Australian Bureau of Statistics

CORPORATE PLAN
2019–20

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Acknowledgement of country

The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to their cultures and their Elders past and present.

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"Our national data should be viewed alongside our transport systems, energy and communications services as part of our essential national infrastructure."

David W. Kalisch, Australian Statistician

FOREWORD

This Corporate Plan provides a high-level description of the work of the ABS for the 2019–20 financial year in line with our strategic directions for the next four years, to give our staff, stakeholders, partners, business, and the Australian community an understanding of how we intend to continue to deliver high quality, relevant and trusted official statistics.

The purpose and role of the ABS remain constant. We will continue to produce statistics and insights critical for important decisions. We are collaborating with our key partners to remain attuned to their needs and ensure that ABS statistics are used to best effect. Through data integration and ongoing enhancements, we are developing new statistics to meet emerging needs.

We are mindful of our overriding interest in maintaining community trust so that our broader work program can continue to best serve the needs of the nation.

Census 2021 will be a major focus of our work during the life of this Plan. Extensive community consultation is being undertaken by the ABS on possible topics to be included in the next Census, and in addition, the ABS has commenced working on the technology dimensions of the Census for a smooth and secure process.

This Corporate Plan introduces a strategic directions statement for the ABS. The ABS Strategic Directions identify opportunities to leverage our statistical and data capabilities within the Australian data landscape.

As the Accountable Authority of the ABS, I am pleased to present the ABS Corporate Plan which covers the period 2019–20 to 2022–23, in accordance with the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

David W. Kalisch
Australian Statistician

SUMMARY

Purpose   To inform Australia's important decisions by partnering and innovating to deliver relevant, trusted and objective data, statistics and insights.

Environment

The ABS works within a complex, competitive, and technologically dynamic environment. This comes with increasing demand for quality data, emergent alternative sources of data, opportunities for innovation through new technologies, growing competition for analytical capability, and increased vigilance around cyber security. This is all within an environment of heightened sensitivity around privacy, and a reported decline in the trust of citizens in government and institutions.

