



FW: Correspondence from Senator Dean Smith [SEC=OFFICIAL]David Gruen to:

S47F 05/08/2026 04:11 PM

Sent by: "S47F" <S47F@abs.gov.au>

Cc: S47F "David Gruen"

From: "David Gruen" <david.gruen@abs.gov.au>

To: S47F <S47F@abs.gov.au>

Cc: S47F <S47F@abs.gov.au>, "David Gruen" <david.gruen@abs.gov.au>

1 Attachment



Letter Dr David Gruen ABS Matters Concerning the Integrity of the 2026 Census.pdf

Hi S47F

Senator Smith has sent the attached letter to David and has posed a number of questions that we will need to respond to.

Could I please ask you to register this in PDMS and task to the 2026 Census team to draft a response for David to send back? He will want to review the draft before it's finalised/sent.

This one will be a tight turnaround as Senator Smith has requested a response prior to Census.

Please give me a call if you need further information or have any questions.

Thank you!

Kind regards,

S47F

S47F

Executive Assistant to the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Bureau of Statistics

S47F @abs.gov.au | www.abs.gov.au

From: S47F (Sen D. Smith) S47F@aph.gov.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 5 August 2026 3:35 PM

To: David Gruen <david.gruen@abs.gov.au>

Cc: Smith, Dean (Senator) <Senator.Smith@aph.gov.au>

Subject: Correspondence from Senator Dean Smith

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

Please find attached correspondence from Senator Dean Smith.

Kind regards

S47F

OFFICE OF SENATOR DEAN SMITH

M: S47F

P: 08 9343 4108 (Perth) | 02 6277 3442 (Canberra)

E: S47F@aph.gov.au



Released under FOI Act



RE: Correspondence from Senator Dean Smith [SEC=OFFICIAL]

From: S47F @abs.gov.au>
Date: Fri 07/08/2026 4:54 PM
To: S47F @aph.gov.au' <S47F @aph.gov.au>
Cc: David Gruen <david.gruen@abs.gov.au>; 'Senator.Smith@aph.gov.au' <Senator.Smith@aph.gov.au>
Bcc: Brenton Goldsworthy <brenton.goldsworthy@abs.gov.au>

📎 1 attachment (417 KB)
MC26-000045.pdf;

Hi S47F

As promised, please find attached correspondence from Dr Gruen to Senator Dean Smith.

S47F
Executive Officer to the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Bureau of Statistics
(02) 6252 5022 | S47F | S47F @abs.gov.au

From: S47F
Sent: Thursday, 6 August 2026 2:42 PM
To: 'S47F @aph.gov.au' S47F @aph.gov.au>
Cc: David Gruen <david.gruen@abs.gov.au>; 'Senator.Smith@aph.gov.au' <Senator.Smith@aph.gov.au>
Subject: RE: Correspondence from Senator Dean Smith [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hi S47F

Thanks for sending through the correspondence from Senator Dean Smith. We will formally respond prior to Census night.

In the meantime, I wanted to draw your attention to a Media Statement the ABS released today: [ABS reminds Australians to answer the religion question according to their own beliefs](#)

Regards

S47F
Executive Officer to the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Bureau of Statistics
(02) 6252 5022 | S47F | S47F @abs.gov.au

From: S47F (Sen D. Smith) S47F @aph.gov.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 5 August 2026 3:35 PM
To: David Gruen <david.gruen@abs.gov.au>
Cc: Smith, Dean (Senator) <Senator.Smith@aph.gov.au>
Subject: Correspondence from Senator Dean Smith

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

Please find attached correspondence from Senator Dean Smith.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]
S47F

OFFICE OF SENATOR DEAN SMITH

M: [REDACTED]
S47F

P: 08 9343 4108 (Perth) | 02 6277 3442 (Canberra)

E: [REDACTED]
S47F @aph.gov.au





Dean Smith

Shadow Assistant Minister to the Shadow Treasurer
Shadow Assistant Minister for the Cost of Living
Liberal Senator for Western Australia

Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Statistician and Chief Statistician
Australian Bureau of Statistics
Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616

Via Email: david.gruen@abs.gov.au

5 August 2026

Dear Dr Gruen,

Matters Concerning the Integrity of the 2026 Census

I write regarding recent media reports concerning the “Census – Not religious? Mark no religion” campaign being conducted by the Rationalist Society of Australia, the National Secular Lobby and associated organisations ahead of the 2026 Census.

