, the ABS data integration effort is for official statistical and research purposes. The ABS's data integration

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<sup>3</sup> The appointment of an integrating authority for each statistical data integration project (or family of projects) is essential to establishing a safe and effective environment for Commonwealth data integration. For projects assessed as posing a high risk, the integrating authority must be accredited, that is, they must be approved by a Deputy Secretary Data Group as having the capacity to deal with high risk data integration projects. The [Process Map for Data Integration Projects](#) explains an overview of key steps for data integration project involving Commonwealth data.

effort is not directed toward targeting specific individuals in the compliance or regulatory functions of governments.

Examples from the ABS data integration program include:

- **Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset** – brings together a 5 per cent random sample of records from the 2006 Census with corresponding records from the 2011 Census, effectively a sample of nearly 900,000 records linked over time. This provides a unique opportunity to examine pathways and transitions of population groups, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Researchers have already made extensive use of the ACLD with over 8000 registered users of the ACLD microdata file.
- **Death registrations to Census linkage project** – brings together existing death registrations with data from the 2011 Census to enable a clearer picture of life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This improved data accuracy means the COAG goal of Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians can be better informed and monitored with higher quality, more trusted evidence.
- **Measuring Educational Outcomes over the Life-Course** – brings together a range of datasets including the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection, state school enrolments (from Tasmania and Queensland), National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy and Census of Population and Housing data to assess the impact of personal, family, social and economic characteristics on school achievement over time. This combination provides the foundations for evidence based decision making for improved educational outcomes.

Examples of collaborative data integration projects which the ABS is involved in include a Multi-Agency Data Integration Project, an Expanded Analytical Business Longitudinal Database and a Linked Employee-Employer Database.

- **Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP)** – is a collaborative partnership between five Australian Government agencies: the Department of Health, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Human Services, the Australian Taxation Office, and the ABS. Partner agencies are working together to maximise the value of existing data, address and resolve barriers to data sharing, and create an enduring data resource with cross-portfolio information available to support analysis and evaluation across health, welfare and income sectors. For example, it provided the first opportunity to examine the different uptake of Medicare-subsidised health services amongst people on different types of Government payments, such as Age Pension, Family Tax Benefit, and Disability Support Pension.
- **Expanded Analytical Business Longitudinal Database (EABLD)** – is a collaborative partnership between the ABS and the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science enabling analysis of the characteristics and finances of Australian businesses. It draws on administrative data from the Australian Taxation Office and survey data from the ABS linked together, enabling analysis of businesses over time, micro-economic factors driving performance, innovation, job creation, competition and productivity. The EABLD improves the evidence base for policy development and program evaluation.
- **Linked Employer-Employee Database (LEED)** – is an aspirational project of the ABS and several partners, including the Australian Taxation Office and the Department of Industry,

Innovation and Science. A foundational stage of the project joined personal income tax data from the Australian Taxation Office with business level data from the Expanded Analytical Business Longitudinal Database to enable multiple job holders to be identified and provide a potential future source of statistics on employee earnings. This foundation project represents an important first step towards a future LEED which will contain data linked across multiple years and include more detailed socio-economic and demographic information relating to employees. Through further linkage with other datasets, additional characteristics could be used to explore the drivers of firm level performance, such as the educational qualifications of employees.

As noted in Section 2, the Government has outlined in its Statement of Expectations that it requires the ABS to *work collaboratively to unlock public sector, transactional and other 'big data' holdings*. The ABS welcomed the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Public Sector Data Management initiative, and actively supported this initiative. This includes partnering with Australian government policy agencies in six of the seven high value demonstration projects (Appendix 3); leading the government's response on Recommendation 9 for trusted access; and the ABS is one agency that has already taken action to ensure a contemporary interpretation of their legislation to support the use of data.

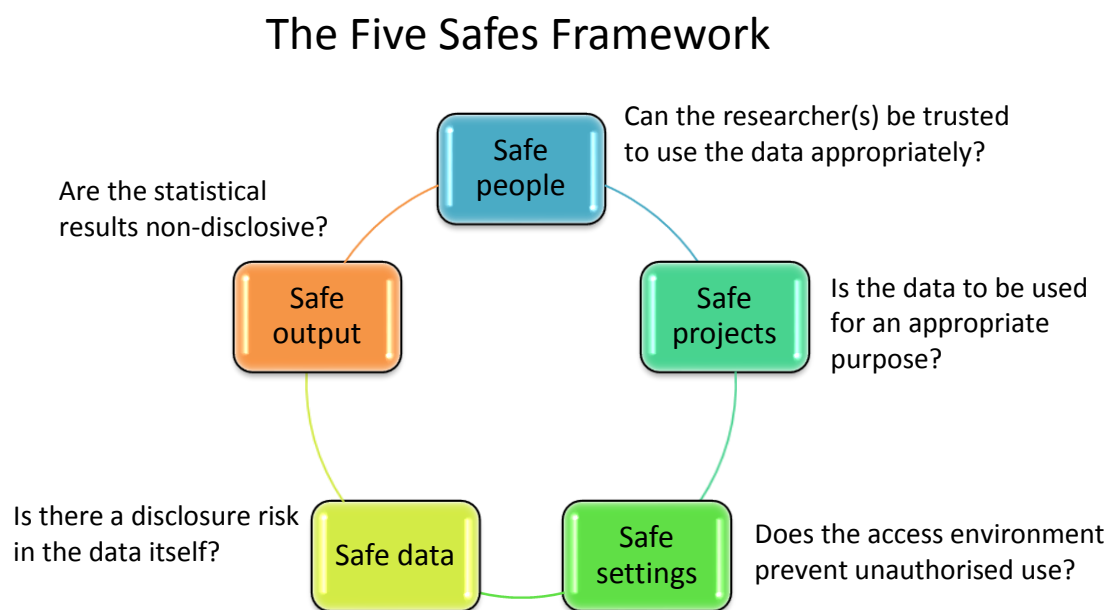
### **3.3.3 Enhancing safe and effective access to information**

