



AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Annual Report
2002–03

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The Hon. Ross Cameron, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer

I have pleasure in submitting the Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ended 30 June 2003.

The Report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under sub-section 24(2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Report is dated on the day I approved the finalised text for printing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandra Harding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Sandra Harding
Chairperson

13 October 2003

Australian Statistics Advisory Council

Mission

To ensure that, in keeping with Council's statutory charter, the advice furnished to the Minister and the Statistician in relation to the collection and dissemination of statistics has due regard to relative priorities, is objective, relevant, timely, constructive and practical, and that it is sensitive to the needs of both suppliers and users of statistical data.

FOREWORD

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) exists to provide advice to the Government through the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer and to the Australian Statistician. As you will read, the Council comprises a number of committed members from all over Australia, representing many interests, sources of expertise and locations. The diversity of viewpoints that the membership implies, make for robust discussions of key issues and, I trust, a useful sounding board for the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Advice provided by Council aims to focus attention on issues critical to the nation where relevant and timely statistics are needed by policymakers. Such issues include: the social and economic impacts of Australia's ageing population; factors influencing participation in the workforce; the health and wellbeing of the population as well as factors influencing productivity such as innovation, research and development, and the knowledge based economy.

Over the past 12 months, ASAC has provided advice on these and many other issues, as indicated in this report. Preparation for the 2006 census, information development plans to provide a focus on the demand for and supply of statistical information, child and youth statistics, and education and training have all been addressed during the year.

Many thanks to Dennis Trewin, Australian Statistician and his team for their positive approach to ASAC and to the advice provided. Many thanks also to the ASAC secretariat, without whose excellent support ASAC simply could not function in an effective manner.

I trust you find the report informative. I would welcome follow up contact about the issues raised.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandra Harding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Professor Sandra Harding
Chairperson

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Note: In this Report, after the first reference, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council is referred to as ASAC or the Council, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics as the ABS or the Bureau.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

Under subsection 18(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- “(a) the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;*
- (b) annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and*
- (c) any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.”*

The Act enables the Minister or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of the Council on these matters. The Council also offers advice on these matters to the Minister or the Australian Statistician when it considers it appropriate to do so.

The Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chairperson, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between ten and twenty-two part-time members, including one nominee of each state premier and the chief ministers of the two territories. The Chairperson and members are appointed by the responsible Minister for periods of five years and up to three years respectively, and are eligible for reappointment. The membership of Council as at 30 June 2003 is detailed at Appendix 1.

Subsection 24(2) of the Act provides that: “the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act”.

Council generally meets twice a year. Where appropriate, experts in a particular field are invited to attend for relevant agenda items. In addition to the meetings, Council has a web-based discussion forum which enables regular interaction between members.

2. SUMMARY OF YEAR'S ACTIVITIES

During 2002–03, Council held two meetings, on 19 November 2002 and 29 May 2003. The full agendas for the meetings are provided at Appendix 2.

Key issues considered by Council during the year included:

- ABS Forward Work Program 2003–04 to 2005–06
- Information Development Plans
- Development and Implementation of the National Statistical Service
- National Ageing Statistics Unit
- Supporting the Research Community
- Education and Training Statistics
- Labour Force Statistics.

2.1 ABS Forward Work Program 2003–04 to 2005–06

One of the key functions of Council is to advise the ABS on the annual and longer-term statistical priorities. At both the November and May meetings the ABS presented to Council papers relating to its forward work program.

At the November meeting Council considered ABS proposals for additions to the forward work program. Council supported the proposals brought forward with particularly strong support for:

- the development of a business longitudinal database (sourced from administrative data)
- establishment of a Children and Youth Statistics Unit and the continuation of the Ageing Statistics Unit
- a proposed survey of business innovation and linking it to the business longitudinal database
- work to improve estimates of Gross State Product
- commitment of resources to an Indigenous Community Engagement Strategy and in particular the proposal to give something back to the Indigenous communities through the provision of easily accessible data and statistical training

- the development of a National Centre for Environment Statistics
- a range of initiatives to support the concept of the National Statistical Service.

In considering the ABS proposals, Council remains mindful of the reporting load on businesses, and particularly welcomed the proposed use of administrative data to develop the business longitudinal database. While the proposed survey of innovation will result in some increase in reporting load, Council also supported the discontinuation of the Business Expectations Survey, which resulted in an offsetting reduction in the compliance cost imposed on businesses.

