Document 1

ATTACHMENT B

Australian Bureau of Statistics

For Information

MS23-000052

Title:	**Update on the 2026 Census Topic Consultation and Development Process**	
To:	**The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	
Cc:	*The Treasurer, The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP* *Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary to the Treasury*	
Recommendation:	1. That you note the outcomes from Phase two of the 2026 Census topic review process that will be published on Tuesday 12 December 2023.	
	Noted ☐	**Please Discuss ☒** Volunteering Ancestry Income
Signature:	S47F **The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	27/11/23 **Date**

Executive summary

- This brief provides an update on the 2026 Census topic review process, including changes that the ABS is no longer considering and potential content changes still under investigation.

- The ABS will make a recommendation on the 2026 Census topics to the Australian Government in mid-2024.

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Key points

- The ABS has refined the shortlist of content changes being considered for the 2026 Census. This is based on submissions from the second phase of public consultation, a preliminary assessment of collection feasibility, and initial focus group and cognitive interview testing.

- The refined shortlist includes five new topics, 12 enhancements to existing topics and four topics still being considered for removal at Attachment A. s22 s22

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Cleared by:	Brenton Goldsworthy Deputy Statistician, Insights and Statistics Group	**Contact officer:**	Duncan Young General Manager, Census Division
Date cleared:	22 November 2023	**Contact number:**	s22
Consultation:	Public consultation on topics proposed for inclusion, change or removal. Engagement with key stakeholders, including the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics and ABS LGBTIQ+ Expert Advisory Committee, to confirm data needs for topics as required. s22 s22		

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- On Tuesday 12 December 2023, the ABS will release the outcomes of the second phase of public consultation and review, including the content changes still under consideration for inclusion, change or removal, and the intention to recommend the decennial collection of number of children ever born.

- The ABS will continue to refine the shortlist of potential content changes during the development and testing phase, prior to making a recommendation to Government in mid-2024.

Issues/sensitivities

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- The ABS shortlisted the religion question for change following the first phase of 2026 Census topic consultation and consultation for the Religious Affiliation Standard review. The ABS received strong support for proposed changes during the second phase of public consultation. The ABS is looking at options to address concerns raised by a small number of stakeholders regarding the increased complexity of having two questions, particularly for people from multicultural backgrounds. Religious affiliation is a sensitive and widely reported topic, and changes to the question are likely to impact on comparability of the data between Censuses. The ABS is investigating options to measure the impact of question changes on response patterns.

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Background

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s22 You were briefed on the outcome of the first phase of public consultation on 25 July 2023 (MS23-000022).

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[redacted]

- Topics were then assessed as to whether the Census is the most appropriate mode of collection. The ABS then refined the shortlist of topics to those with the strongest case for inclusion or change when balancing public value and feasibility.

- ABS will make a recommendation on 2026 Census topics to the Australian Government in mid-2024. Any changes to content included in this recommendation will have undergone sufficient initial testing to provide confidence they can be successfully implemented in the 2026 Census. Following Government decision, the Census and Statistics Regulation 2016 will be amended and tabled in both houses of the Australian Parliament.

- The ABS has the authority under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* to determine the questions that are used to collect data on the topics prescribed in the Regulation. Some enhancements being considered for the 2026 Census do not require a change to the topic in the Regulation. The ABS will engage the Australian Government Solicitor to determine whether an enhancement requires a change to the Regulation prior to making the recommendation to Government.

Attachments

Attachment A - Summary of topic changes still being considered following phase two consultation and review

[redacted]

[redacted]

Attachment A: Summary of topic changes still being considered following phase two consultation and review

[redacted]

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Table 2: Changes to existing topics being considered further

Priority	Topic	Proposed change
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Priority 2	s22	
	Religious affiliation	Review question design and response categories. Will support the review of the Religious Affiliation Standard which requires testing in the Census context.

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[redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted]

Document 2

Australian Bureau of Statistics

For Information

MS24-000006

Title:	**Update on the 2026 Census Topic Consultation and Development Process**	
To:	**The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	
Cc:	*The Treasurer, The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP*	
	Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary to the Treasury	
Recommendation:	1. That you note the update on the planned steps in the 2026 Census topic review process and the update on ABS considerations for 2026 Census content. This information is being provided as background for a face-to-face briefing by the ABS on 21 February 2024.	
	Noted ☑	**Please Discuss** ☐
Signature:	S47F **The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	20/2/24 **Date**

Executive summary

- This brief provides information on the process for finalising the 2026 Census topics ahead of a briefing on Wednesday 21 February 2024. It also provides an update on the ABS's current 2026 Census content directions (the previous update was provided in December 2023 in MS23-000052).