ABS microdata products are particularly valued by researchers across the public, private and research sectors. The ABS has an extensive array of infrastructure in place to meet research priorities. This includes an arrangement for free-of-charge access to academics working in universities covered by an agreement with the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee and the ABS.

The ABS is currently trialling a new trusted data access model under the five safes framework. By carefully assessing people, projects, settings, data and output, appropriate controls can be put in place to maximise the use of data while protecting privacy and confidentiality (see Figure 1). The five safes framework is already in use in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the European Commission.

The trusted access arrangements are being progressively made available to Commonwealth and state/territory agencies. As at July 2016, over 60 users from around 10 agencies are accessing ABS data holdings through these new arrangements. This includes providing access to researchers or consultants working with these agencies.

Figure 1: Five Safes Framework



### 3.4 Ensuring cost-effective operations

To ensure the ABS continues to deliver statistics of importance to significant government outlays and public policy, the Government is investing \$257 million over five years to transform the way the ABS acquires, processes, analyses and disseminates statistics. This Statistical Business Transformation Program (SBTP) is modernising the ABS's infrastructure and business processes and will result in reduced costs, time to market, risks to statistical outputs, and red tape for providers. In addition, it will better position the ABS to more efficiently respond to opportunities such as whole of government(s) data integration and leveraging of big data.

As previously noted, the ABS takes its legislated mandate to maximise the use of existing data seriously and is an extensive user of existing data, both public and private sector data sources, alongside ensuring the privacy of personal and business information and upholding the legislative provisions to protect the identification of those who provide data to the ABS.

New sources of public and private sector data are regularly being assessed and investigated for use to enhance statistical information, reduce costs and reduce respondent burden. Potential uses currently under investigation include satellite imagery data (drawing on the work done by Geoscience Australia with the Australian Geoscience Data Cube) in the context of environmental and agriculture reporting; trialling the use of GPS tracking data for freight statistics; and trialling telecommunications data for service populations and other fly-in-fly-out populations.

Throughout the ABS transformation, the ABS will need to deliver and maintain trusted official statistics, transform and modernise the business, and reduce costs. This will involve streamlining business practices and reducing the regulatory impost on providers of information. Additionally, as the ABS is a steward of taxpayer resources it must ensure efficient processes are in place.

### 3.5 Coordinating and advising official bodies

The ABS is regularly at the forefront of new statistical standards to meet growing global expectations around relevance, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New statistical standards, such as the recently endorsed international standard for a System of Environmental-Economic Accounts and a soon-to-be endorsed standard for global geospatial-statistical integration, contribute to the relevance of Australia's global coherence as well as reputation.

Domestically, the ABS's statistical standards are widely used. For example, the Department of Social Services have used the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2011 to define service areas in their Streamlined Grant Agreements. The ABS also collaborates with the data community to develop and encourage adoption of important statistical standards. For example, the ABS has worked closely with ANZLIC – the Spatial Information Council (a peak intergovernmental spatial organisation) in the development of the Foundational Spatial Data Infrastructure which aims to provide current, quality, authoritative and standardised foundational spatial data for Australia and New Zealand. The ABS was also an early adopter of the Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender.

## 4. Realising the value of the growing private and public data assets

The Government expects the ABS to make data available and to maximise the use of data, and this inquiry by the Commission provides an opportunity to address several key issues in Australia's statistical system.

Making data available and both useable and used is not just a technical problem. Pre-requisites for realising the value of growing private and public sector data assets include:

- effective governance and institutional settings to ensure an enduring public sector data asset and integrity measures to protect that information
- having regard to the social licence from the community in how their information is collected, stored, shared and released
- quality assurance and maintenance of data assets, and ensuring appropriate use according to that quality
- enhancing the accessibility of data and sharing data to enable cross-sectoral and cross-domain analysis

### 4.1 Governance and institutional settings

Australia already has many governance and institutional settings in place to ensure an enduring public sector data asset and integrity measures to ensure the quality and security of sensitive information. There are a range of private sector organisations already providing data to the ABS under strict confidentiality agreements. This demonstrates trust in the ABS and the ABS's capacity to effectively manage and protect their brand while delivering public value from private sector assets. The trust private sector organisations hold in the ABS to manage their data and reputation has been

built over time and this enables new opportunities to be progressed, for example, with data integration.