At the May meeting ABS presented to Council two papers for consideration. The first provided a summary of ABS' statistical activities relevant to the Key Whole of Government Priorities Statement by the Prime Minister to the Committee for Economic Development Australia (CEDA) and the Prime Minister's National Research Priorities. The second paper summarised the key statistical priorities of state/territory governments as well as the ABS statistical activities relevant to these priorities. Both these papers highlighted the large array of statistical information compiled by the ABS and the need to raise awareness of the information available.

In considering the papers Council noted the need for, and importance of better statistical measures of outcomes as opposed to inputs. It also noted that there was a potential role for longitudinal studies to complement the extensive array of cross-sectional data to assist in addressing some of the key policy initiatives.

Council noted the large statistical program being undertaken by the ABS. It also discussed and noted the critical importance of Information Development Plans in identifying both key policy issues and key statistical gaps. Two policy issues identified by Council as most in need of improved statistical information were the factors discriminating successful businesses and the barriers to improved labour force participation. Strong emphasis was also given to ensuring the quality of population estimates, given their key role in determining funding and electoral matters.

2.2 2006 Population Census Planning

At the May meeting Council considered a paper by ABS on the strategy and timetable for the development and conduct of the 2006 census, and some of the data content issues that will be considered in the process.

Members supported the importance of obtaining data on 'unpaid work'. However they encouraged ABS to give careful consideration to the definition of unpaid work and to explore the best method for collecting the data. In particular, Members expressed some concerns about the appropriateness of the population census for collecting data on unpaid work and of the subsequent utility of the data collected.

Council also noted that there is a substantial amount of data on unpaid work, caring and volunteering activities currently available through other ABS statistical publications. Council further noted ABS intentions to conduct a Time Use Survey in 2005–06.

Council strongly supported further investigations on the inclusion of a question on disability in the next census. Members commented that such data are required for the planning of government and non-government service delivery. At the same time the difficulties of framing an appropriate question were highlighted. Council expressed the view that careful consideration and testing of any question to assess its appropriateness would be required.

ASAC strongly encouraged the ABS to consult widely in the development of the census content.

2.3 Information Development Plans

A major development in the ABS in 2002–03, has been the concept of Information Development Plans (IDPs) in defined fields of statistics. The intention of the IDP is to provide a framework for looking at the key policy issues, the data requirements to address those issues, identifying the available data (both ABS and non-ABS data) and establishing what additional data are needed and who has carriage of providing the data.

During the year Council specifically considered a draft Information Development Plan for Education and Training Statistics, which is discussed below.

Council strongly supported the concept and development of IDPs. Council particularly welcomed the objective of establishing a shared understanding between all interested parties of the issues and a shared commitment to actions to be undertaken. Council emphasised the importance of correctly identifying up-front the key issues and what the policy questions were that needed answering.

2.4 Development and Implementation of the National Statistical Service

ABS with the strong support of Council has been actively moving towards the development of the concept of a National Statistical Service (NSS) which recognises that much statistical information resides in other government agencies, particularly administrative data, and in many cases is largely untapped. The main aim of the NSS is to provide users with reliable statistics that they require irrespective of the source.

During 2002–03 Council was provided with an outline of how ABS intends to advance the development and implementation of the NSS. Again there was strong support for the concept of the NSS particularly from the state/territory government members. Council did note that there were a number of issues to be resolved such

as the costs and difficulties for agencies in developing existing administrative systems to fully tap their statistical potential.

Council noted that the development of IDPs would be a key and integral component in the development of the NSS. It also noted that an important element in progressing the NSS would be the development of strong partnerships and collaboration between ABS and other agencies.

Council strongly endorsed the directions ABS is proposing in respect of the NSS.

2.5 National Ageing Statistics Unit

Ageing has been, and continues to be, an issue high on the ASAC agenda. In response, the ABS has established the National Ageing Statistics Unit. At the May meeting Council was provided with information on the strategic direction, policy context, work program and governance arrangements for the National Ageing Statistics Unit.

Council had a very useful discussion of this key issue. The meeting identified a strong need for information to better understand the whole issue of an ageing Australia. This included transitions to retirement, labour force participation rates, factors influencing retirement intentions, the nature of mature age workers and the work they do, and the health issues and service requirements of older people. Ageing will continue to be a focus of attention for Council in 2003–04.