The Australian Census is one of the nation’s most important statistical exercises.

Its credibility depends upon Australians providing accurate responses that reflect their own circumstances, free from organised campaigns seeking to influence how particular questions are answered.

According to recent reporting, the organisations involved have developed and distributed an online questionnaire that, depending upon an individual’s responses, recommends they either record “No religion” or use another category when completing the Census.

The questionnaire invites participants to consider factors such as attendance at religious services, prayer, and views on contemporary social issues before recommending how they should answer the Census religion question.

As you would recall, I have questioned you on several occasions during Senate Estimates regarding preparations for the 2026 Census, including the proposed treatment of the religion question and the importance of maintaining confidence in the integrity of Census data.

During Estimates in both June and November 2024, we discussed the consultation process undertaken by the ABS, including your engagement with religious and secular organisations, the testing of alternative approaches to the religion question, and your confirmation that responsibility for determining the wording and structure of the question rests with you as Australian Statistician.

You also advised the Senate Estimates Committee that the ABS was carefully considering stakeholder views and evidence before determining the question that would best capture accurate information on religious affiliation.

Against that background, I am concerned that organised campaigns encouraging Australians to answer the religion question in a particular way may have the potential to compromise the integrity of the Census, undermine public confidence in its results, and facilitate an inaccurate use of Census data in future policy and planning decisions.

I would appreciate your advice on the following matters:

1. Is the ABS aware of the “Census – Not religious? Mark no religion” campaign and the questionnaire currently being circulated by the Rationalist Society of Australia, the National Secular Lobby and associated organisations?
2. Does the ABS consider it appropriate for advocacy organisations to conduct campaigns that encourage or recommend particular responses to Census questions, and if not, what concerns does the ABS have about such campaigns?
3. Has the ABS assessed whether campaigns of this nature have the potential to influence responses, undermine the accuracy or integrity of Census data, or diminish public confidence in the Census?
4. What representations, concerns or complaints has the ABS received regarding this campaign or similar campaigns, and what action, if any, has the ABS taken in response?
5. Has the ABS engaged with the organisations conducting this campaign, or any other stakeholders, regarding its potential impact on the integrity of the Census?
6. Has the ABS taken steps to satisfy itself that this campaign is lawful and categorically does not risk the integrity of the Census.
7. Does the ABS intend to issue any public guidance reminding Australians that Census responses should reflect their own circumstances and beliefs, rather than recommendations made by third-party advocacy groups?
8. Has the ABS raised this issue with the Australian Government or the responsible Minister, or sought additional legislative powers or other measures to better protect the integrity, credibility and independence of the Census from organised attempts to influence responses?
9. More broadly, what policies, protocols or safeguards does the ABS have in place to respond to organised campaigns by advocacy groups that seek to influence how Australians answer Census questions, regardless of the issue or viewpoint being advanced?

The Census underpins decisions on public policy, service delivery, infrastructure planning and the allocation of resources across Australia.

Maintaining confidence that Census data represents Australians' genuine responses, rather than responses shaped by organised advocacy campaigns, is essential to preserving its credibility and value.

If it assists, I am comfortable with your response to this letter being made public.

Given the proximity of Census night on Tuesday, 11 August, I would appreciate your earliest advice.