- The 2026 Census content is determined by:
    - Government decision on Census topics, specified in the *Census and Statistics Regulation 2016* and tabled in both houses of the Australian Parliament.
    - ABS decisions, under authority of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, to determine the questions that are used to collect data on the topics prescribed in the Regulation.

- Consistent with previous Censuses, the finalisation of the questionnaire for the public 2024 Major Census Test (by 1 March 2024) occurs in advance of ABS recommendations to Government (around May 2024) and the Government decision on Census topics (mid-2024). Also, the Government decision on Census topics occurs before the 2024 Major Census Test is conducted (10 September 2024). This timing is driven by immovable operational deadlines for the Census Test (updating the Census online form) and for the 2026 Census main event (printing of Census paper forms), alongside the timeline required for Government decision and updating of the Census Regulation.

Cleared by:	Brenton Goldsworthy, Deputy Australian Statistician, Insights and Statistics Group	**Contact officer:**	Duncan Young General Manager, Census and Population Statistics Division
Date cleared:	19 February 2024	**Contact number:**	s22

Consultation: Two rounds of public consultation. Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, including the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics and the ABS LGBTIQ+ Expert Advisory Committee, to inform question design and testing activities. Engagement with Department of Treasury on the process for updating *Census and Statistics Regulation 2016*.

- The 2024 Major Census Test is a critical activity as it provides the last opportunity to test the Census questions, and the Census questionnaire, before print deadlines. This allows the ABS to confirm that new questions collect data of the expected quality, or to guide further refinement to questions and their placement on the form. Given the timing of the 2024 Major Census Test and Government decisions, it is important that the ABS includes all Census topics in this Test that may be included in the 2026 Census to ensure these are adequately tested.

[redacted]

- Public communication and discussion of changes to Census content is unlikely to distinguish between the Census topic changes determined by Government and the Census question decisions determined by the ABS. This brief includes the current ABS considerations of question changes to give you an understanding of the whole package of change under consideration.

Key points

- The ABS has undertaken a significant and expanded consultation process as part of the 2026 Census topic review. For the first time this has included two phases of public consultation. The ABS has published information after each phase of public consultation on the submissions received and the shortlist of topics under consideration.

- Since the ABS' last communication on the topic review process, 2026 Census topic review: Phase two directions, the ABS has continued to refine the shortlist of potential 2026 Census content changes following initial testing activities (see Table 1). Attachment A provides detail on the status of each topic shortlisted for change in December 2023.

Table 1: Content change being considered for 2026 Census at the end of each phase[redacted]

Phase	New content for inclusion	Existing content for change[b]	Existing content for removal
Phase one outcome	12 topics	15 topics	5 topics
Phase two outcome	5 topics	12 topics	4 topics
Intended direction for 2024 Major Census Test[c]	3 topics	12 topics[d]	1 topic

[redacted]

(b) Existing topics may have more than one change.

(c) Draft shortlist to inform the Minister on the direction. The decision for the 2024 Major Census Test will occur on 1 March 2024.

(d) For some topics, the scope and/or number of changes considered has reduced following initial development and testing activities. This includes reduced scope to updates that improve the quality of data collected, as opposed to collecting new data.

- In this shortlist, the ABS has prioritised progressing new or enhanced content that meets priority data needs and will ensure that the Census is inclusive of all Australians. Consideration has also been given to the need for data comparability between Censuses, the burden on households and the available time and resources. The changes proposed are in keeping with the ABS plans to again deliver the Census at a reduced cost per capita than the previous Census.