Objectives

1. ABS statistics are trusted and used to inform important decisions
2. Partnerships to enable better decisions
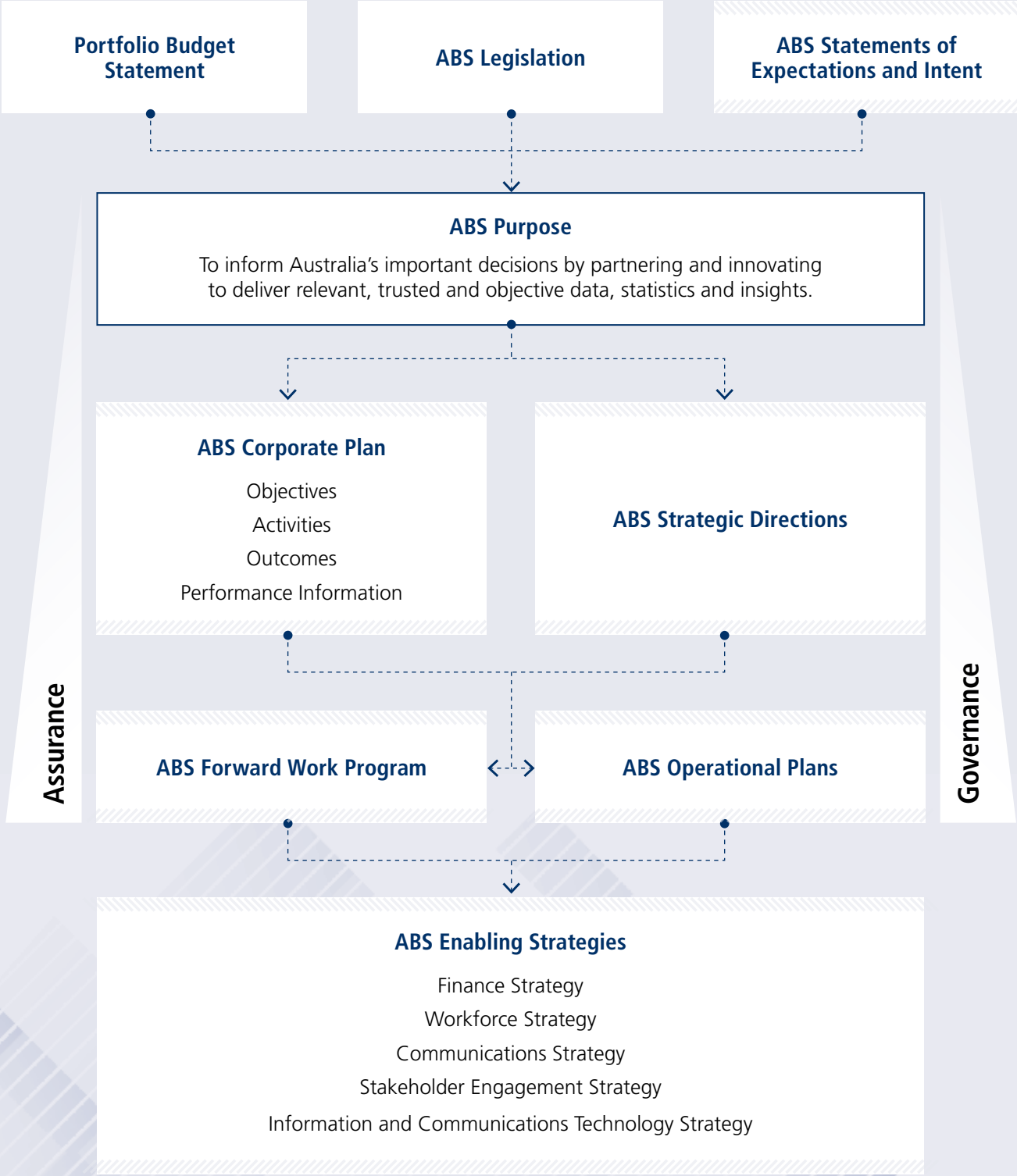3. New statistics to support Australia's emerging priorities

Outcomes

- ABS data is valued as a national resource and trusted by key data users
- Quality official statistics are made available in a timely manner to inform important government, business and household decisions
- ABS and key data users collaborate to improve Australia's national data infrastructure in priority areas
- The ABS works with stakeholders to build data capability and understanding about key emerging issues for Australia

Strategic Directions

1. Continue to invest in the production of high quality data and statistics
2. Be recognised as a leader in the Australian data landscape
3. Demonstrate leadership in data skills and capability building across Australia
4. Deliver new data solutions and services

ABS STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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ABS Legislation

ABS Statements of Expectations and Intent

ABS Purpose

To inform Australia's important decisions by partnering and innovating to deliver relevant, trusted and objective data, statistics and insights.

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Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

Information and Communications Technology Strategy

PART 1

ABS CORPORATE PLAN

ABOUT THE ABS

Our purpose

The ABS' purpose is to inform Australia's important decisions by partnering and innovating to deliver relevant, trusted and objective data, statistics and insights.

Our role

The ABS is Australia's national statistical agency, providing trusted official statistics on a wide range of economic, social, population and environmental matters of importance to Australia.

The ABS also has an important leadership role, to maximise the use of public data for statistical purposes. In addition, the ABS provides technical advice, develops standards and provides assistance to the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in relation to statistics.

Our legislation

The *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* and the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* are the principal pieces of legislation that 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, legislates our main function to be the central statistical authority for the Australian Government and provide services for the state and territory governments.
- 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 and contains strong provisions to maintain the confidentiality of information collected under the Act.

