

Basics

2026 Census Content Development WDB
Sent by S47F

05/03/2024 04:06 PM

Send	To info@ampjp.org.au, S47F@ampjp.org.au
	cc
	bcc
Subject	2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy ☐ Legal privilege ☐ Legislative secrecy Caveat ☐ NATIONAL-CABINET
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations

Dear Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons,

The next Census of Population and Housing will take place in 2026. Every Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a review to inform a recommendation to the Government on the topics for the next Census.

The ABS received extensive feedback on Religious affiliation when consulting on the [Religious Affiliation Standard](#) and during the [2026 Census Topic Review public consultation](#) process. Currently we are preparing for a large-scale Census test that will test proposed new Census questions and changes to existing questions.

We are testing a new way of asking the Religious affiliation question, including updates to the list of religion examples (see image below). Roman Catholic is proposed to be included as one of the eight listed examples.

We would like to check with the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons if there are any concerns including this particular example, and to confirm how the example should be presented.

We welcome your thoughts by **COB Wednesday 13 March 2024**. We're also happy to arrange a brief meeting for next week if you'd prefer.

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Kind regards,

S47F

S47F

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

2026 Census Content Development | Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(E) S47F [@abs.gov.au](mailto:S47F@abs.gov.au) (W) www.abs.gov.au

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Basics

S47F

09/04/2024 04:17 PM

S47F

@abs.gov.au

Send	To "2026 Census Content Development WDB" <2026.census.content.development.wdb@abs.gov.au> cc bcc
Subject	FW: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy ☐ Legal privilege ☐ Legislative secrecy Caveat ☐ NATIONAL-CABINET
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations

Cheers

S47F

S47F

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

2026 Census Content Development | Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

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From: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Sent: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 12:26 PM

To: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Subject: FW: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

FYI ?

S47F

A/g Program Manager, Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) S47F

(M) S47F

(E) S47F @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Executive assistant: S47F (P) S47F (E) S47F @abs.gov.au

The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and elders, both past, present and emerging.

From: S47F <S47F@catholicreligious.org.au>

Sent: Tuesday, April 9, 2024 11:58 AM

To: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Thank you!



S47F

p: S47F

m: S47F

e: S47F [@catholicreligious.org.au](mailto:S47F@catholicreligious.org.au)

w: www.catholicreligious.org.au

a: Office A / Level 1, 9 Mount Street, North Sydney NSW 2060, Australia

p: PO Box 1518, North Sydney, 2060



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CRA acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land where we work, live and gather.

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Please consider the environment before printing this email.

From: S47F [@abs.gov.au](mailto:S47F@abs.gov.au)

Sent: Tuesday, April 2, 2024 3:04 PM

To: S47F [@catholicreligious.org.au](mailto:S47F@catholicreligious.org.au)

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Absolutely Anne, we will add you immediately.

Regards

S47F

From: S47F [@catholicreligious.org.au](mailto:S47F@catholicreligious.org.au)

Sent: Wednesday, March 27, 2024 10:19 AM

To: S47F [@abs.gov.au](mailto:S47F@abs.gov.au)

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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safe.

Dear S47F

Thank you for your email advising us of the next steps forward.

I would be grateful if you could please also include me in updates and also on the subscription list, mentioned in your email.

Kind regards,

S47F



S47F

p: S47F

m: S47F

e: S47F @catholicreligious.org.au

w: www.catholicreligious.org.au

a: Office A / Level 1, 9 Mount Street, North Sydney NSW 2060, Australia

p: PO Box 1518, North Sydney, 2060



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From: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2024 11:58 AM

To: S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@catholic.org.au>
Cc: S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@catholic.org.au>; S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@catholicreligious.org.au>; S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@ampjp.org.au>; S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@abs.gov.au>
>; S47F [redacted] <[redacted]@abs.gov.au>

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hi S47F [redacted]

Thank you very much for providing the prompt feedback on the term 'Roman Catholic,' and for forwarding the letter from S47F [redacted] regarding broader feedback on the question design being tested for the 2026 Census.

I can confirm that based on your feedback we have changed the wording of the example to 'Catholic' for the large-scale test later this year.

I can also confirm that while the question we shared with you will proceed to the large-scale test, we will not decide on the design of the questions for the 2026 Census until after this test. We will ensure that this additional information and the case put forward in your letter is accurately reflected in our final assessment documentation, as it builds on your submission provided to the Religious Affiliation Standard consultation in late 2022.

My team or I will be in touch if we have any follow up questions on your letter and will keep you abreast of any developments. We have also added you to the subscription list for broader updates on the Content consultation. This will ensure you are included in all communications regarding the 2026 Census content, not just on this question. Please let me know if you would not like to be on this list and we will remove you (you can also unsubscribe at the bottom of any of the emails when they are distributed).