- The ABS intends to include the topics in this shortlist in the 2024 Major Census Test, occurring in September 2024. The ABS needs to determine the content changes proceeding to the 2024 Major Census Test by 1 March 2024 to allow sufficient time for the implementation of changes into a secure electronic form for the test.

s22 [redacted]

Attachments

Attachment A – Summary of current ABS intention for content changes

s22 [redacted]

Attachment A – Summary of current ABS intention for content changes

Table 1: New content identified for potential inclusion at end of phase two consultation and review[a]

Topic	ABS intended direction
s22 [redacted]	[redacted]

Table 3: Existing content identified for potential change at end of phase two consultation and review[a]

Topic[b]	ABS intended direction
[redacted] s22	
Religious affiliation	Update the question design to support more accurate data collection, however this will impact comparability with previous Censuses.

[redacted] s22

(b) Excludes other topics with minor changes that occur every Census to update question, response category and instructional text wording and to online supplementary questions (used to improve coding of Industry and Occupation topics).

[redacted] s22

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Document 3

Australian Bureau of Statistics

FOR INFORMATION

MS24-000040

Title:	**Census Executive Board Update**	
To:	**The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	
Cc:	*The Treasurer, The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP* *Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary to the Treasury*	
Recommendation:	1. That you note the update on the 2026 Census Program	
	Noted ☑	**Please Discuss** ☐
Signature:	S47F **The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	8 / 10 / 24 **Date**

Executive summary

- This submission provides an update on the 2026 Census Program (the Program) following the meeting of the Census Executive Board (CEB) on 18 September 2024.

Key points

s22

Cleared by:	Brenton Goldsworthy Deputy Australian Statistician, Insights and Statistics Group	**Contact officer:**	Mark Harding Program Manager, 2026 Census Branch
Date cleared:	03 October 2024	**Contact number:**	s22
Consultation: Nil			

- The Australian Statistician and other ABS senior executives have met with representatives of several religious and secular organisations to discuss their views on the proposed changes to the religious affiliations question. All were appreciative of the opportunity to discuss their perspectives and better understand the complexities involved in question design.

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[redacted]

Background

- The ABS provides an update to the responsible Minister on active Census Program activities following each formal meeting of the Census Executive Board.
- This process was implemented in response to recommendations made in the 2016 Census: Issues of Trust report of the Senate Economics References Committee. The review recommended regular briefings be provided to the responsible Minister

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Religions of Peace**
Time and date	19 September 2024 3:30pm
Attendees (external)	Prof Desmon Cahill Phillipa Rowland Reverend Sandy Boyce Dr Susan Elis Dr Sarah Haggar
Attendees (ABS)	Denise [redacted] [redacted]
Briefing paper	[redacted]

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1		No actions

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introduction	• RfP is the largest multi faith organization in the world with headquarters in New York • RfP expressed concerns that the increase in 'no religion' response is partly due to a lack of spirituality visibility in the Census • RfP asked why we were reframing the question. The ABS explained that it is part of the Census review process and coincides with the ASCRG update. [redacted]

Position on proposed question update	• RfP expressed differing opinions on question design:
	  ◦ existing question would provide continuity – but understand that picklist options probably lose granularity
	  ◦ others see an opportunity to start a new time series/modernisation of the question – with an emphasis on how the question can capture the modernisation of religion/spirituality (see spiritualism section below)

How they use the data	• RfP use Census data to identify emerging religions and to reach out to make them feel welcome and recognised • Data at a granular level is important so they can understand people's changing faith and how RfP can work with different communities
Spiritualism	• RfP spoke extensively on the importance of spirituality in modern Australia. • A consensus that there has been a move away from organised religion to more fluid ideas of religion and spirituality

	- RfP suggested question design: 'Does the person practice (or believe in) a religion, faith or spirituality?' - Professor Cahill suggested that having spirituality in the religion question would be 'within in the spirit of the legislation'. - A picklist option for 'spirituality' was suggested. - Alternatively, the question of 'does the person have a religion?' could have tickboxes – 'no', 'yes – religions' and 'yes – spirituality' then a write in box - 'eco-spiritualism' or similar could be used as one of the examples on the form to emphasise that it's an legitimate response - ABS discussed the difficulty of 'spirituality' in testing and the confusion it created. RfP asked about the type of people that were used for testing and whether we were asking the right people. ABS confirmed that testing covered a broad range of participants.
Other suggestions	- Question could have tick boxes for the broad groups and a "more information" write in box to get more detail. - Two phase question also suggested
Multi-faith	- RfP discussed the amount of people that would be practicing multiple faiths and how they might be captured. - RfP raised but then dismissed the idea of people choosing more than one religion/faith - There were some concerns that the design of the question works against people that would consider themselves of multifaith/spiritual - The lack of evidence for multi-faith in the Census is a concern for RfP and access to funding