Our values

We uphold the Australian Public Service Values:

- Impartial—we are apolitical and provide the Australian Government with frank, honest and timely advice which is based on the best evidence available
- Committed to service—we are professional, objective, innovative and efficient. We work collaboratively to achieve the best results for the Australian community and Government
- Accountable—we are open and accountable to the Australian community under the law and within the framework of ministerial responsibility
- Respectful—we respect all people, including their rights and heritage
- Ethical—we demonstrate leadership, are trustworthy and act with integrity in all we do

Our culture

We have an inclusive culture that brings out the best in all our people, enabling us to increase our impact through outstanding service delivery. We are customer focused, collaborative, accountable, agile, innovative and self-aware.

OUR OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Measurement complexity

Rapid changes in the economy pose measurement challenges for official statistics. Our methods are having to evolve to ensure our official statistics are capturing and accurately reflecting the contributions of the new economy.

Data collection challenges

Our data collection methods are designed to minimise the burden on data providers. Where we can, alternative sources such as administrative data and new, quality information sources are being used to ensure that we only survey the community and business where necessary to achieve quality statistical results. It has also become increasingly difficult to sustain high response rates to ABS household and business surveys and so the cost of obtaining this data is rising.

Growing demand for data integration

The ABS is one of a number of National Statistical Organisations making more extensive use of integrated datasets. These datasets are generally more complex than survey datasets and require special expertise for proper analysis. The ABS is further increasing its data capability in order to grow our capacity to provide professional data services to the public sector, however the overall supply of expert data analysts may constrain effective use of this valuable data.

Opportunities from big data

Big data provides opportunities for the ABS to improve its statistical offerings by generating more granular data and richer data, more frequently. However, using these new data sources in the production of official statistics requires new methods and skills. The ABS is working actively to stay ahead of the challenges in storage, processing and dissemination of big data and in maintaining the confidentiality of the information we publish.

Speed of technological change

The rapid speed of technological change is making it costly to keep up with the latest innovations and heightening the risk of cyber security attacks. Rising costs are undermining the promise of efficiencies from Information and Communications Technology (ICT) investments. The constant need to upgrade to the latest versions of applications and platforms places increased demands on our people to bridge gaps between new and old technology to prevent security weaknesses.

Greater privacy awareness in the community

The ABS is trusted by the community to keep their data safe and secure. There is heightened interest in privacy in the community and media due to recent privacy breaches by private and public sector organisations. At the same time there is increased stakeholder demand for more data to be available for research purposes. The ABS must balance the growing demand for data with the need to protect privacy. One way we are doing this is through the adaption of international best practice, such as the 'Five Safes' approach, to manage improved access to data while maintaining individual's privacy alongside use of our advanced statistical techniques.

OUR RISK OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT

Risk management approach

Risk policy and practice in the ABS is guided by the need for balance between rigour around critical and strategically important projects and programs, and cost-effectiveness in our routine business operations.

The ABS is intensifying its engagement with risk in response to a more challenging external context, the growing expectations of customers, increasing cyber security threats, and constrained resources.

The ABS has a fit-for-purpose and structured enterprise risk management framework. A more visible and active risk governance model has been instituted to ensure that strategic and operational decisions are supported by a thorough appreciation of current and emerging uncertainties, and appropriately informed by an understanding of the controls required to deliver the level of confidence expected by the ABS Executive. Routine management reporting and oversight are supported by a commitment to mature organisational risk capabilities and positive risk culture.

The ABS is fundamentally committed to fit for purpose statistical quality and takes an appropriately cautious approach to risks that could undermine its delivery of world class statistical products and services. Our commitment to the continued transformation of our capabilities makes it necessary to embrace some opportunities for change and growth that impose unavoidable challenges. Decisions made by staff and managers are informed by a detailed category-level risk appetite statement that points to areas where greater or lesser risk is deemed appropriate for the ABS.

OUR CAPABILITY

People

We have a Workforce Strategy aimed at: increasing the capacity and capability of the ABS; identifying, monitoring and predicting where specialist and general skills and knowledge are required; supporting innovative ways of working to achieve high performance and efficiency; and improving the ABS' position as an 'employer of choice'.