2.6 Supporting the Research Community

During 2002–03 the ABS reported to Council on a range of issues relating to microdata access. These issues mainly related to the potential threat to the confidentiality of the unidentified microdata by the increasing availability of external databanks.

Council noted and fully endorsed the ABS' initiatives to put in place measures to ensure the continued availability of unidentified microdata files on CD-ROM, and was very pleased with the development of a web-based remote access data laboratory to provide more detailed data. At the same time Council recognised and strongly supported the obligation of the Statistician to ensure the confidentiality of individuals' information.

2.7 Education and Training Statistics

Council noted the developments and improvements to the range of education and training statistics in 2002–03.

The development of a Framework for Education and Training Statistics, involving statistical leadership and consultation with a range of government agencies undertaking data collection in this area, including all state and territory education

and training departments, has been an important focus of the Bureau's National Centre for Education and Training Statistics. Council welcomed the release during 2002–03 of the *Information Paper: Measuring Learning in Australia — A Framework for Education and Training Statistics*.

At the November meeting, Council considered a draft Information Development Plan for Education and Training Statistics. The Plan identifies key issues and areas for consideration, presents agreed directions for improving the relevance, coverage, comparability and quality of statistics, and identifies responsibilities for progressing individual strands of work, and for monitoring overall progress. Council observed that the plan's attention to the higher education sector was underdeveloped and that reliable data in respect of this sector is sorely needed. It also noted the need for more information on education as an industry, in particular measuring the efficiency of supplying education services.

Council were encouraged by ABS progress in this important area of statistics and look forward to the finalisation of the Information Development Plan for Education and Training Statistics.

2.8 Labour Force Statistics

Reliable and relevant information on the labour market continues to be a high priority issue for Council recognising the impact that access to the labour market has on the wider Australian community.

At the November meeting Council was presented with a stocktake of the labour force data currently available. Council acknowledges the very extensive range of labour force statistics produced by the ABS, including indicators of emerging labour market issues. However Council expressed the view that much of the data continues to be underutilised and there is scope for improved dissemination strategies. Two gaps identified by Council were information on the duration of vacancies and longitudinal data, especially on the employment status of individuals and firm employment.

Council welcomed the new quarterly publication *Australian Labour Market Statistics* that includes a range of information on employment and unemployment, underutilised labour, earnings, industrial relations and job vacancies as providing valuable additional data on emerging labour market priorities.

3. THE YEAR AHEAD

2003–04 will be a challenging year for Council and for the ABS. The demand for statistics continues unabated and Council has a critical role in advising the Bureau on priorities in that regard.

During 2002–03 Council devoted some time to considering what are the big issues confronting society and policy makers and encouraging the ABS to look at available data sources and what new statistics might be needed to address those issues. Key issues identified by Council included:

- social and economic impacts of Australia's ageing population
- factors influencing participation in the workforce
- health and wellbeing
- factors influencing productivity such as innovation, research and development and the knowledge based economy.

These issues will be high on the agenda for Council in 2003–04.

Many of the above issues are interrelated and it is in this regard that Council sees a key role for the development of IDPs, to the extent that they commence from the perspective of what are the key policy issues.

While Council recognises that there will be increasing demands on the ABS for relevant statistical information on these policy issues, it does not necessarily expect that the data needs will be met through new statistical collections conducted by the Bureau. In that regard, Council strongly supports the ABS' role in developing a National Statistical Service. The concept of a National Statistical Service provides the potential to greatly increase the availability, accessibility and useability of information derived from key administrative and survey data sets. Council views it as being essential to sound policy formulation, research and decision-making. It is also essential that ABS provide strong statistical leadership in establishing the National Statistical Service.

In a similar vein, ASAC sees scope for the ABS to undertake analysis of a range of ABS and non-ABS datasets, and where appropriate the linking of data sets to provide deeper understanding of the data. Increasingly there will be a greater role for secondary data analysis and ABS efforts to support that will be closely monitored by Council.

The further development of IDPs and progress with the National Statistical Service will be topics of critical interest to Council during 2003–04.

During 2003–04 another key role for Council will be providing advice to the Statistician on the 2006 census. The census is the major statistical undertaking of the ABS. Given the comprehensive nature of the census there is inevitably more proposals for topics than can be accommodated within the resources available to the ABS. At the same time Council is mindful of the need to keep the workload imposed on the reporting public to reasonable levels.