Document 5

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	S22
Time and date	2:00pm – 2:45pm (AEST) - Thursday 9 August 2024
Attendees (external)	**Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC)** Fr Chris de Souza, General Secretary Most Rev Timothy Costelloe, President Dr Trudy Dantis, Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research Dr Stephen Reid, Senior Research Officer, National Centre for Pastoral Research **Anglican Church of Australia** Anne Hywood, General Secretary Matthew Robson, General Synod Officer Rev Prof Phillip Hughes **-** Founding director of the Christian Research Association, Honorary research fellow at the University of Divinity. **National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)** S47F (apology)
Attendees (ABS)	**Dr David Gruen -** Australian Statistician **Brenton Goldsworthy -** Deputy Australian Statistician, Insights and Statistics Group **Duncan Young -** General Manager, Census and Population Division S22 **–** Co-Director, 2026 Census Content Development S22 (minutes) **-** Content Designer, 2026 Census Content
Briefing paper	S22

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1	ABS – Census Content	Notify ACBC and ACA of outcomes from the 2024 Test

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introduction	**ABS** confirmed that: - Government decides which topics are collected in Census. The ABS decides how they are collected.

	• Testing a version of the question that does not include check boxes in the 2024 test does not mean we are committed to this approach. • There is complexity in collecting religious affiliation. In some cases, people are reporting broad level religions, in others, denominations. The proposed change to the restructure the religion question aims to help address this concern.
Discussion on changes to religious affiliation question being tested	**ACBC & ACA** expressed concern that: • Removal of the picklist will place additional burden on people reporting religious affiliation. Affects accuracy, comparability, and usability of the data • Concerns raised around CALD population being able to answer a free-text response • Respondents may be discouraged from reporting an affiliation if they are not practicing. • Archbishop: Discussed the merits of different options noting that the most comparable does not necessarily mean the most inclusive and that more inclusive will mean changes. Inclusive will lead to better counts for the Catholic denominations but a reduction in total Catholic numbers. **ABS** • Confirmed that a trigram coder/ digital prompts for the free text box are not being considered for 2026 due to data quality risks. There may be an option for the online form only to have broad level check boxes, and targeted supplementary questions (TSQ's) prompting respondents to provide more detail. However, this may introduce complications for the usability of the data due differences between the paper and online form. ACBC & ACA • Generally supported the TSQ approach for the online form.
2024 Test	**ACA & ACBC** • Would like to be keep in the loop around 2024 test outcomes. • Suggested looking at number of responses reporting a local church rather than a denomination or religion. **ABS** • 2024 test results are generally not output but will be made available if it informs content decisions.
Christian picklist option	**ABS** • If picklist is kept as 2021 'Christian' would be included on the picklist. Presents a barrier for comparability, reduces granularity of the information collected. • No agreement on whether this inclusion would be an issue. Key points include: • People reporting 'Christian' are a growing and important population to understand and service. Tick box may aid responding for this population. • Inclusion of 'Christian' in the picklist may weaken the denominational data, and risk granularity important to inform infrastructure planning.

	• Broad level reporting already has significant impacts on the accuracy of the data at the denominational level. This inclusion would exacerbate the issue. • Some people may be inclined to answer 'Christian' where they may have reported 'no religion' otherwise • Suggested 'Pentecostal' be included instead. • Suggested that if the 'Catholic' checkbox is maintained, the introduction of a 'Christian' check box is likely to be of minimal benefit. • ACA and ACBC: People from all denominations will go to a Christian Tick box (prefer to identify with the religion than the denomination).