As we embed and operationalise the Strategy, we will further professionalise our workforce, with an increased emphasis on communities of practice, leveraging internal and external experts, and targeted, specialist and graduate recruitment. High demand capabilities include: statistical, data science, data integration, program and project management (including 'agile' methodology), and stakeholder engagement.

Methods

We are enhancing our ability to leverage big data sources and use artificial intelligence methodologies. We are building our methodological capability to introduce new advanced methods to represent, store, manipulate, integrate, and analyse large datasets. We are continuing to collaborate internationally to ensure that our methods are better practice.

Systems and processes

Our business processes and ICT are being re-engineered in order to maintain high quality statistics, provide a platform for innovation, and deliver greater efficiencies. This work is supported by the use of a robust enterprise architecture.

Standards and frameworks

We maintain our expertise in domestic and international standards, classifications and frameworks to ensure that consistent, reliable and high quality statistics, data and insights are produced.

Other resources

The ABS has enabled activity-based working across all offices to ensure teams can work virtually, as well as equipping staff to work flexibly to balance their responsibilities both at work and outside of work.
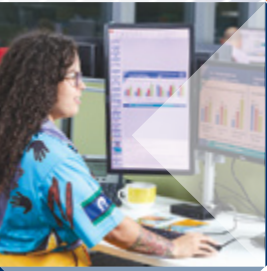
ABS OBJECTIVES

The ABS Purpose drives our three objectives.

1 ABS statistics are trusted and used to inform important decisions

ABS data informs important decisions made by government, business and the community. It underpins sound fiscal and monetary policy decisions and informs the delivery of programs and services vital to the wealth and wellbeing of the people of Australia including in relation to health, education, the cost of living, the environment and energy, housing and infrastructure. ABS data also supports a functioning democracy, with its data contributing to fair electoral boundaries and informed community debates.

The Government's Statement of Expectations requires the ABS to deliver services that are timely, relevant, responsive and of the highest integrity and quality.

2 Partnerships to enable better decisions

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 ABS is committed to maintaining effective working partnerships with other federal and state/territory agencies, the ABS' 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 partners with other agencies through collaborations, strategic out-postings of staff and participation in decision-making fora.

3 New statistics to support Australia's emerging priorities

The Government expects the ABS to engage with 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.

Australia's data is a national resource providing enormous benefits for citizens, business and governments. This resource can be used to make informed decisions and develop innovative products and services across all sectors.

The ABS draws on its understanding of our stakeholders' needs and our specialist expertise to produce new insights to solve complex or emerging policy problems and service delivery challenges.

OBJECTIVE 1

ABS STATISTICS ARE TRUSTED AND USED TO INFORM IMPORTANT DECISIONS

Key Activities

- Produce macro-economic statistics, including National and International Accounts, Labour Force and quarterly Consumer Price Index (CPI)
- Produce social and population statistics, including enhancing key demographic statistics, and implementing a wide range of social surveys including Health, Disability, Safety, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and Time Use
- Produce quality industry and business statistics including the Annual Economic Collections, Agricultural Collections and Transport
- Prepare for Census 2021, including undertaking a major field test
- Deliver our Statistical Business Transformation Program for more robust and resilient statistical processes
- Maintain the trust of the Australian community through strong privacy processes and cyber security settings
- Provide transparent access to collection methodology and standards
- Provide access to data through the ABS website, DataLab and other customised data services

Outcomes

- ABS data is valued as a national resource and trusted by key data users
- Quality official statistics are made available in a timely manner to inform important government, business and household decisions

Performance Measures	Method	Target
Community trust = average level of trust in the ABS and ABS statistics Measure frequency: annual	– Community trust surveys – Number of statistics released free from significant errors – Percentage of statistical releases published on the advertised date	– At least 85% average level of trust in the ABS and ABS statistics – 100% of statistics are released free of significant error – At least 95% of statistical releases are published on the advertised date
Use of data products and services = number of customers using ABS data products or services Measure frequency: biannual	Counts of customers per product or service each year	– At least 6,000 DataLab sessions each year – At least 8,000 new Table Builder registrations each year – At least 1,300 requests for customised data each year
International compliance = ABS statistics meet standards for National and International Accounts, Labour Force, Unemployment, CPI, and Estimates of Resident Population Measure frequency: annual	Compliance with International Monetary Fund (IMF) Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS)	100% of in-scope collections meet IMF SDDS