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL AND ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Membership of Council at 30 June 2003 and Date of Initial Appointment

Member	Position	Date first appointed
Prof. Sandra Harding	Dean Faculty of Business Queensland University of Technology	01.03.02
Mr Dennis Trewin	Australian Statistician (ex officio)	05.07.00
Ms Christine Bierbaum	Executive Director State Infrastructure Department for Business, Manufacturing and Trade South Australia	01.12.97
Dr Peter Crossman	Assistant Under Treasurer and Queensland Government Statistician Office of Economic and Statistical Research Queensland Treasury	11.03.99
Prof. Peter Dawkins	Dean and Ronald Henderson Professor Faculty of Economics and Commerce The University of Melbourne	01.04.99(a)
Mr Clem Doherty	Chairman Like Minded Individuals Pty Ltd	01.05.97(b)
Mr Peter Horn	Director Fiscal Strategy New South Wales Treasury	01.05.03
Ms Betty Hounslow	Principal Consultant RPR Consulting	01.05.97(b)
Mr Wayne Jackson	Deputy Secretary Department of Family and Community Services	01.03.02
Mr Peter Jones	Director Economic Analysis Northern Territory Treasury	01.03.03
Dr Steven Kates	Chief Economist Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	01.09.91(c)

Dr Michael Kirby	Director Economic, Social and Environmental Group Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria	01.09.98
Mr Chris Lock	Director Economic Policy Department of Treasury and Finance Tasmania	01.06.02
Mr Haydn Lowe	Partner Blue Lagoon Pearls	01.04.03
Ms Anne Nolan	Acting Coordinator of Energy Office of Energy Western Australia	01.02.02
Dr Martin Parkinson	Executive Director Macroeconomic Group Department of the Treasury	01.03.02
Prof. Fiona Stanley AC	Director Telethon Institute for Child Health Research	01.04.03
Ms Louise Sylvan	Chief Executive Australian Consumers Association	01.03.02

- (a) Membership expired at 31 March 2002, however attended subsequent Council meetings as an observer until formally reappointed 1 April 2003.
- (b) Membership expired at 30 April 2000, however attended subsequent Council meetings as an observer until formally reappointed 1 March 2002.
- (c) Membership expired at 31 August 2000, however attended subsequent Council meetings as an observer until formally reappointed 1 March 2002.

Changes in Membership Since 30 June 2002

2 January 2003	Ms Sandra Lambert's term of appointment expired
1 March 2003	Appointment of Mr Peter Jones
1 April 2003	Appointments of Prof. Fiona Stanley and Mr Haydn Lowe and reappointment of Prof. Peter Dawkins
30 April 2003	Mr Richard Cox's term of appointment expired
1 May 2003	Appointment of Mr Peter Horn

Meetings of Council 2002–03

19 November 2002

29 May 2003

Attendance at Meetings

		Attendance
Chairman	Prof. Sandra Harding	2
Australian Statistician	Mr Dennis Trewin	2
State/Territory Representatives		
South Australia	Ms Christine Bierbaum	2
Queensland	Dr Peter Crossman	1
	Mr Walter Robb(a)	1
New South Wales	Mr Peter Horn(b)	1
Northern Territory	Mr Peter Jones(c)	2
Victoria	Dr Michael Kirby	2
Tasmania	Mr Chris Lock	1
	Mr Iain Meaney(d)	1
Western Australia	Mr David Smith(e)	2
Australian Capital Territory	Mr George Tomlins(f)	1
	Mr Andrew Rice(g)	1
Other Members		
	Prof. Peter Dawkins	2
	Mr Clem Doherty	2
	Ms Betty Hounslow	1
	Mr Wayne Jackson	2
	Dr Steven Kates	2
	Mr Haydn Lowe	1
	Dr Martin Parkinson	2
	Prof. Fiona Stanley	1
	Ms Louise Sylvan	1

- (a) Attended as proxy for Dr Peter Crossman.
- (b) Attended as proxy for Mr Richard Cox, formally appointed 1 May 2003.
- (c) Attended as NT Government representative pending formal appointment 1 March 2003.
- (d) Attended as proxy for Mr Chris Lock.

- (e) Attended as proxy for Ms Anne Nolan.
- (f) Attended as proxy for Ms Sandra Lambert.
- (g) Attended as ACT Government representative pending formal appointment of Mr George Tomlins on 1 July 2003.