Yours sincerely,



Dean Smith

Released under FOI Act



Australian Bureau of Statistics
Locked Bag 10 | Belconnen ACT 2616

Ref: MC26-000045

Senator Dean Smith
Senator for WA
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Smith

Thank you for your correspondence of 5 August 2026 concerning the integrity of the 2026 Census. Here are my answers to your questions:

1. *Is the ABS aware of the “Census – Not religious? Mark no religion” campaign and the questionnaire currently being circulated by the Rationalist Society of Australia, the National Secular Lobby and associated organisations?*

The ABS is aware of the “Census – Not religious? Mark no religion” campaign. It is one of several campaigns circulating around the 2026 Census question on religion and other topics.

2. *Does the ABS consider it appropriate for advocacy organisations to conduct campaigns that encourage or recommend particular responses to Census questions, and if not, what concerns does the ABS have about such campaigns?*

The ABS is grateful to the many groups, including cultural and religious organisations, that are encouraging participation in the Census and helping their communities to complete the form accurately. Many of these groups and organisations consult with the ABS and invite us to fact-check their guidance.

The ABS is concerned when advocacy encourages people to respond in a manner that is inconsistent with the intent of the question. The question on religion asks what is a person’s religious **affiliation**, which may be different from their practice of, or participation in, religious activities. It is important that the question is answered accurately and according to an individual’s own beliefs regarding their religion.

3. *Has the ABS assessed whether campaigns of this nature have the potential to influence responses, undermine the accuracy or integrity of Census data, or diminish public confidence in the Census?*

When the ABS becomes aware of campaigns we assess them for accuracy, reach and impact. If campaigns are found to be factually incorrect, we take action to encourage accurate completion and maintain public confidence in the Census.

4. *What representations, concerns or complaints has the ABS received regarding this campaign or similar campaigns, and what action, if any, has the ABS taken in response?*

The ABS has responded to a small number of public and media enquiries asking if we were aware of the “Census – Not religious? Mark no religion” campaign.

The ABS released public guidance on 6 August [reminding Australians to answer the religion question according to their own beliefs](#).

5. *Has the ABS engaged with the organisations conducting this campaign, or any other stakeholders, regarding its potential impact on the integrity of the Census?*

The ABS has had previous interactions with organisations involved in the campaign. For example, the “Census26 – Not Religious?” campaign has previously requested ABS review the campaign’s proposed website content instructing people how to request a separate form for reasons of privacy to ensure it provided accurate information. The ABS did not review or have any prior awareness of the questionnaire.

6. *Has the ABS taken steps to satisfy itself that this campaign is lawful and categorially does not risk the integrity of the Census?*

The ABS has not sought legal advice related to this campaign. We have not seen evidence that would suggest the campaign poses a risk to the integrity of the Census. We will continue to monitor our public channels for questions or feedback on this issue.

7. *Does the ABS intend to issue any public guidance reminding Australians that Census responses should reflect their own circumstances and beliefs, rather than recommendations made by third-party advocacy groups?*

The ABS released public guidance on 6 August [reminding Australians to answer the religion question according to their own beliefs](#).

8. *Has the ABS raised this issue with the Australian Government or the responsible Minister, or sought additional legislative powers or other measures to better protect the integrity, credibility and independence of the Census from the organised attempts to influence responses?*

The ABS has alerted the responsible Minister to the media statement we released on 6 August.

9. *More broadly, what policies, protocols or safeguards does the ABS have in place to respond to organised campaigns by advocacy groups that seek to influence how Australians answer Census questions, regardless of the issue or viewpoint being advanced?*

The ABS has established protocols for the management of misinformation on media and social media that presents a risk to the ABS's reputation or to public confidence in the Census. We are actively monitoring media and social media for misinformation. Where we identify misinformation, we take action based on its potential impact and reach. This action can include hiding or turning off social media comments on ABS posts, reporting posts or comments to social media platforms, issuing a correction request to a media outlet or publishing a media statement clarifying an issue.

A question on religion has been included in the Census since Australia's first Census in 1911 and is important for understanding how the religious affiliation of Australians has evolved over time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Gruen". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Statistician

7 August 2026

Released under FOI Act