Again, thank you for taking the time to meet with us earlier this month and for your interest and commitment to the Census. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at any point.

Regards

S47F [redacted]

S47F [redacted]

A/g Program Manager, Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) S47F [redacted]

(E) S47F @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Executive assistant: S47F @abs.gov.au

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From: S47F @catholic.org.au>

Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2024 4:24 PM

To: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Cc: S47F @catholic.org.au>; S47F @abs.gov.au>; S47F @catholicreligious.org.au

>; S47F @ampjp.org.au>

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear S47F,

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference wishes to provide the Bureau with feedback in response to the email alerting us to the proposed alterations to the religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census that was received on 5 March 2024.

Please find attached a letter from the S47F, S47F, in which our concerns on the 2026 question are detailed. The Conference's letter is supported by Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial PJP's, in a joint response on behalf of the Catholic community.

We await your prompt response on the matter and are ready to provide any assistance to further consultation on this issue.

Kind Regards,

S47F

S47F

S47F

Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic
Bishops Conference



GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601

P: S47F [redacted] |

E: S47F [redacted]@catholic.org.au | W: ncpr.catholic.org.au



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

The information in this email is confidential. If you are not the intended recipient, you must not use, copy, disclose or disseminate this email or information contained in this email, and must delete it. Opinions contained in the message(s) do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

From: S47F [redacted]@abs.gov.au>

Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 3:59 PM

To: S47F [redacted]@catholic.org.au>

Subject: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Caution: This is an external email from outside ACBC. Please take care when clicking links or opening attachments. If in doubt, forward the email to S47F [redacted]@catholic.org.au

Dear S47F [redacted]

The next Census of Population and Housing will take place in 2026. Every Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a review to inform a recommendation to the Government on the topics for the next Census.

The ABS received extensive feedback on Religious affiliation when consulting on the [Religious Affiliation Standard](#) and during the [2026 Census Topic Review public consultation](#) process. Currently we are preparing for a large-scale Census test that will test proposed new Census questions and changes to existing questions.

We are testing a new way of asking the Religious affiliation question, including updates to the list of religion examples (see image below). Roman Catholic is proposed to be included as one of the eight listed examples.

We would like to check with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference if there are any concerns including this particular example, and to confirm how the example should be presented.

We welcome your thoughts by **COB Wednesday 13 March 2024**. We're also happy to arrange a brief meeting for next week if you'd prefer.

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S47F

S47F

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

2026 Census Content Development | Population Statistics Branch | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

(E) S47F [@abs.gov.au](mailto:S47F@abs.gov.au) (W) www.abs.gov.au

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Basics

2026 Census Content Development WDB
Sent by S47F

05/03/2024 04:11 PM

Send	To S47F@catholicreligious.org.au, S47F@catholicreligious.org.au cc bcc
Subject	2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Catholic Religious Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL
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Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations

Dear S47F and S47F

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Stakeholder Relationship Manager

2026 Census Content Development | Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(E) S47F [@abs.gov.au](mailto:S47F@abs.gov.au) (W) www.abs.gov.au

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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

S47F

19 March 2024

S47F

Director, 2026 Census Content

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Via email: S47F@abs.gov.au

Dear S47F

Proposed changes to the religious identification question

Thank you for alerting us to the proposed new religious identification question in the 2026 Census via your email dated 5 March 2024. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (the Conference) strongly opposes the reformulation of the question and asks that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reconsider the change.

Our position is supported by Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial PJP's.

One in five Australians identify as Catholic.¹ The Catholic Church and its agencies contribute in various ways across the spectrum of Australian society. As an integral part of its core mission, the Church seeks to assist people to experience the fullness of life. It is concerned with all that impacts human dignity and well-being for the common good.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is a permanent institution of the Catholic Church in Australia and the instrumentality used by the Australian Catholic Bishops to act nationally and address issues of national significance.

As this letter outlines, the change to the religious identification question is problematic for several reasons. Its content has been prepared by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR), the research agency of the Conference², which has been one of the significant users of Census data from the religion question for over 26 years.³

¹ Trudy Dantis, Stephen Reid, Katherine Jelavic, Leith Dudfield, and Marilyn Chee, *Social Profile of the Catholic Community in Australia: Based on the 2021 Australian Census*, (Canberra: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2023): 2.

² "National Centre for Pastoral Research," Main page, National Centre for Pastoral Research, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/>. The NCPR was previously known as the Pastoral Research Office.

³ Several people have contributed to the content of this letter, including leading sociologists of religion, Dr Robert Dixon and Rev Dr Philip Hughes.