The ABS already has a range of private sector organisations agreeing to provide data under strict confidentiality agreements, demonstrating the trust in the ABS's capacity to effectively manage and protect their brands while unleashing further public value from private sector assets. Moving data integration to a separate agency may result in less likelihood of these types of opportunities being able to be progressed until trust in the new organisation is established.

The ABS is Australia's central statistical authority and, by arrangement, the provider of statistical services to state and territory governments. The ABS has endured for over 100 years and will continue to endure into the future.

The integrity of the ABS and ABS's statistical assets and products are underpinned by internationally agreed principles and frameworks.

The ABS is a Statutory Authority with an independently appointed Australian Statistician. The Australian Statistics Advisory Council advises the Minister and the Australian Statistician on current and longer-term statistical priorities and the ABS work program.

ABS legislation already provides a mandate not only to collect, compile, analyse and disseminate statistical information, but also a mandate to maximise the use of existing data and means of collecting that data.

## **4.2 Social licence**

The ABS has a strong social licence, not only with the community and business sector but also with the user community. Our experience demonstrates the importance of balancing respective interests and that judgements do need to be made sometimes between maintaining community trust and expanding data use.

As noted in Section 3.1, public trust in the ABS is high, far higher than our international counterparts.

The ABS' social licence is underpinned by strong legislative provisions that ensure any information collected by the ABS, including that re-purposed from other public and private sources, is protected by secrecy provisions. The ABS cannot, never has, and never will release identifiable data.

Our statistical methodology, along with our confidentiality methodology, is world class. Internal ABS processes ensure that privacy is a paramount consideration when data is being integrated. No person will ever be able to see all of any one individual's information together at any point of the data combining process. Names or identifying personal information are kept separate from the content information.

## **4.3 Quality assurance and maintenance of data assets**

Quality is the hallmark of the ABS.

The ABS Quality Framework is used extensively by the ABS and our partners in Australia's statistical system to assess and articulate the quality of official statistics and data assets across seven dimensions: institutional environment, coherence; relevance; accuracy; timeliness; accessibility and interpretability. Internationally recognised, the ABS Quality Framework was used to assess the quality of the statistics on the 2013 Essential Statistical Assets (ESA) list. This was the first time Australia had a set of quality assessments of our essential statistics, which enable better utilisation of the government resources that go into the production of these statistics. The results showed that the quality of Australia's statistical assets is faring well, but there were still areas for improvement.

Effective statistical infrastructure is necessary to ensure the overall quality and accessibility of official statistics. The Essential Statistical Infrastructure consultation<sup>4</sup> in 2015 demonstrated that custodians, users and producers were concerned about the current state of statistical infrastructure within the Australian statistical system, but there were also opportunities available which could be leveraged to address those barriers. Opportunities included sharing existing infrastructure between agencies whilst barriers included incompatible infrastructure across government and sharing of and access to data.

Data quality in the ABS is also ensured by managing statistical risk. The ABS has recently improved its approach to statistical risk through a more holistic and strategic view of risk, ensuring a much lower risk appetite for our key statistics and clear accountability. The risk management process embeds the data quality framework to help articulate objectives and uses quality gates to prevent, detect and respond to risk.

#### **4.4 Enhancing the accessibility of data to enable cross-sectoral analysis**

Whilst the ABS is already enhancing the accessibility and sharing of data in appropriate ways to enable cross-sectoral and domain analysis through its data integration program, more could be done.

With this in mind, the ABS is currently developing a cost-effective, whole of government(s) model for enhancing the accessibility and sharing of data to enable cross-sectoral and cross-domain analysis that can best leverage existing expertise and infrastructure. It will enhance the ability of the public sector to provide insights into complex policy conundrums, such as improving the wellbeing of vulnerable populations, understanding life and educational transitions and increasing firm level productivity.

Drivers for the model are found overseas, particularly in the New Zealand Integrated Data Infrastructure. These drivers include:

- expanding the quality and use of administrative data
- enabling access to richer and higher quality datasets
- leveraging existing institutional arrangements and legislative provisions
- optimising access to high value public sector data assets