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Australian Baptist Ministries**
Time and date	11.30am – 12pm (AEST) - Monday 24 June 2024
Attendees (external)	**Rev Mark Wilson -** National Ministries Director, Australian Baptist Ministries (he is based in WA)
Attendees (ABS)	**Duncan Young -** General Manager, Census and Population [redacted] - Assistant Director, 2026 Census Content
Briefing paper	[redacted]

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1	None	None

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Information about Australian Baptist Ministries (ABM)	- ABM represents over 1,000 Baptist churches across Australia (and this number is growing). It also has a number of affiliated and delegated bodies that function in the community including education (in WA alone there are over 10,000 students in K-12 schools and 2 VET providers), health care, finance and insurance. Rev Wilson also noted that their agencies do not just employ Baptist people. They believe in freedom of religion for all. - Rev Wilson is also the current President of the Asia Pacific Baptist Federation. He noted that this was his voluntary job, but it is quite a large one, with the Federation representing 40,000 Baptist churches.
Introduction from the ABS	- Duncan noted that the ABS hadn't previously held meetings with the Baptist Church so was grateful for the opportunity to discuss the Census with them and gain more of an understanding of how they used Census data and their thoughts on the changes being tested. - Duncan provided context on the role of Government and the role of the ABS - the Govt has one job to do - topics of Census should be a choice of Govt to pass through parliament. The ABS then decides what is the best question to ask to collect this information. In its assessment the ABS needs to think about what the need is for the data, and what will continue to see support for the Census. Religion is one of the thirteen topics that's existed in every Census since 1911. Religion continues to be an important topic in the Census and it is safe to say that religion will be included in 2026. - [redacted] Lots of ways of thinking about data quality - does the data remain comparable? Is it accurate? Is it coherent? Is it understandable? What's the best way to ask that question? We're testing changes

	because understanding how questions work with Australia's people is essential. Tests of 50K gives us great intel, but we are also engaging with religious organisations to enable us to understand whether changes would enhance or diminish the data or impact on participation. Big growth has been witnessed within Islam and Buddhism religions - previously our classification grouped the components together - but there are some large compositions to these religions such as Sunni and Shia under Islam- so we have updated classification to support that.
How the Baptist Church use Census data	• Rev Wilson noted that Census data is very beneficial and often used alongside some other key datasets used by the church (National Church Life Survey is one source - Rev Wilson referred to it as purely a Christian 'Census' - the Baptist Church have been participating in it for over 30 years, conducted to coincide with the Census but not every church does it), and also for comparing numbers of Baptists over time. Data is used not just for church based purposes, but also community based support. In WA alone over 10,000 students attend Baptist schools (open enrolment, not closed) - ie. not all of the students are Baptists. So the Census data serves as a really useful comparison to these data sources.
2024 Test question feedback	• Rev Wilson sought clarification on whether the question 'Does the person have a religion?' was locked in for the Major Test. Duncan confirmed that it was, noting that following the test, the ABS will assess what we see from the question, and weigh that up with the potential impacts of the data change on stakeholders. • Rev Wilson noted that a change to the question will impact on statistical analysis. His preference would be to have a response box that would enable respondents to select Baptist, as sometimes being required to write something in can be a blocker. Rev Wilson suggested that if the question was to change from what was asked in 2021, there would be some benefit in a hierarchy question - could ask first for Major Religion, and then drill down to the next level. Duncan noted that such an approach would be more feasible on a digital form, but space constraints on the paper form would preclude this being feasible (and around 15-20% of people still respond by paper). Duncan noted that in the 2021 Census, there were over 800,000 Christian or Christianity responses that were written in. If Christianity was an option then some people may choose not to provide a denomination.
Order of religions in 2021 pick list	• Duncan confirmed that the order of religions listed in 2021 was based on the likelihood of response, and this had been the convention across previous Censuses too. Baptist used to be further up the order in previous Censuses. If we had the same categories in 2026 as presented in 2021, Baptists would still rank 9th on the list. Sikhism is the religion that is making ground from outside of the existing list.
2024 Test question wording feedback	• Duncan explained that the wording of the question was something we'd been exploring and considering alternatives to 'What is the person's religion?' We have received feedback that asking a question in such a way assumes that a person has a religion. For example, we don't ask: 'What is the language you speak other than English at home?' In testing the 'Does the person have a religion?' question, Duncan noted that the ABS regarded this as a more neutral question and invited Rev Wilson to provide any thoughts or reflections on the question. Rev Wilson indicated that he was comfortable with that question 'as long as we can list the religions'. • Duncan went on to say that one key element the ABS will be keen to identify from the test is whether the question change will impact on the way that people respond? Test will give us a feel for it. Duncan added that the question used to be a lot more like the question that will appear in the 2024 Test, but the primary driver behind that was to make our jobs easier.