Revisions to the religious identification question in the 2026 Census

The proposed new formulation of the religious identification question in 2026 is:

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The proposed examples (received via email on 12 March 2024) are:

For example: MAHAYANA BUDDHISM, ROMAN CATHOLIC, ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA, HINDUISM, SUNNI, JUDAISM, SIKHISM, ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

Concerns with the new religion question

We wish to outline five concerns with the reformulation of the 2026 question.

1. Disengaging religion from culture and identity

The religious identification question on the Australian Census, 'What is your religion?' assesses *religious identification* as part of a person's culture and heritage, serving as an essential marker of other attributes and behaviour.⁴ Its purpose is not to measure "how religious people are, whether they hold religious beliefs, are members of religious organisations, or attend religious services".⁵

The responses to the Census question on religious identification hold significant value for various stakeholders, including religious leaders, scholars, government personnel, not-for-profit organisations, and sociologists of religion who rely on the data to study a wide range of issues in Australian society.⁶ As one of the world's most successful multicultural societies, data from this question has helped demonstrate and monitor changes in the multicultural character of Australia over time.⁷ The Catholic Church in Australia uses the data to assist

⁴ Gary D. Bouma, Robert Dixon, Philip Hughes, Andrew Singleton, and Michael Mason, "The question ticks a box", *The Age*, July 20, 2021, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/all-pfizer-doses-should-go-to-victoria-and-nsw-20210719-p58b3j.html>.

⁵ Bouma, et al., 2021.

⁶ "Religious Affiliation (RELP). Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary," Australian Bureau of Statistics, released October 15, 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/guide-census-data/census-dictionary/2021/variables-topic/cultural-diversity/religious-affiliation-relp>.

⁷ Gary D. Bouma, "The Emergence of Religious Plurality in Australia: A Multicultural Society." *Sociology of Religion* 56, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 285–302; Gary D. Bouma, *Many Religions All Australian: Religious Settlement, Identity and Cultural Diversity* (Melbourne: Christian Research Association, 1997a); Gary D. Bouma, "The Role of Demographic and Socio-cultural Factors in Australia's Successful Multicultural Society: How Australia is not Europe." *Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 4(2016): 750–71.

parishes, schools, health services, welfare and other organisations in understanding the religious demographic of the communities they serve.

At the 2021 Census, 54 per cent of the population answered the question of their religious identity, while 39 per cent said they had no religion and a further 7 per cent did not provide an answer. Religious identification remains important to the Australian population since numerous individuals seek assistance from religious institutions in times of personal crisis and for services such as schools, health care facilities and welfare.⁸

Reformulating the question as 'Does the person have a religion?' effectively destroys the measure of culture and identity as it changes the question to whether a person holds religious beliefs or not. This will result in the loss of a sense of religious heritage as the new format attempts to divorce religion from culture and tradition, presuming that this is no longer significant.

2. Standardisation and time series impacts

The purpose of tick box options in survey questions is to obtain clear, unambiguous responses capable of being measured and compared across a sample of respondents. Before the introduction of checkbox responses to the religion question in 1991, all responses had to be written in by the respondent. The tick box format has been successfully implemented for seven consecutive Censuses, leading to a high response rate (93.1% in 2021, an increase from 90.9% in 2016).⁹ One effect of the tick box format's relative consistency over time has been comparable results throughout this period. In conjunction with other Census information, this standardised data has assisted the Catholic Church in Australia in formulating policies and organising its operations, enabling the Church to respond to evidence-based needs of the diverse demographic groups in Australia and across the nation.

'What is the person's religion?' and 'Does the person have a religion?' are two different questions. The proposed reformulation represents a substantial change and will mean that results from the 2026 Census would not be comparable with results from the 2021 and earlier Censuses. The loss of comparability would be compounded by altering the format of responses from tick boxes to write-ins.

3. Introducing a new bias in favour of 'No religion'

The reformulation of the question will introduce a significant bias towards individuals who identify as having no religion. This is due to two factors: first, by offering the more convenient option of selecting 'no' as the initial response, and second, by limiting the availability of the tick-box option and providing only write-in options for everyone else. This unjustly increases complexity and ambiguity for all individuals who wish to record their religious identity.

Implementing the write-in-only option will result in a greater number of responses that are invalid, indecipherable, or ambiguous. Many people erroneously associate the names of

⁸ Gallet, W. (2016). 'Social Connectedness: The role of the local church in building community', *Pointers* 24(4): 1-5.

⁹ "Religious Affiliation in 2021", Australian Bureau of Statistics, released July 4, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia#religious-affiliation-in-2021>

their local churches with denominations and religious organisations. Some individuals will probably enter the name of their local church or other meaningless words. Others might opt not to respond at all. This will be particularly evident in communities where a more significant proportion of members are not proficient in English. Consequently, the information presented will be considerably less precise and useful. Determining the meaning of what people have written and correctly classifying it has always been difficult. With the new question and no tick box options for religious identification, this will become considerably more challenging.

