

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS' STATEMENT OF INTENT

This Statement of Intent outlines the response of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (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.