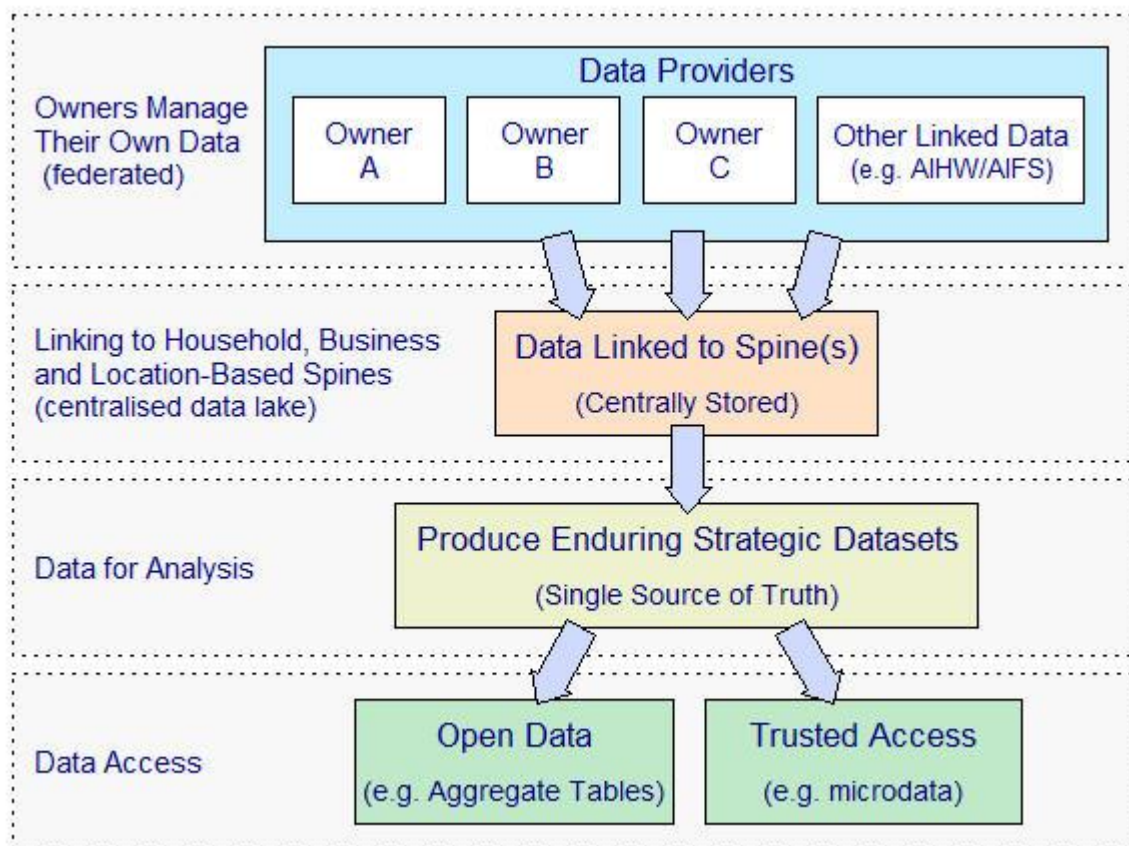
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<sup>4</sup> The Essential Statistical Infrastructure consultation process was an important phase of the Essential Statistical Assets initiative, which aimed to understand the key statistical infrastructure barriers and opportunities underpinning the production and use of official statistics.

- making best use of existing, often scarce resources and a finite skill base
- building analytical and program evaluation capability
- attracting academic research on Australian datasets to study Australian policy questions
- providing a means to objectively measure policy and program effectiveness

The model leverages the strengths of the ABS in terms of existing legislative provisions securing the confidentiality of sensitive information, community trust, our expertise and capacity to manage very large data sets, and the statistical and methodological expertise available within the ABS to produce reliable information in a cost-effective manner. The model is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 – Whole of Government(s) Model for Cross-Sectoral and Cross-Domain Analysis**



Features of the model include:

- Leveraging existing data – data owners, both public and private sector, would remain responsible for the collection, management, and curation of their data holdings. These data owners would provide access to their data to a centralised entity, such as the ABS, where the data would be linked to a spine and centrally stored and managed. It is important that data owners would be responsible for the curation and care of their own data before it is linked.
- Adding value – using data provided by data owners, a central entity such as the ABS would link data to a spine and central store and manage the linked dataset. A centralised model facilitates the management of risk, security and costs. The spine would be like a single-source-of-truth, such as an address register, business register or cadastral register. This would enable analysis of counterfactuals (for example, those within the welfare system



compared to those not) as well as provide important, population-based reference (for example, per capita measures).

- Enabling analysis – once data is linked and quality assured, data extracts would be produced for analysis. These would be accessed by users for program evaluation, research and official statistics.
- Enabling access – a federated access model is being considered, supporting open access and trusted access to both official statistics and microdata.

The whole of government(s) model would support official statistics, research, program evaluation and analysis. The model is not being proposed for operational or compliance purposes. This is important for maintaining the trust of the Australian public and private sectors who contribute data to Australia's statistical system, and to maintain consistency with the social licence of the ABS.

## Appendix 1: ABS Legislative Framework

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* and the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* set out the primary functions, duties and powers of the ABS.