Although certain groups during the consultation period expressed concerns to the ABS regarding a potential bias in the previous question towards those who identified with a particular religion, the optional nature of the question and the lead 'No Religion' response makes this bias negligible. The Census has consistently granted individuals the opportunity to indicate if they have no religious affiliation at all.

4. Impacts on the reporting of special ethnic minority groups

One of the strengths of the Australian Census is that it provides a relatively accurate account of many minor religious groups. Determining members of Eastern Catholic Churches—specifically Maronite Catholics, Melkite Catholics, Ukrainian Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, Syro-Malabar Catholics, and Syrian Catholics—is critical for the Catholic Church. Census data is used in these communities for the following purposes: to plan allocations of clergy based on regional concentrations of the increasingly dispersed church population; to address specific welfare needs, particularly of elderly first-generation immigrants; and to provide government agencies with information regarding specific ethnic groups affiliated with these churches.

When individuals encounter the list of the eight largest groups in the 2021 question, they can discern whether or not they belong to those categories. It provides them with a significant guide for explaining their heritage. Maintaining a listed order of various religious groups based on the counts from the previous Census is a consistent approach that ensures data efficiency and accuracy. Before each Census, the Catholic Church dedicates a substantial amount of time and effort to educate Catholics from Eastern Catholic churches not to tick the Catholic option but rather to provide alternative responses such as 'Maronite Catholic' under 'Other (please specify).'

The proposed reformulation will render many members of these groups clueless in 2026 (notwithstanding the availability of numerous examples). This confusion may be exacerbated by the respondents' literacy and language abilities, adversely affecting the recording of these minority groups and leading to severe undercounts. Inaccuracies in recording figures will substantially impede the formulation of policies and plans for these groups.

5. Confusions over the term 'Roman Catholic'

'Roman Catholic' is not a term Australian Catholics identify with. The institution's official name is "The Catholic Church in Australia". The term "Roman" is not part of that name, and its use in the list of examples would be unacceptable to the Conference and misleading and confusing to people completing the Census

The term 'Roman' last appeared in reports about religion in the 1986 report *Religion in Australia* (Cat. No. 2510.0), specifically in a footnote to Table 1.¹⁰ Before that, Census reports included 'Catholic' and 'Roman Catholic' as two distinct categories. While this indicates that many individuals continued to write in 'Roman Catholic' until the 1970s and possibly the 1980s, usage of that terminology among Catholics themselves declined precipitously, and the ABS decision to discontinue the use of the term 'Roman Catholic' reflected this.

The term 'Roman Catholic' is synonymous with 'Catholic' and includes both Catholics who identify as 'Western Catholic' (the term the ABS gives to distinguish Latin Rite Catholics) and Catholics who belong to Eastern churches (e.g. Maronite Catholics). Using the term 'Roman Catholics' in the Census question will cause considerable confusion among Catholics trying to record their religious identity accurately and may lead to the use of other meaningless terms such as 'Australian Catholic'. For these reasons, the preferred term for the 2026 Census is 'Catholic' as it has been ever since the tick-box format of the question was introduced for the 1991 Census.

Conclusion

The ABS is distinguished by the calibre of the Census data it generates and the tools with which the data is disseminated. The Catholic Church considers religious identification data and other Census data very important for several reasons: the comprehensive range of classifications and variables, the availability of data for large and small geographical areas, and the timely updating of the information every five years. However, to maintain data quality, the ABS must guarantee that its preparations for the 2026 Census have given full consideration to people with religious beliefs through adequate consultations with relevant stakeholders to ensure that proposed changes reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of the Australian population.

The changes to the religious identification question have likely been proposed by opponents of including a religion question in the Census. Should the reformulated question be adopted, the 2026 question could probably fail due to a high level of unusable responses and significant deviations from the 2021 results. This may lead to calls for the question to be omitted in 2031 and subsequent years.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and other Catholic agencies and institutions rely on ongoing reliable data produced by the ABS to support a vast array of services and activities to meet all Australians' current and emerging needs. We are deeply concerned about the significant effects that the reformulation will have on the data collected in the Census and urge you to reconsider such a drastic change to the religious identification question for 2026.

¹⁰ Ian Castles, *Census 1986 - Religion in Australia*. (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1991): ABS Catalogue No. 2510.0.

I would be happy to answer any questions the ABS may have. I can be contacted via S47F
National Centre for Pastoral Research, on S47F or at
ncpr@catholic.org.au.