Concluding remarks	- Duncan thanked Rev Wilson for his time and offered him the chance to reach out if he thinks of anything else that he would like to add to his feedback.

Document 7

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Australian Christian Lobby**
Time and date	07 August 2024 2:00pm
Attendees (external)	**Michelle Pearse** CEO ACL
Attendees (ABS)	**Dr David Gruen**, Australian Statistician S22, Co-Director 2026 Census Content S22 (minutes) 2026 Census content
Briefing paper	S22

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
S22		
3	MP	**Action**: Offered to chase up some denomination leaders to understand what they might be using the data for and how a change might affect them

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introduction	S22 - DG noted the upcoming test and the operation readiness exercise in Aug/Sep 25 - Final decision on question design will be after that date. - DG confirmed that there is a tick box for yes – after questioning from ACL
ACL intro	- Has state directors in each state - 250k members - ACL has a position on the test question: - The extra steps for the people that have top religions will have a higher level of user burden

	• Risk of inaccurate answer • People might be putting down their church name (Australian Christian Churches was used as an example) rather than the denomination. DG confirmed that there will be indexes available during the coding process that will attempt to code answers to religious groups as much as possible.
Religious affiliation question design	• Concern from the ACL that the loss of the picklist will give rise to ambiguous answers and accurate coding would be difficult. This would be particularly common for CALD people – many will tick and not use the free-text field. • DG stated that the test and readiness exercise is a chance to work on our coding index – ie if we got a critical mass of the any particular church we would get that into the coding index. Also, that the test is a chance to gauge the level of difficulty presented by the free-text field (ie the quality of response/non response/indeterminable response), particularly for the CALD community. • Previous structure of the picklist was discussed. Confirmed that the picklist was the top choices from previous Census and that's why 'No Religion' appeared at the top in 2021.
Picklist	• ACL asked for the justification for removal of the picklist (DG reiterated that the removal of the picklist was not final yet). • DG stated that we have had representations from church groups that weren't on the picklist stating that the picklist was detrimental to the numbers for that denomination and that sub-religions weren't getting captured because of the picklist (ASCRG is also expanded). • Freetext style question would allow for people to make clearer representations of religion /equitable for the 139 religions that are within the ASCRG.
How ACL uses the data and potential impacts	• ACL uses data to see where people are moving between religions etc to understand the demographics of Christianity - ACL thinks that there is a movement towards more "traditional" religions.

S22

Document 8

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Executive Council of Australian Jewry**
Time and date	Wednesday 19 June 2024
Attendees (external)	**Peter Wertheim AM –** co-Chief Executive Officer, Executive Council of Australian Jewry **Dr David Graham –** Social research consultant **Professor Andrew Markus** – Director of the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University; Research Professor in Jewish Civilisation, Pratt Foundation. **Dr Gary Eckstein** – Demographer
Attendees (ABS)	Duncan Young [redacted] S22
Briefing paper	[redacted] S22

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
[redacted] S22		

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introduction	Duncan provided overview: • The outcome of the classification review providing greater granularity for some world religions • That government decides the topics and ABS decides questions. The Gov is yet to decide on certain topics, but it's assumed that religious affiliation will remain unchanged. • The ABS is exploring two key changes to the 2026 census question on religious affiliation, but no decision has been made by Dr. Gruen (the Statistician). The changes are the question wording (requiring a yes/no response) and the move from a picklist and free text field to free text field only to write in your religion. • The ECAJ request is to retain the question as is.
Uses of data and need for comparability	• The ECAJ attendees highlighted the importance of comparability over time and this being a key advantage of the Census. This need was articulated through all the use cases provided by the representatives during the meeting. • ECAJ representatives highlighted that Jewish and Sikh communities are recognised by ABS and general (case) law as ethno-cultural religions. Their assessment is that a sizable proportion of the Jewish community (approx. 20%) would identify as Jewish in a cultural sense, but as secular in a religious sense. Changing the question wording could fail to capture this distinction. • Representatives highlighted the importance of understanding trends in Jewish identity, particularly considering global events. Understanding intermarriage is also important to understand future size of Jewish population.