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* establishes the ABS as an independent statutory authority and the office of the Statistician, with Section 6(1) describing the six functions of the ABS as being to:

- constitute the central statistical authority for the Australian Government and provide services for the state and territory governments
- collect, compile, analyse and disseminate statistics and related information
- ensure coordination of the operations of official bodies in the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics and related information
- develop standards for statistics and ensure compliance
- give advice and assistance to official bodies in relation to statistics
- provide liaison between Australia, other countries and international organisations on statistical issues

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* also establishes the Australian Statistics Advisory Council, prescribes the functions of the Council and prescribes the membership of the Council and its operations.

The *Census and Statistics Act 1905*:

- empowers the Australian Statistician to collect statistical information on a broad range of demographic, economic, environmental and social topics
- enables the Australian Statistician to direct a person to provide statistical information, in which case they are legally obliged to do so
- requires the ABS to publish the results of these statistical collections
- places a life-long obligation on all ABS officers to maintain the secrecy of information collected under the Act, and provides harsh penalties for those who fail to do so
- requires a Census to be conducted every five years

Under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* and in compliance with the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, state and territory population statistics are used to calculate representation entitlements of states and territories. The Census is used as a critical input into the *Federal Financial Relations Act 2009* as well, which administers the distribution of government funds like GST revenue.

The ABS, as a statutory authority, is also governed by other Commonwealth legislation, such as the *Public Service Act 1990*, *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, the *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013*.

## Appendix 2: Statement of Expectations and Statement of Intent for the ABS

### Statement of Expectations for the Australian Bureau of Statistics

#### Introduction

This Statement outlines the Government's expectations of the ABS when carrying out its role and responsibilities. It forms part of the Government's commitment to the good governance of statutory authorities and reducing the regulatory burden on business and the community.

The ABS is the central statistical authority for Australian governments. It is the main provider of Australian statistics used in the development and implementation of public policy and for a range of purposes by businesses, non-government organisations and the wider community. It also coordinates the activities of other official statistical bodies to promote and encourage the efficient provision of statistics.

The ABS exercises leadership of Australia's national statistical system by overseeing the quality of official statistics and working in partnership with other countries and international organisations on statistical matters, including ensuring consistency with internationally accepted frameworks.

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*, the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* and the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* set out the primary functions, duties and powers of the ABS. The Statistician<sup>5</sup> controls the operations of the ABS, subject to relevant laws.

The ABS should carry out its functions in a way that ensures it maintains its reputation as a world-class statistical agency, and supports and promotes the efficient and effective delivery of official statistics and statistical services for Australia.

#### Independence and accountability in exercise of functions

The ABS operates as part of the Australian Government and is accountable to the Parliament, and ultimately to the public, through the Treasury Ministers, the Parliamentary Committee process and the tabling of its annual report. While it is imperative that the ABS acts independently and objectively in performing its functions and exercising its powers as set out in legislation, the Government expects the ABS to take into account the Government's broad policy framework in performing its role and meeting its responsibilities.

It is particularly important for the integrity and perceived integrity of official statistics that the ABS acts with independence, objectivity, transparency and with a view to best practice in both the collection, analysis and dissemination of statistics and in the determination of the methods and procedures for their production.

The Government's priorities and policies will be clearly documented and communicated to the ABS, and the ABS, like other agencies, will be accountable for adherence to, or performance against, these requirements.

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, the functions of the Statistician are referred to as those of the ABS.

The ABS should, where possible, participate in initiatives that are directly relevant to it. The ABS should also consider the outcomes or recommendations of relevant Government-established panels, reviews or inquiries.

### **Ministerial direction**

Where the Minister directs the collection of statistical information under section 9 of the Census and Statistics Act 1905, the Government expects that the ABS will determine, in accordance with best practice, the methods and procedures for producing this information, and the extent, form and publication of that information.

More generally, where the Minister exercises powers of direction, those directions will be given transparently.

### **The Government's deregulation agenda**

The Government is committed to reducing red tape and compliance costs for business and the community as a critical step towards improving Australia's productivity.

The Government expects that the ABS will look for opportunities to reduce compliance costs for businesses and the community and contribute to the Government's \$1 billion red and green tape reduction target. This includes greater use of existing administrative, transactional, commercial and other digital sources, where suitable.

The Government also expects that the ABS will comply with the Government's enhanced Regulatory Impact Analysis requirements for all regulatory proposals, including considering the impacts of regulation on business and the community and costing proposals before they are introduced, using the Regulatory Burden Measurement framework.

The Government's Regulator Performance Framework, which applies from 1 July 2015, provides further detail on the Government's expectations for the performance of the ABS and other relevant agencies against specific performance indicators<sup>6</sup>. The aim of the Framework is to encourage relevant agencies to undertake their functions with the minimum impact necessary to achieve their objectives. In particular, agencies are expected to demonstrate that they are adopting a risk-based approach to compliance obligations, engagement and enforcement, allowing for proportionate approaches that, in the case of the ABS, balance the risk of poor data quality with the compliance burden for respondents. This allows the agencies to achieve their objectives more efficiently and reduce the overall compliance burden, particularly for small businesses.

The Government expects that the ABS will act in accordance with best practice in its decision-making, policies, processes and communication practices to maximise effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, and minimise compliance costs. The ABS should regularly review its policies and procedures to identify improvements to achieve these goals.