Yours sincerely

S47F

S47F

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

SUPPORTED BY:

S47F

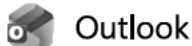
S47F

Catholic Religious Australia

S47F

S47F

Association of Ministerial PJs



RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
[SEC=OFFICIAL]

From: **S47F** <[REDACTED]@catholic.org.au>
Date: Tue 02/04/2024 12:19 PM
To: **S47F** <[REDACTED]@abs.gov.au>
Cc: **S47F** <[REDACTED]@catholic.org.au>; **S47F** <[REDACTED]@abs.gov.au>; **S47F** <[REDACTED]@ampjp.org.au>; **S47F** <[REDACTED]@catholicreligious.org.au>; **S47F** <[REDACTED]@ampjp.org.au>; **S47F** <census.content@abs.gov.au>; **S47F** <census.content@abs.gov.au>; **S47F** <[REDACTED]@abs.gov.au>; **S47F** <[REDACTED]@abs.gov.au>

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear **S47F**

Thank you for your email.

We are pleased to hear of the change of wording of the example to 'Catholic' for the large-scale test. I am very happy to be included on the subscription list for broader updates on the Content consultation and look forward to hearing about further developments on the questions for the 2026 Census.

Kind Regards,



S47F

S47F

Synod of Bishops 2021-2024

S47F National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601

P: **S47F** |

E: **S47F** <[REDACTED]@catholic.org.au> | W: ncpr.catholic.org.au



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

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From: **S47F**

Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2024 11:58 AM

To: **S47F**

Cc: **S47F**; census.content@abs.gov.au;

S47F

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hi **S47F**

Thank you very much for providing the prompt feedback on the term 'Roman Catholic,' and for forwarding the letter from **S47F** regarding broader feedback on the question design being tested for the 2026 Census.

I can confirm that based on your feedback we have changed the wording of the example to 'Catholic' for the large-scale test later this year.

I can also confirm that while the question we shared with you will proceed to the large-scale test, we will not decide on the design of the questions for the 2026 Census until after this test. We will ensure that this additional information and the case put forward in your letter is accurately reflected in our final assessment documentation, as it builds on your submission provided to the Religious Affiliation Standard consultation in late 2022.

My team or I will be in touch if we have any follow up questions on your letter and will keep you abreast of any developments. We have also added you to the subscription list for broader updates on the Content consultation. This will ensure you are included in all communications regarding the 2026 Census content, not just on this question. Please let me know if you would not like to be on this list and we will remove you (you can also unsubscribe at the bottom of any of the emails when they are distributed).

Again, thank you for taking the time to meet with us earlier this month and for your interest and commitment to the Census. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at any point.

Regards

S47F

S47F S47F

Avg Program manager, Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) S47F

(E) S47F @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Executive assistant S47F @abs.gov.au

The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and elders, both past, present and emerging.

From: S47F @catholic.org.au>

Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2024 4:24 PM

To: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Cc: S47F @catholic.org.au> S47F

S47F @abs.gov.au>; S47F @catholicreligious.org.au> S47F

S47F @ampjp.org.au>

Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear S47F

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference wishes to provide the Bureau with feedback in response to the email alerting us to the proposed alterations to the religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census that was received on 5 March 2024.

Please find attached a letter from the S47F of the Conference S47F in which our concerns on the 2026 question are detailed. The Conference's letter is supported by Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial PJPs, in a joint response on behalf of the Catholic community.

We await your prompt response on the matter and are ready to provide any assistance to further consultation on this issue.

Kind Regards,

S47F

S47F Synod of Bishops 2021-2024

S47F National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601

P S47F

E S47F @catholic.org.au | W: ncpr.catholic.org.au

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

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From: S47F [REDACTED]@abs.gov.au>

Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 3:59 PM

To: S47F [REDACTED]@catholic.org.au>

Subject: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Caution: This is an external email from outside ACBC. Please take care when clicking links or opening attachments. If in doubt, forward the email S47F [REDACTED]@catholic.org.au

Dear S47F [REDACTED]

The next Census of Population and Housing will take place in 2026. Every Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a review to inform a recommendation to the Government on the topics for the next Census.

The ABS received extensive feedback on Religious affiliation when consulting on the Religious Affiliation Standard and during the 2026 Census Topic Review public consultation process. Currently we are preparing for a large-scale Census test that will test proposed new Census questions and changes to existing questions.

We are testing a new way of asking the Religious affiliation question, including updates to the list of religion examples (see image below). Roman Catholic is proposed to be included as one of the eight listed examples.

We would like to check with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference if there are any concerns including this particular example, and to confirm how the example should be presented.

We welcome your thoughts by **COB Wednesday 13 March 2024**. We're also happy to arrange a brief meeting for next week if you'd prefer.

24 Does the person have a religion?

- Answering this question is **OPTIONAL**
- For example: RELIGION 1, ROMAN CATHOLIC, RELIGION 3, RELIGION 4, RELIGION 5, RELIGION 6, RELIGION 7, RELIGION 8.