Current Capability

- Methods and standards expertise
- Sound statistical business processes
- Robust privacy practices
- Reliable cyber security settings

Capability Required

- Robust enterprise wide systems
- Engaging training for users of ABS data

Associated Enterprise Risks

A. The ABS repeatedly or significantly fails to deliver high quality statistical products and services
C. The ABS is unable to access the data it needs and protect the data it holds
E. Workforce quantity, capability, and/or capacity is insufficient to deliver quality ABS products and services
F. Transformation fails to deliver capability to generate improvements in public value, meet customer needs, and more efficient operations

OBJECTIVE 2

PARTNERSHIPS TO ENABLE BETTER DECISIONS

Key Activities

- Collaboration with other government agencies to provide integrated data which supports complex policy and research information needs, including under the Data Integration Partnership for Australia (DIPA). Projects delivering safe and secure access to integrated data to inform important decisions include collaborating with:
  - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Bureau of Meteorology and Geoscience Australia to inform improved forecasts and enable warning communications to be targeted to those Australians most at risk during heatwaves
  - AIHW and Department of Human Services (DHS) to better target the delivery of health and mental health services
  - Department of Education to create a direct income measure to determine the capacity of a non-government school community to contribute financially to their school
  - Reserve Bank of Australia, the Treasury, state/territory governments to understand the impact of firm dynamics on the economy
- Membership of external taskforces, committees (e.g. Deputy Secretaries' Data Group)
- Provision of resources to the Parliamentary Library to provide advice to ministers on ABS statistics
- Public engagement on Census 2021 with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Strategic out-postings established with key stakeholders to better understand stakeholder needs and improve access to ABS data

Outcomes

- ABS and key data users collaborate to improve Australia's national data infrastructure in priority areas

Performance Measures	Method	Target
External fora = ABS membership of key external decision-making fora or advisory boards and outcomes of participation Measure frequency: biannual	Case studies of impact of ABS membership on key external fora	Not applicable
Stakeholder health = average stakeholder rating of the value of their relationship with the ABS and level of engagement of the public through social media channels Measure frequency: annual	– Survey of a range of stakeholders – Social media engagement	– Maintain or improve previous stakeholder survey scores – Maintain 3% rate of social media engagement – Increase the number of ABS social media followers by 7% – Increase in impressions/posts by 8%
Partnerships = outcomes of projects undertaken in collaboration with external customers Measure frequency: biannual	Case studies showing outcomes/direct realisable benefits to the partner and to the ABS within the current year	Not applicable

Current Capability

- Awareness of partners' policy environments
- Re-engineered business processes
- Expert advisors to partner entities

Capability Required

- Strong customer focused culture
- Stakeholder engagement expertise

Associated Enterprise Risk

D. The ABS experiences a reduction in social licence and/or loses the confidence of Government, the Parliament and other key authorising entities

OBJECTIVE 3

NEW STATISTICS TO SUPPORT AUSTRALIA'S EMERGING PRIORITIES

Key Activities

- Signature activities under this objective are:
  - Exploring options with Geoscience Australia to use satellite data to inform land accounts
  - Explore telematics data for insights in the use of vehicles and the road transport network
  - Developing data to support Department of Education to implement schools funding model
  - Continued production of a cross-sectional Employer-Employee Database
- Data Integration Partnership for Australia initiative:
  - Multi-Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP)
  - Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE)
- Signature research hub projects which are innovative and will lead to the creation of new statistics include:
  - Non-market health care and education outputs for economic and productivity measurement
  - New annual and quarterly Labour Account
  - Potential impacts from globalisation and the digital economy on economic statistics
  - Outcomes for job seekers who have left employment services programs in remote Australia
  - Effects of drought on Australian farms
  - Migration's impact on Australian society