### **Effective provision of key statistics and use of data**

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<sup>6</sup> The Regulator Performance Framework complements the broader performance reporting requirements set out in the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 and related instructions from the Department of Finance.

The Government expects the ABS to prioritise its resourcing to ensure the maintenance of core statistics. This includes the economic, social and population statistics that stakeholders consider to be the most important.

The Government expects the ABS to deliver high quality, objective and flexible official statistical solutions and to improve the accessibility, timeliness and relevance of Australia's statistical information. The ABS should also work to improve the management of official statistics and promote their informed use.

The ABS should, where possible, avoid the duplication of statistical data collection and help to minimise such duplication by other agencies or researchers. In particular, the ABS should work collaboratively to unlock public sector, transactional and other 'big data' holdings.

### **Engagement with stakeholders**

The ABS has important relationships with the providers and users of its data, including Australian households, businesses and governments. The Government expects that the ABS will manage these relationships to ensure that it is able to perform its statutory functions well, including by consulting with data providers and instituting procedures that minimise the burden of providing data to the ABS.

Where the ABS makes decisions that impose compliance requirements or exercises powers in a way that would pose significant implications for businesses or households, the Government expects that the ABS will consult as appropriate with stakeholders and the Government.

The Government expects the ABS to engage data users to ensure that the range of statistics collected and disseminated by the ABS is appropriate to their needs, and to consult stakeholders regarding significant changes to the ABS' work program.

The Government expects that the ABS will endeavour to maintain the trust of Australians, and the public and private sectors, in Australia's official statistics.

### **Collaboration with other bodies**

The Government expects the ABS to maintain robust, effective and collaborative working partnerships with other producers of official statistics in Australia to ensure the proper functioning of the National Statistical System. The Government also expects the ABS to be a respected leader in international statistical communities and bodies, and ensure that Australia's interests in international comparable statistics are taken into account.

### **Relationship with the responsible Minister**

The ABS plays an essential role in ensuring that the Government is well-placed to respond promptly to issues that may arise in the collection and dissemination of statistics.

The ABS should therefore provide Treasury portfolio Ministers with accurate and timely advice on significant issues in its core area of business. Significant issues might include: matters on which the Government may be called to comment in Parliament or in public; important ABS operational or budgetary issues; and the ABS's decisions regarding the appropriate action for it to take following substantial problems or disruption which may result in substantial revisions to key statistics.

In view of the important role that statistics and their analysis play in policy development and implementation, the ABS should consult the Minister on its work plan annually, or when significant changes to it are contemplated.

### **Relationship with Treasury**

Treasury's key role is to support and advise the Treasurer and other Treasury Ministers in their responsibilities by being the principal source of advice on the economy and a range of policy issues, including statistical policy issues.

The Government expects that Treasury and the ABS will maintain a close relationship. Treasury is expected to take into account the views and experience of the ABS when considering and advising on changes to statistics policy and legislation and to ensure that the objectives of legislation are fulfilled. By advising Treasury on the operational implications of Government policy initiatives, the ABS is expected to contribute to policy development.

In view of the above, the ABS should inform the Secretary of the Treasury of all significant statistical, financial and operational matters, including all strategically important correspondence between the ABS and Treasury portfolio ministers. The ABS should keep the Secretary of the Treasury informed of significant meetings between the ABS and Government Ministers and other key policy figures. The ABS should also advise Treasury about changes to legislation or policy that, in the ABS's opinion, would improve the regulatory framework or minimise compliance costs for businesses and the community. Treasury will also ensure that relevant information is passed to the ABS in a timely manner.

The Government expects that the ABS will continue to provide Treasury and other relevant agency and ministerial officials with access to key ABS statistics under appropriate 'lock up' arrangements for the purposes of preparing briefs for the Government where access during an embargo period is required.

### **Organisational governance and financial management**

The ABS employs staff under the Public Service Act 1999 (PSA). Under the PSA, agencies are required to uphold and promote the APS Values. All APS employees are required to adhere to the APS Code of Conduct. The ABS is also required to comply with the APS Bargaining Framework in relation to APS employees.

The ABS further engages staff in accordance with regulations made pursuant to the Census and Statistics Act 1905. These staff are also made subject to the provisions of the APS Code of Conduct as part of their employment contracts and the ABS Enterprise Agreements.

The requirements for the ABS's financial management are set out in the relevant legislation, including the PGPA Act and associated PGPA Rules and instruments. The Government expects that the ABS will be efficient in its use of resources and pursue opportunities to continue improving the efficiency of its operations and to demonstrate value for money for the services that it delivers.

The Government expects the ABS to put in place appropriate security arrangements for data protected by security and privacy provisions in laws or Government policies. The Government also

expects the ABS to put in place appropriate controls to manage the risk of unauthorised disclosure of market sensitive information.