Kind regards,

S47F [REDACTED]

S47F [REDACTED]

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

2026 Census Content Development | Population Statistics Branch | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

(E) S47F @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and elders; past, present and emerging.

Released under FOI Act

Basics

S47F

06/03/2024 01:19 PM

S47F

abs.gov.au

Send	To "2026 Census Content Development WDB" <2026.census.content.development.wdb@abs.gov.au>		
	cc		
	bcc		
Subject	FW: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]		
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL		
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy	☐ Legal privilege	☐ Legislative secrecy
	Caveat	☐ NATIONAL-CABINET	
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations		

FYI

Cheers

S47F

S47F

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

2026 Census Content Development | Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) S47F @abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and elders; past, present and emerging.

From: S47F@catholic.org.au>

Sent: Wednesday, March 6, 2024 12:57 PM

To: S47F@abs.gov.au>

Cc: S47F@catholic.org.au>; S47F@catholic.org.au>; S47F@catholic.org.au>

Subject: FW: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear S47F,

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference S47F, S47F has forwarded your email regarding changes to the ABS religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census.

Our Centre (the National Centre for Pastoral Research) is responsible for the use of Census data and the preparation of reports for the Catholic Church in Australia (See <https://ncpr.catholic.org.au/2021-catholic-social-profiles/>) on behalf of the Conference.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the proposed amendments to the religious affiliation question, particularly the wording of the example you provided.

Would you be available to meet on Tuesday, 11 March 2024 at 2 pm? If this time does not suit you, please let me know what other day/time would work.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Kind Regards,



S47F [REDACTED]
S47F [REDACTED], Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
S47F [REDACTED] National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic
Bishops Conference
GPO Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601
P: S47F [REDACTED] |
E: S47F [REDACTED]@catholic.org.au | W: ncpr.catholic.org.au



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to this Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

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S22

Relea

FOI Act

S22

x

From: S47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@abs.gov.au](mailto:[redacted]@abs.gov.au)>

Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 3:59 PM

To: S47F [redacted] <[\[redacted\]@catholic.org.au](mailto:[redacted]@catholic.org.au)>

Subject: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Caution: This is an external email from outside ACBC. Please take care when clicking links or opening attachments. If in doubt, forward the email to tech@catholic.org.au

Dear S47F [redacted]

The next Census of Population and Housing will take place in 2026. Every Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a review to inform a recommendation

to the Government on the topics for the next Census.

The ABS received extensive feedback on Religious affiliation when consulting on the [Religious Affiliation Standard](#) and during the [2026 Census Topic Review public consultation](#) process. Currently we are preparing for a large-scale Census test that will test proposed new Census questions and changes to existing questions.

We are testing a new way of asking the Religious affiliation question, including updates to the list of religion examples (see image below). Roman Catholic is proposed to be included as one of the eight listed examples.

We would like to check with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference if there are any concerns including this particular example, and to confirm how the example should be presented.

We welcome your thoughts by **COB Wednesday 13 March 2024**. We're also happy to arrange a brief meeting for next week if you'd prefer.

24 Does the person have a religion? • Answering this question is OPTIONAL • For example: RELIGION 1, ROMAN CATHOLIC, RELIGION 3, RELIGION 4, RELIGION 5, RELIGION 6, RELIGION 7, RELIGION 8.	☐ No Yes (specify religion) <table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>																																																																																																				

Kind regards,

S47F

S47F

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

(E) S47F [REDACTED] [@abs.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@abs.gov.au) (W) www.abs.gov.au

The Australian Bureau of Statistics acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and elders; past, present and emerging.

Basics

S47F

30/05/2024 03:40 PM

S47F @abs.gov.au

Send	To "census.content@abs.gov.au" <census.content@abs.gov.au> cc S47F @abs.gov.au S47F @abs.gov.au bcc
Subject	FW: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census and offer of meeting [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy ☐ Legal privilege ☐ Legislative secrecy Caveat ☐ NATIONAL-CABINET
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations

From: S47F @catholic.org.au

Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2024 2:09 PM

To: S47F @abs.gov.au; Duncan Young <Duncan.Young@abs.gov.au>

Subject: FW: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census and offer of meeting [SEC=OFFICIAL]

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Duncan,

Thank you for your below email to S47F and S47F, regarding the offer to meet with Dr David Gruen regarding the potential changes to the 2026 religion question.

S47F has asked me to respond on behalf of S47F, the S47F of the Catholic Bishops' Centre for Pastoral Research, who is currently on leave overseas.

We have been in contact with a small group of our colleagues from some of the other Christian church groups who have received a similar email from you. We would be most pleased to take up the offer to meet with David at a convenient time for all. It makes sense to meet as a group, if that is most appropriate.

Would you please be able to advise a suitable date and time to meet, and let me know?