	- The Jewish community are a niche service provider, and use Census data for planning and resource distribution, especially for Jewish schools and aged care homes. The Community run their own surveys to provide further information on the community, however weight this using Census data. An unexplainable change in the data will lead to questioning of the models and weighting and an inability to plan as efficiently. - Representatives of the meeting were not supportive of a question design that would potentially increase accuracy (and the size of the Jewish population), as this would have just as much of an impact on their ability to use data for planning.
Need to explain statistical impacts	- ECAJ referenced the experience in 2016 where there was a decrease in the Jewish population as well as a change to the question design. One of the key issues was that when the data was published, the ABS did not acknowledge that the question change would have impacted the data comparability. Given the importance of comparability of data, the ECAJ invested significant resources into understanding the real-world change using other datasets <<note – A journal article was sent following the meeting which articulates the work that occurred>> - Representatives pointed to the impact of the change in NZ's question design (from picklist to a free text field) and how this led to a decrease in reported Judaism. - The ABS talked about what the 2024 Test would and wouldn't be able to show from a data quality perspective, and that statistical impact would not be possible to measure. - ECAJ representatives asked if there was going to be testing to understand Statistical impact and if this was included in the 2024 Test. Duncan confirmed that the 2024 Test design would not provide a scientific measure statistical impact, however the ABS would consider how to understand and measure any change in question design during 2025 if it occurs. - ECAJ representatives reminded that the Jewish community is highly concentrated and requested that any testing consider the locations of the community (and whether there should be a sample boost if testing is conducted).
Other points	- ECAJ talked about the extensive effort in educating the community on the importance of reporting Judaism to the Census question in 2021. This did get the numbers back closer to what was expected in this Census (after the decrease in 2016). - They highlighted that they understood there might be ways to increase accuracy, particularly with technology advances and could understand that at some point the question should change to adapt to meet a changing Australian community. However, given the importance of comparability, and that the last massive change occurred in 2016, they asked if the change was essential for 2026, or whether the ABS could wait until 2031 (allowing for a time series of three Censuses) before making a change. Or, could the ABS invest in supporting the Jewish community to understand the change in numbers. - Attendees requested that the ABS consider the perspectives of the religious organisations that value the data and use it for their planning, over non-religious organisations and individuals who don't need the data for their planning and want to focus on accuracy over need for comparability. - Attendees acknowledged that they will manage and find a way to adapt if it is absolutely necessary for the ABS to make the change. - Duncan reflected on the importance of understanding identification in the context of real-world events, the use of data for planning in religious groups, and the need for culturally appropriate care for those with a cultural connection.

Document 9

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Hindu Council of Australia**
Time and date	11-11:30am (AEST) – Tuesday 2 July 2024
Attendees (external)	**Kanti Jinna**, OAM, Advisory Board of Hindu Council of Australia **Said Paravastu**, National President, Hindu Council of Australia **Dr Shanti Reddy**, National President Hindu Council of ACT
Attendees (ABS)	**Duncan Young**, General Manager, Census and Population S22, Stakeholder Relationship Manager, 2026 Census Content
Briefing paper	S22

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1	ABS	Note down interest in training for 2026 data release.
2	ABS	Work with Hindu Council on messaging for their community about importance of Census and how to fill in.
3	ABS	Send a link to SBS recording from 2021 Census data release.
4	Hindu Council	Sai will provide some more information via email.

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Opening remarks (Kanti)	Has spoken to 2 organisations about the ABS and the right question. Up to them to talk to their cohorts about what they want to do. They will likely reach out. • S47G S S47F • S47G S47G S47F • Extremely worried about what came out of the last census that 40% of Australia voted no religion at all. • Whilst people may not have a religion, they may have an inclination towards spirituality.
Context (Duncan)	Provided an overview of the: • decisions for the Government (topics) and decisions for the ABS (question design) • considerations about how data is being used, and how people fill out the census and make sure they understand the questions, data comparability between censuses and looking at ways to improve its accuracy. • testing and consultation to understand use of data and your community and views you have to take that into account.

