CHAPTER 1: SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE CLASSIFICATION

Introduction

1   This chapter provides a brief outline of the ASGC and is based on the material presented in Chapters 2–5 of this manual. It is recommended that these be referred to for a more comprehensive description of the classification.

The Nature and Spatial Units of the ASGC

2   The ASGC is a system for the classification of statistical units by geographical areas.

3   Common types of statistical units so classified are households in population censuses and surveys and establishments (eg individual farms, mines, factories and shops) in economic censuses and surveys. Once these units have been classified (ie assigned ASGC codes) statistics collected about them can be compiled and published (subject to normal confidentiality restraints) for ASGC geographical areas.

4   The geographical areas, or 'spatial units' incorporated in the ASGC cover the following:

.   *Census Collection Districts (CDs).* These are the smallest type of spatial unit in the ASGC and the smallest area building blocks of which all other ASGC spatial units are composed. They have been designed for use in population censuses and are defined (updated) for each census. As a consequence, they are not current at any other time. They cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without omission or duplication. At the time of the last, ie 1986, Census of Population and Housing Australia was divided into 29,632 CDs.

.   *Statistical Local Areas (SLAs).* These consist of one or more CDs at the time when CDs are current (ie at population census time) – at all other times SLAs are, in effect, the smallest type of spatial unit in the ASGC. They are local government area (ie Legal LGA) based or equivalent spatial units. They cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps and are used, in general, as the smallest type of spatial unit for the geographic classification of establishment locations and for the compilation and publication of economic, social and demographic statistics other than those collected in population censuses. (Statistics collected in population censuses are produced for CDs as well as SLAs and other ASGC spatial units.)

.   *Statistical Subdivisions (SSDs).* These consist of one or more SLAs and cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. They are used as an intermediate level, general purpose regional type spatial unit.

.   *Statistical Divisions (SDs).* These consist of one or more SSDs and cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. They are used as a large, general purpose regional type spatial unit.

.   *States and Territories (S/Ts).* These consist of two or more SDs and cover the whole of Australia (as defined for statistical purposes) without gaps or overlaps. They encompass the geographic areas of the six Australian States and two mainland Territories.

- *Statistical Districts (S DISTs).* These consist of one or more SSDs and represent the more important, predominantly urban areas of Australia outside State capital city SDs. Because of their nature they can and, in some cases, do straddle SD and S/T boundaries. An example is the 'Gold Coast–Tweed' Statistical District which encompasses an urban area which lies partly in the State of Queensland and partly in the State of New South Wales.

- *Legal Local Government Areas (Legal LGAs).* These consist of one or more SLAs and are the geographical areas of incorporated local government councils, such as towns and shires. In aggregate, these cover only part of Australia. (The major areas of Australia not governed by incorporated local government councils include the northern parts of South Australia, most of the Northern Territory and all of the Australian Capital Territory.) Legal LGAs can and, sometimes, do straddle SSD, S Dist. and SD boundaries. An example is Tweed Shire in New South Wales. The predominantly urban part of this Shire is treated as an SLA as well as an SSD in its own right and constitutes the New South Wales part of the 'Gold Coast–Tweed' Statistical District. The predominantly rural remainder of this Shire constitutes a separate SLA outside the 'Gold Coast–Tweed' Statistical District and lies within a different SSD.

- *Statistical Region Sectors (SRSs).* These consist of one or more SLAs and equate, in most cases, with Statistical Regions (SRs). They cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. Those SRSs which are subdivisions of SRs are, on the whole, used primarily for the production and presentation of population census and labour force statistics outside the normal frameworks for standard statistical outputs from these collections. Additionally or alternatively, some of these SRSs are also used to present a wider range of statistics according to regional features, eg the Brisbane rings and sectors, which could not be incorporated in ASGC main structure spatial units.

- *Statistical Regions (SRs).* These consist of one or more SRSs and cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. They were designed primarily as sufficiently large regional type spatial units which are suitable for the presentation of both population census and labour force statistics within the frameworks for standard statistical outputs from these collections. The minimum size of such regions, in terms of population, is 147,000.

- *Major Statistical Regions (MSRs).* These consist of one or more SRs and cover, in aggregate, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. They do not cross State or Territory boundaries and serve the same purpose as Statistical Regions, though at a broader spatial (ie Capital City SD versus Balance of State) level. (However, even this dissection could not, due to population size limitations, be implemented in the case of Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, each of which equates with an MSR.)

- *Statistical Retail Areas (SRAs).* These consist of one or more SLAs within SSDs and cover, conceptually, the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. However, the Off–Shore Areas and Migratory categories are not used for the presentation of Retail Census statistics. SRAs are defined (updated) for each Census of Retail Establishments and used as the smallest type of spatial unit for the publication of retail and certain services industry statistics.

- *Urban Centres and (Rural) Localities (UC/Ls).* These are defined (updated) for each Census of Population and Housing and consist of one or more whole adjoining CDs with urban characteristics and represent, in the case of rural localities, population clusters of between 200 and 999 people and, in the case of urban centres, population clusters of 1000 or more people (including known holiday resorts of smaller size). Because of their nature they can and, sometimes, do straddle SLA, Legal LGA, SSD and other ASGC spatial unit boundaries.

. *Sections of State*. These are defined (updated) for each Census of Population and Housing and are non–contiguous areas with particular urban or rural characteristics. The following four Sections of State are distinguished within each State and, depending on population distribution, within each Territory: major urban, other urban, locality and rural balance – the latter two constitute the rural part of each State/Territory.