APPENDIX 2

AGENDAS FOR ASAC MEETINGS

19 November 2002 Meeting — Agenda

1. Summary record of previous meeting

Paper: Summary record of May 2002 meeting.

2. Chairperson's report

Verbal report

3. Statistician's report

Verbal report

4. ABS Forward Work Program

Papers: (a) ABS Forward Work Program 2003–04 to 2005–06
(b) Statistical Issues of Concern Identified by ASAC Members —
An Update

5. 2006 Census Planning

Paper: Key Development Issues for the 2006 Population Census

6. Information Development Plan — Education and Training Statistics

Papers: (a) Rationale and Approach to Information Development Plans
(b) IDP for Education and Training Statistics

7. Development and Implementation of the National Statistical Service

Paper: Development and Implementation of the National Statistical
Service

8. Labour Statistics — Stocktake of ABS Statistical Information

Paper: Labour Statistics — Stocktake of ABS Statistical Information

9. Evaluation of Electronic ASAC Discussion Forum

Verbal report

29 May 2003 Meeting — Agenda

1. Summary record of previous meeting

Paper: Summary record of 19 November 2002 meeting

2. Chairperson's report

Verbal report

3. Statistician's Report

Verbal report

4. Statistical Priorities for the ABS

Paper: Statistical Response to the Key Whole of Government Priorities Statement by the Prime Minister to CEDA and to the Prime Minister's National Research Priorities.

Paper: Summary of Key State/Territory Government's Statistical Priorities and ABS' Statistical Response.

Publication: ABS Forward Work Program 2003–04 to 2005–06

5. National Ageing Statistics Unit

Paper: Directions and Forward Work Program for the National Ageing Statistics Unit

6. Update on some recent statistical developments

Paper: Directions in Health statistics

Paper: Directions in Agriculture statistics

7. Supporting the research community

Paper: Developments in microdata release

Paper: Access to Microdata — Issues, Organisation and Approaches.

8. Global Developments that might impact on statistics

Paper: ABS' International engagement and global developments that might impact on the ABS

APPENDIX 3

INVOLVEMENT OF ASAC MEMBERS IN OTHER ABS ACTIVITIES / USER GROUPS

ASAC Member	Committee/Group/Activity
Mr Richard Cox	NSW Statistical Coordination and User Forum Economic Statistics User Group
Dr Peter Crossman	Queensland State Statistical Consultative Committee
Mr Peter Horn	NSW Statistical Coordination and User Forum Economic Statistics User Group
Mr Peter Jones	NT Statistical Liaison Committee
Dr Steven Kates	Labour Statistics Advisory Group Economic Statistics User Group
Dr Michael Kirby	Victorian Statistics Advisory Committee Victorian Economic Statistics Subcommittee Economic Statistics User Group
Mr Chris Lock	Tasmanian Statistical Policy Committee

APPENDIX 4

OPERATION OF ASAC

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The Chairperson of the Council receives an annual fee, set by the Remuneration Tribunal, and members are reimbursed their travel costs, where applicable. Apart from the Chairperson, no members receive remuneration for serving on the Council. Direct expenditure on ASAC during 2002–03 was \$63,986. These costs are met from the ABS budget.

Secretariat services for ASAC are provided by the ABS. The office of ASAC Secretary is held by the Assistant Statistician of the Policy Secretariat Branch of the ABS. Secretariat support provided by ABS includes organising and recording of meetings, administering membership and the members' online Discussion Forum, and the preparation of Council's Annual Report. The cost of these services was estimated to be \$69,946 during 2002–03.

APPENDIX 5

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION STATEMENT

Below is a statement, as required by section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, about the structure of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by it.

Establishment, organisation and functions

See Chapter 1 (page 1).

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. It does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS so that a broad range of views and interests is reflected in the advice that it offers to the Minister and the Statistician. Membership details are given on pages 9–10.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may participate in the Council's policy formulation by making representations to the Minister or the Chairperson on matters of concern to them.

Categories of documents

The ASAC Annual Report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from all ABS offices. Files are maintained which contain documents relating to the administration of the Council, papers discussed at Council meetings, summary records of proceedings of meetings and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

FOI procedures and initial contact points

All inquiries concerning access to documents, including inquiries under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, may be directed on weekdays, between 8.30am and 4.30pm, to the Secretary, Australian Statistics Advisory Council, c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 45 Benjamin Way, Belconnen, ACT 2617 — telephone (02) 6252 5533.

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