Outcomes

- The ABS works with stakeholders to build data capability and understanding about key emerging issues for Australia

Performance Measures	Method	Target
New statistics created = number of enduring integrated statistical assets and new statistics created through integration and analysis Measure frequency: biannual	Review of delivery status of signature research projects to produce new statistics to support policy	Delivery of signature research hub projects
Stakeholder impact = New statistics or methods are used by customers to inform high priority areas or new policy directions Measure frequency: biannual	Case studies of new statistics or methods used in informing high priorities or new policy directions, and the outcomes achieved as a result	Not applicable

Current Capability

- Innovative culture
- Accessible release practices
- Collaboration

Capability Required

- Stronger statistical and data analytics skills
- Data integration expertise
- Enterprise-wide statistical processes

Associated Enterprise Risk

B. The ABS repeatedly or significantly fails to meet customer needs

PART 2

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Government's Statement of Expectations requires the ABS to 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.

Our Strategic Directions seek to maintain the ABS' reputation into the future. They are shaped by the evolving external environment, the advice of our partners and stakeholders on their future needs.

OUR STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Data landscape

Our most significant challenge is the changing data landscape. Our enabling legislation establishes the ABS at the centre of the data landscape—to lead, coordinate, and collaborate with others in relation to statistical activities. It is critical for our success that we are able to improve collaboration across government to maximise the value of public data.

The ABS is ideally placed to lead the enhancement of the public sector's capacity for data analytics, data collection, storage and dissemination, data integration, as well as provide technical services like confidentialisation. Along with sharing our statistical infrastructure, the ABS is uniquely able to provide stewardship across the public sector for the efficient management of public data.

Data and statistical skills

There is a high demand for data scientists who can analyse and interpret large integrated datasets. Over the last decade however, the proportion of Australians with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills has fallen.

Data integration

Large integrated datasets can provide unique insights into complex policy problems, however, these datasets require specialised storage, management, analysis and publishing capabilities. Few public sector agencies have the skills and ability to safely and confidentially analyse large integrated datasets. As a leader in this field, the ABS can leverage its expertise to partner across the public sector to create new and highly valued statistical products and services.

Investing in our statistics

Our customers have greater expectations for quality and timely statistics, and are demanding increased access to ABS data. The Australian economy also continues to evolve with emerging products and services, and changing interactions between businesses. The ABS must continue to invest in its core statistical assets (such as Labour Force, National Accounts, population estimates and demographic data) so they remain relevant. However, the ABS must continue to operate sustainably, making prudent investment in innovations that will not only make us more efficient over time, but also better able to meet the emerging information requirements of governments, business and the community.

ABS STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Reflecting our purpose, our environment, and enterprise risks, the ABS Strategic Directions are as follows:

SD1 Continue to invest in the production of high quality data and statistics

The ABS will continue to deliver high quality and trusted national statistics by investing in our people and using contemporary statistical methods, processes and technology. Taking a customer centred approach, we will continually review our products and services with our stakeholders to produce the most relevant data and statistics to meet the needs of the Australian community.

SD2 Be recognised as a leader in the Australian data landscape

The ABS will lead and provide guidance in best-practice data: collection; use; management; and safe and secure access, across government and other sectors to help maximise the public benefit of data for the Australian community.

SD3 Demonstrate leadership in data skills and capability building across Australia

The ABS will build data capability across Australia to help address existing gaps and emerging demand for data and statistical roles in the public and private sectors.

SD4 Deliver new data solutions and services

The ABS will continue to innovate and deliver new data solutions and services to provide fresh insights and help solve complex policy problems by: making better use of the data we collect; making our data more accessible to support different users' needs; and working in partnership with others.

"As a nation, we cannot afford to be complacent or indifferent to future availability and productive use of our essential national data resources."

David W. Kalisch, Australian Statistician

Australian Bureau of Statistics

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