With kind regards,

S47F

S47F
National Centre for Pastoral Research
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
90 Albion Road Box Hill Victoria 3128
P: S47F
E: S47F@catholic.org.au | W: ncpr.catholic.org.au

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From: S47F@abs.gov.au> On Behalf Of Duncan Young

Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 5:45 PM

To: S47F@catholic.org.au; S47F S47F@perthcatholic.org.au>

Cc: S47F [REDACTED]@catholic.org.au>; census.content@abs.gov.au

Subject: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census and offer of meeting [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear S47F [REDACTED],

I am writing to you, in your roles in the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), in relation to the question on religious affiliation for the 2026 Census of Population and Housing.

We are currently preparing for a large Census test that will test potential new Census questions and changes to existing questions, including potential changes to the question on religious affiliation.

There has been some media reporting of potential changes to the religious affiliation 2026 Census. The ABS released a statement today to clarify what is being considered and tested

<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/census-media-hub/releases-and-statements/on-the-record/clarification-reports-published-regarding-religious-affiliation-question-2026-census>.

As the statement notes, the ABS has not made a decision on the approach for the 2026 Census and is still consulting and conducting testing. We will consider the impact of any changes on comparability of data between Censuses, as well as ensuring the question collects the highest quality data, minimises public burden and is inclusive for all.

As a key stakeholder for data on religious affiliation, we are keen to understand your views and any concerns.

With this in mind, the Australian Statistician Dr David Gruen is available to meet with you to discuss our plans and hear your views. Please respond to this email if you would like to take up this opportunity.

We will continue to keep you informed as we work to reach a final position on the question to be included in the 2026 Census.

Regards,

Duncan Young (he / him)
General Manager

Census and Population Division

Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) (02) 6252 7807 (M) S47F

(E) duncan.young@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Released under FOI Act

Basics

S47F [REDACTED]
S47F [REDACTED]@abs.gov.au

21/05/2024 11:46 AM

Send	To "census.content@abs.gov.au" <census.content@abs.gov.au> cc bcc		
Subject	FW: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census and offer of meeting [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]		
Protective Mark	UNOFFICIAL		
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy	☐ Legal privilege	☐ Legislative secrecy
	Caveat		☐ NATIONAL-CABINET
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations		

FYI

From: S47F [REDACTED]@perthcatholic.org.au>

Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 10:51 AM

To: Duncan Young <Duncan.Young@abs.gov.au>

Subject: RE: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census and offer of meeting [SEC=OFFICIAL]

CAUTION: External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Good morning, Duncan

On behalf of [REDACTED], may I thank you for your correspondence.

Your correspondence will be provided to the [REDACTED] upon his return to the office.

Kind regards

[REDACTED] Episcopal Services

Griver House, 249 Adelaide Terrace

PERTH WA 6000

PO Box 3311, EAST PERTH WA 6892

Telephone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]@perthcatholic.org.au | Website: www.perthcatholic.org.au

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP



*Journeying Together
Led by the Spirit*



Perth Archdiocesan Assembly
2023 - 2024

Acknowledgement to Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians and Elders, both past and present, of the lands on which our parishes, agencies, offices and workplaces are located.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians who have walked upon and cared for this land for thousands of years.

We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

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From: S47F [REDACTED]@abs.gov.au> On Behalf Of Duncan Young
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2024 3:45 PM
To: S47F [REDACTED]@catholic.org.au; S47F [REDACTED]@perthcatholic.org.au>
Cc: S47F [REDACTED]@catholic.org.au; census.content@abs.gov.au
Subject: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census and offer of meeting [SEC=OFFICIAL]

You don't often get email from duncan.young@abs.gov.au. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear S47F [REDACTED] and S47F [REDACTED]

I am writing to you, in your roles in the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC), in relation to the question on religious affiliation for the 2026 Census of Population and Housing.

We are currently preparing for a large Census test that will test potential new Census questions and changes to existing questions, including potential changes to the question on religious affiliation.

There has been some media reporting of potential changes to the religious affiliation 2026 Census. The ABS released a statement today to clarify what is being considered and tested

<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/census-media-hub/releases-and-statements/on-the-record/clarification-reports-published-regarding-religious-affiliation-question-2026-census>.

As the statement notes, the ABS has not made a decision on the approach for the 2026 Census and is still consulting and conducting testing. We will consider the impact of any changes on comparability of data between Censuses, as well as ensuring the question collects the highest quality data, minimises public burden and is inclusive for all.

As a key stakeholder for data on religious affiliation, we are keen to understand your views and any concerns.

With this in mind, the Australian Statistician Dr David Gruen is available to meet with you to discuss our plans and hear your views. Please respond to this email if you would like to take up this opportunity.

We will continue to keep you informed as we work to reach a final position on the question to be included in the 2026 Census.