5   Chapter 3 provides a more comprehensive treatment of ASGC spatial units and specifies the principles and criteria according to which they are delimited. Chapter 6 lists all current ASGC spatial units within the context of the various ASGC structures.

The Structure of the ASGC

6   The ASGC spatial unit descriptions in the preceding paragraphs already indicate the structure of the ASGC by specifying how ASGC spatial units relate to each other in a hierarchically structured way. They indicate, for example, that CDs, the smallest spatial units and area building blocks in the ASGC, form the lowest or most detailed hierarchic level of the classification and add, without gaps or overlaps, to SLAs which, in turn, represent another higher hierarchic level and add, without gaps or overlaps, to SSDs, etc. Such a chain of linked ASGC hierarchic levels (ie one in which the spatial units in adjoining levels relate to each other by aggregation in an upwards direction and disaggregation in a downwards direction) constitutes an ASGC structure. However, since some ASGC spatial unit types do not relate to each other in this way (because they cut across each other, as is the case with some Legal LGAs and SSDs), it is not possible to fit all ASGC spatial unit types into a single structure. Instead, several structures are needed, all of which can be derived from the one set of CDs at the lowest hierarchic level of the classification.

7   Accordingly, the ASGC has been constructed conceptually as an integrated multi–structured hierarchic classification in which CDs are aggregated upwards in several parallel streams (or chains) into progressively larger spatial units at progressively higher hierarchic levels of the ASGC. The ASGC structures, the hierarchic levels (or spatial unit types) of which they are composed and the total area covered by them are shown in the table below.

ASGC STRUCTURE		HIERARCHIC LEVELS	TOTAL AREA
Main	5	CDs, SLAs, SSDs, SDs, S/Ts	Australia
S Dist.	4	CDs, SLAs, SSDs, S Dists	Part of Aust.
Legal LGA	4	CDs, SLAs, Legal LGAs, S/Ts (a)	Part of Aust.
Stat. Region	6	CDs, SLAs, SRSs, SRs, MSRs, S/Ts	Australia
SRA	6	CDs, SLAs, SRAs, SSDs, SDs, S/Ts	Australia
UC/L	2	CDs, UC/Ls	Part of Aust.
Sect. of State	3	CDs, Sections of State, S/Ts	Australia

(a) Incorporated areas only.

8   The ASGC structural chart on page 8 of Chapter 2 depicts the ASGC structures in diagrammatic form as one integrated framework and shows the relationships between the structures.   Chapter 2 also describes each of the structures in detail and specifies the principles according to which the ASGC has been constructed.   Chapter 6 and the Appendixes depict the structures in their full detail.

The ASGC in ABS Statistical Geography

9   Although the ASGC is the principal Australia–wide geographical classification of the ABS it cannot, for technical and other reasons, incorporate all spatial unit types for which the ABS produces statistics in response to user needs, such as Postcode Areas and Electoral Divisions. These, together with the ASGC, will be described in a wider and more comprehensive document, currently under preparation, entitled the 'Geographic Classification Framework' (GCF).

The Spatial Unit Code System

10   Each ASGC spatial unit in the classification is designated by a numeric code which identifies it. The system of codes is described in Chapter 4 and the code of each current spatial unit is specified in the ASGC structures which are set out in Chapter 6.

Maintenance of the Classification and its Use in Publication

11   The ASGC is being kept up to date on a periodic or as needed basis by the issue of replacement pages – usually twice a year, ie at the beginning of calendar and financial year collections.

12   Maintenance of the ASGC manual (which presents the Classification primarily in a conceptual sense and as a statistical standard) and the standard ASGC structures on the ABS Data Dictionary is the responsibility of Integration and Classification Section. Other ASGC based/related material (used in applying the ASGC in statistical work such as area coding reference data sets and maps) is shared by a number of organisational entities within ABS State and Central Offices and is coordinated by Integration and Classification Section.

13   As far as publication of statistics according to the ASGC is concerned, it is recommended that a number of rules be followed to ensure that ASGC classified statistics are presented consistently and in a manner which optimises comparability between different statistical series/collections. These rules are specified in Chapter 5 which also provides more detail on the nature of ASGC maintenance.

Order of States/Territories

14   One aspect of the ASGC is the ordering of States and Territories in data processing and in published statistical tables, data tapes and other forms of dissemination. This is a matter of some importance, firstly because it involves standards for the consistent presentation of statistics (through time, as well as between various publications); secondly, because it has ramifications throughout many aspects of data processing, ranging from the insertion of location codes on unit records in a large number of statistical collections, to the identification of aggregated data at the State level. It has implications for producers and users of data everywhere, and has special importance where current and historical data files are used together in computer processing systems. Comparative analysis of data provided in computer readable form from successive population censuses is a case in point. Consistency in this aspect of area classification is therefore seen as of fundamental importance if errors in handling data, and costly conversions of data codes, are to be minimised.

15   The order that has been adopted in the ASGC is one which has been widely used as a standard for very many years not only in the ABS but in other organisations that have been guided by ABS practice. That order is as follows:

State	Code	State/Territory	Code
NSW	1	WA	5
VIC	2	TAS	6
QLD	3	NT	7
SA	4	ACT	8

The ABS will continue this order in the presentation of statistics in printed tables, data tapes, microfiche, etc, and accordingly has retained this standard in the ASGC.