## **Conclusion**

The Government's aims for the ABS are that it: delivers services that are timely, relevant, responsive and of the highest integrity and quality; is efficient and effective in its use of resources; administers its responsibilities in a way that minimises compliance costs for business and the community; and, in exercising leadership of Australia's national statistical system, works in partnership with other organisations to expand and improve the quality and awareness of statistical services available to governments and the community.

## **Statement of Intent for the Australian Bureau of Statistics**

This Statement of Intent outlines the response of the ABS to the Government's Statement of Expectations for the ABS.

The Australian Statistician and the ABS will continue to operate independently and objectively in performing its day-to-day business in a way that maintains its reputation as a world-class statistical agency, retains the trust of the public, and supports and promotes the efficient and effective delivery of official statistics for Australia.

The ABS has published a refreshed corporate plan that outlines the ABS vision to be an organisation that is self-aware, that collaborates, that listens and learns, that is agile and innovates, and is aware of the information requirements of its users.

The ABS Corporate Plan is aligned with the Government's commitment to good corporate governance and reducing red tape for business and the community, and has drawn on the key dimensions in the Statement of Expectations.

The ABS will deliver on its objectives by undertaking transformational change across all facets of the organisation, not just the systems, processes and infrastructure. This includes:

- ensuring ABS staff better understand the environment in which the ABS operates, including the central relationship with the Australian Government;
- developing a corporate strategy that has a focus on the ABS being both rigorous and innovative, with greater attention to statistical priorities of main economic indicators and key population statistics, that encourages effective relationships with key partners and prudent use of scarce taxpayer resources;
- governance arrangements that enable sound, timely decision making and accountability;
- a workforce and culture that enables the ABS to deliver its expected outcomes; and
- statistical infrastructure that enables the ABS to undertake its information activities more effectively both now and into the future

The ABS acknowledges and welcomes the \$250 million investment of the Australian Government to fund the upgrade of critical statistical infrastructure and business processes.

## **Independence and accountability in exercise of functions**

The ABS will be cognisant of the Government's key policy objectives and participate, where possible, in initiatives that are directly relevant to the ABS. The ABS will also consider the outcomes or recommendations of relevant Government established panels, reviews or inquiries.

The ABS will be transparent and accountable in relation to its role as the central statistical authority for Australian governments, including through the publication of its corporate plan, forward work program and annual report.

The ABS intent is to be more open in its engagement with stakeholders, to strengthen partnerships and to be responsive to the statistical needs of Australian governments and the community, within the constraints of available resources.

## ***Ministerial direction***

Where the Minister directs the collection of statistical information under section 9 of the Census and Statistics Act 1905, the ABS will determine, in accordance with best practice, the methods and procedures for producing this information, and the extent, form and publication of that information.

## **The Government's deregulation agenda**

The ABS will look for opportunities to reduce compliance costs for businesses and the community and contribute to the Government's \$1 billion red and green tape reduction target, including through greater use of existing administrative, transactional, commercial and other digital sources where suitable.

The ABS will comply with the Government's enhanced Regulatory Impact Analysis requirements, including considering the impacts of regulation on business and the community and costing proposals before they are introduced, using the Regulatory Burden Measurement framework.

The ABS will act in accordance with best practice in its decision-making, policies, processes and communication practices to maximise effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, and minimise compliance costs. The ABS will regularly review its policies and procedures to identify improvements.

Where the ABS decides to directly collect information and therefore impose compliance requirements, and the exercise of that power would have significant implications on businesses or households, the ABS will consult as appropriate with stakeholders and the Government.

## **Effective provision of key statistics and use of data**

The ABS will be efficient with its use of taxpayers' dollars and will prioritise its resourcing to ensure the maintenance of core statistics. This includes the economic, social and population statistics that are considered by stakeholders to be the most important.



The ABS will deliver high quality, objective and flexible statistical solutions. ABS statistics will be timely and accompanied by information about their quality to inform their use.

The ABS will work collaboratively across the Australian Government to unlock public sector data holdings. Through this mechanism, the ABS will avoid duplication of statistical data collection. By actively promoting the compatibility between, and the integration of, statistics compiled by official bodies, the ABS will maximise the possible utilisation of information for statistical purposes.

### **Engagement with stakeholders**

The ABS will strengthen its relationships with the providers and users of its data, including Australian households, businesses and governments to ensure that it is able to perform its statutory functions well. This will include consulting with data providers and instituting procedures that minimise the burden of providing data to the ABS and consulting with data users to ensure that the range of statistics collected and disseminated by the ABS is appropriate to their needs.

The continued trust and support of providers is critical to the ABS. The ABS protects the confidentiality of information provided and respect the contribution made by data providers while seeking to minimise the burden placed on them. The ABS will explain why information is being collected and how it will be used.

A strategic priority for the ABS is to revitalise stakeholder engagement across government, business and the statistical community, as a central pillar of the ABS organisational culture. The ABS Engagement Strategy will ensure that we are a connected and responsive partner in government, open to meeting the needs and expectations of our stakeholders.

The ABS will also develop statistical solutions that maintain confidentiality but unlock the value of information.