Regards,

Duncan Young (he / him)

General Manager

Census and Population Division

Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) (02) 6252 7807 (M) S47F

(E) duncan.young@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Released under FOI Act

Basics

2026 Census Content Development WDB

21/05/2024 04:37 PM

Sent by S47F

Send	To S47F @catholicreligious.org.au cc S47F @catholicreligious.org.au bcc S47F @abs.gov.au@M365
Subject	Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy ☐ Legal privilege ☐ Legislative secrecy Caveat ☐ NATIONAL-CABINET
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations

Dear S47F

I am writing to you, in your role with Catholic Religious Australia, to provide an update on the the question on religious affiliation for the 2026 Census of Population and Housing. This follows on from our email in March this year, where we contacted your organisation to advise that we were testing potential changes to the question on religious affiliation for the 2026 Census and to seek feedback on the examples we were proposing to use in our large-scale

Census test.

There has recently been some media reporting regarding these potential changes. The ABS released a statement yesterday to clarify what is being considered and tested which I have linked below:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/census-media-hub/releases-and-statements/on-the-record/clarification-reports-published-regarding-religious-affiliation-question-2026-census>

As the statement notes, the ABS has not made a decision on the approach for the 2026 Census and is still consulting and conducting testing. We will consider the impact of any changes on comparability of data between Censuses, as well as ensuring the question collects the highest quality data, minimises public burden and is inclusive for all.

As a stakeholder for data on religious affiliation, we are keen to understand your perspectives. You can send any feedback to census.content@abs.gov.au. Please also let me know if you do not want to receive further updates from the ABS on the 2026 Census.

Regards,

S47F

Co-Director – 2026 Census Content
Population Statistics Branch | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

(E) census.content@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Please do not send a response to a personal email address as individuals may be absent from work and there may be a delay in attending to your query. The [ABS Privacy Policy](#) outlines how the ABS handles any personal information that you provide to us.

RE: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL] (Response to:)
2026 Census Content Development WDB

S47F

06/06/2024 02:19 PM

OFFICIAL

Basics

S47F

06/06/2024 02:19 PM

S47F

@ampjp.org.au

Send	To	S47F @abs.gov.au>, "census.content@abs.gov.au" <census.content@abs.gov.au>		
	cc			
	bcc			
Subject	RE: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL]			
Protective Mark	OFFICIAL			
Information management markers	☐ Personal privacy ☐ Legal privilege ☐ Legislative secrecy		Caveat	☐ NATIONAL-CABINET
Categories	04. Engagement\External\Religious and non-religious organisations			

4 attachments



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Dear S47F,

Thankyou for the continued consultation.

This has been an area of great concern.

I would understand your purpose in addressing the question is to maintain maximum comparability, while trying to maximise a fair and as detailed a response as possible.

The existing question provides the solution to that, if it has the addition of example subsets which will indicate the possibilities within Other to nominate subsets. So the Other list might include

e.g. S47C etc.

(this is just an example , nor have I listed them in any particular order)

This will provide the highest quality data (likely to maximise responses and comparability), minimises public burden (ticks are easiest) and is inclusive for all (by indicating more options might be used)

If you were however, to change to the test question, then in fairness

Yes and the answer boxes should sit above No as Yes was the majority answer in 2021.

However changing to the test question is likely to reduce responses to the question by needing to write in responses. Ticking a box is easier and simpler, and more likely to generate a response.

Again, a modification of the existing question by the addition of examples of subsets is most likely to meet the needs of both ABS and those interested in using the data from the question post-census.

With best wishes,

S47F



S47F

S47F

Association of Ministerial PJP's

S47F @ampjp.org.au

S47F

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From: S47F @abs.gov.au>

Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2024 5:02 PM

To: S47F @ampjp.org.au>

Subject: Update: Religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear S47F

I am writing to provide an update on the the question on religious affiliation for the 2026 Census of Population and Housing. This follows on from our email in March this year where we advised that we were testing potential changes to the question on religious affiliation for the 2026 Census and sought feedback on the examples we were proposing to use in our large-scale Census Test.

There has been some media reporting of potential changes to the religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census. The ABS released a statement yesterday to clarify what is being considered and tested

<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/census-media-hub/releases-and-statements/on-the-record/clarification-reports-published-regarding-religious-affiliation-question-2026-ce>

[nsus](#)

As the statement notes, the ABS has not made a decision on the approach for the 2026 Census and is still consulting and conducting testing. We will consider the impact of any changes on comparability of data between Censuses, as well as ensuring the question collects the highest quality data, minimises public burden and is inclusive for all.

As a stakeholder for data on religious affiliation, we are keen to understand your perspectives. You can send any feedback to census.content@abs.gov.au.

Regards,

S47F

Co-Director – 2026 Census Content

Population Statistics Branch | **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

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