The ABS will work transparently with stakeholders to develop its work program and be able to clearly articulate the rationale for the shape of the work program and the prioritisation of its statistical activities and outputs to inform key policy decisions and support service delivery and evaluation.

### **Collaboration with other bodies**

The ABS is committed to maintaining effective working partnerships with other federal and state agencies, the ABS's counterparts in overseas jurisdictions, and other official statistical bodies to ensure the proper functioning of Australia's statistical governance framework, and to expand and improve the quality and awareness of statistical services available to governments and the community.

The ABS goal is to be a respected leader in the national and international statistical communities, producing statistics of integrity, and enhancing the coordination of, and investment in, the National Statistical System. The ABS will ensure that Australia contributes to internationally comparable

statistics and international statistical standards.

### **Relationship with the responsible Minister**

The ABS will keep the Treasurer and the responsible Minister informed with accurate and timely advice on significant issues in its core area of business. Significant issues might include: matters on which the Government may be called to comment in Parliament or in public; important ABS operational or budgetary issues; and the ABS's decisions regarding the appropriate action for it to take following substantial problems or disruption which may result in substantial revisions to key statistics.

The ABS will consult the Minister on its work plan annually, or when significant changes to it are contemplated.

### **Relationship with Treasury**

The ABS is committed to working productively with the Treasury and will maintain a close relationship including providing advice and information relevant to the Government's statistical priorities and regarding significant statistical matters.

The ABS will provide the Secretary to the Treasury with all information, briefing, press releases and correspondence given to Ministers as well as notice of significant meetings between the ABS and Government Ministers and other key policy figures. The ABS will contribute to policy development by advising Treasury on the operational implications of Government policy initiatives. The ABS will continue to provide Treasury and other relevant agency and ministerial officials with access to key ABS statistics under appropriate 'lock up' arrangements where access during an embargo period is required for the purposes of preparing briefs for the Government.

### **Organisational governance and financial management**

The ABS will continue to be governed by the relevant provisions of the Public Service Act 1999 and relevant financial management legislation, including the new Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013. The ABS is committed to upholding and promoting the APS values, as well as adhering to the APS Code of Conduct.

The ABS has put in place appropriate security arrangements for confidential information, including controls to manage the risk of unauthorised disclosure of market sensitive information.

The ABS is responding to the Australian Public Service Commission capability review by focussing on the following five change actions:

1. Comprehensive and coordinated approach to transformation
  - *Senior leadership develop and implement a comprehensive transformation agenda.*
2. Leadership, decision making and resource prioritisation
  - *To ensure the organisation has leadership, management and decision making arrangements that are fit for purpose.*

3. Open and engaged partnerships
  - *We will become more open to meeting stakeholder needs and expectations.*
4. Staff commitment and contribution to transformation
  - *Our staff are committed to, understand and contribute to the transformation agenda.*
5. Valuing Diversity and high performance
  - *We will build on existing ABS performance management processes to facilitate high performance and increase diversity.*

## **Conclusion**

The ABS intent is to provide high quality, authoritative and timely information on key aspects of the Australian economy and community.

The ABS will make sound choices about the information it can produce within the funding that is available, drawing upon its extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The ABS will enable more effective use of its information, while also respecting any legislative constraints. By transforming the way in which the organisation works, the ABS will better manage quality risks, respond to new information requirements in a timely manner and achieve efficiencies

### Appendix 3: ABS engagement with the Public Sector Data Initiative Program of High-Value Demonstration Projects

Project	Lead Agency	ABS contribution
Project 1: Early interventions for troubled families	Department of Human Services	Project expecting to use the Multi-Agency Data Integration Project dataset for applied research in relation to troubled families once longitudinal data is available.
Project 2: Better targeting of mental health services	Department of Health	Following the ABS linkage of three Commonwealth data sources (MBS, PBS and Census data) to create the Mental Health Services-Census integrated data set, the ABS and Commonwealth Department of Health have worked together to interrogate the linked dataset to identify barriers to accessing mental health services.
Project 3: Indigenous early childhood interventions (longitudinal study)	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	ABS worked with PM&C to help overcome barriers to linking Commonwealth and State data.
Project 4: Better harnessing environmental data	Department of Environment  (the ABS has no involvement in this project)	The ABS is not involved.
Project 5: Analyse freight company data to plan road infrastructure	Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development	The ABS and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development are working in collaboration to test the suitability of freight vehicle telematics data to identify road infrastructure bottlenecks and inform infrastructure priorities.
Project 6: Analyse productivity in firms and evaluate policy	Department of Industry, Innovation and Science	The ABS collaborated with the Department of Industry to link personal income taxation data at the employee level with business characteristics data from the Expanded Analytical Business Longitudinal Database.
Project 7: An online market research tool for small/medium sized enterprises (SMEs)	ABS	The ABS worked with CSIRO (Data61) to shape the design and function of a data-driven tool for small to medium sized enterprises to select an optimal location. The tool uses public, private and local government data.