	• different views, such as people wanting extra questions, some want the question to change, some like it as it is. • Importance of the topic and that the ABS expects the Government would keep it.
Considerations for change	• The ABS is looking at what's the best question to ask. • In the last few censuses there was a mark box for 9 religions and for the other 130 religions, people would write those in. We've heard that those in the 130 think it's unequal and mark boxes lead people. • What we are testing lists Hinduism as an example. • We are testing different wording of question 'What is a person's religion?' Asking in this way means that it assumes people have a religion. We have another question on the form that asks 'Do you use a language other than English at home?', not 'What language other than English do you use at home?'
Confirmation of question design	Sai So are you moving from a tick box to a text box? Duncan Confirming this is what we are testing.
Hinduism (Sai)	• Sikhism has come out of Hinduism. • People will write what they feel - is there a grouping? People tick Hindu, it will be confusing for you to understand what they write in. • There are so many variations of Hindu. People might want to write details of their devotion form - which would then need to be rolled back to Hinduism but that extra information is useful.
Other questions using freetext (Duncan)	• There are other questions on the Census such as occupation and industry where people need to write in their response. • We have a list of those over 1000 so can't put those on the form. • The ABS has automated programs so if people write in (e.g. engineer or high school teacher) it can be grouped. We would have the same process for religions. So if they misspell, or use other words, they need to be grouped together. • We might need to do some work to understand the different ways people might respond. Having an example might help. • We already have to do that for the other 130 religions where some people write their temple or synagogue, so we can link it up.
Faiths that have come from Hinduism (Kanti)	• There have been other faiths that have come out from Hinduism eg. Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism (about 500-600 years ago). There may be different forms of Hinduism that some people may be followers of. • You would open a can of worms - for instance Islam have Shia's and other forms of Islam and same with other faiths - Christians and Protestants. And this would be very difficult.
Classification (Duncan)	• The list of religions does get updated over time. Recently we updated Islam so now there are 5 different types of Islam identified. • There is a hierarchy with world religions at the top. Hinduism is separate from Sikhism which comes under Other Religions. Would Sikhism think of themselves as Sikhs or Hindus?
Religions Emanating from Hinduism (Sai)	• Some think Sikhism evolved from Hinduism - some are still practicing Hindus. • The first child of family - following Sikh family and if they marry a Hindu family, they are still Sikh. But the other side of the family is non-Sikh. So they would identify as separate religions and mixed - one might select as Hindu and one Sikh. • Buddhism identifies itself separately. • High level [provided information in the chat]:

	Religions Emanating from Hinduism - Buddhism - Jainism - Sikhism Philosophical Schools - Vedanta - Sankhya - Yoga - Nyaya - Vaisheshika - Mimamsa Movements - Bhakti Movements - Tantrism - Neo-Hindu Movements ________ • There are a number of variations in the philosophical schools. It would be good to capture this for other statistical reasons.
Hindu Council use of data (Kanti)	• Increasing number of people coming to Australia and living here as Hindu, Sikhs, Buddhists. • Associated with this are schools (including language schools), radio stations, temples, organisations - there are 32 separate Indian organisations that belong to Federation of Indian Associations in the ACT. • Important for us to know where the people are, how many there are, and see what their basic needs are. • Hindus are living in small and remote parts of Australia. Important to know the statistics, particularly in a growing community. • India has the highest number of new migrants to Australia we are told by ABS. We want to know where they are and assist them in assimilating and give them assistance. • Sai is involved in charitable organisations - and during Covid would get requests and many times we didn’t know where they were coming from. Food distributions, financial assistance, expat to India to see dying parents with Covid. So many reasons to know where the spread is. They all come to us in one way or another. Even if they write to MPs, still come to us - we are the central org - not just Hindus, also Indians. Sai • If grouped under Hindu, it would be easy to identify where the population is growing and cater for facilities. Over the course of birth to the end of life, there are so many facilities we need e.g. access to river for Hindu services - for spreading ashes, bonfire areas (we asked Parramatta Council to create this) • Things we need [Sai included list in chat]: Temples and Places of Worship Cultural Centres Religious Education Community Support Services Ritual and Ceremony Services Dietary Needs Yoga and Meditation Centres Funeral Services Support for Pilgrimages

	Cultural and Social Organizations Needs of Hindus from a "Samskaras" Point of View Cultural and Religious Identity Spiritual Growth Social Structure Moral and Ethical Guidance Community and Belonging Life Milestones • If you use any other form (of Hinduism) - would be hard to find out where people are. • Hindu school proposed in Sydney - it was easy to overlay where pockets of Hindus were (based on Census data). • Hindu mark box – it doesn't duplicate things. If data segregated, there is a risk of duplicating (Sai included further info in chat] The duplication i was mentioning can also be a confusion to people - thinking that Government recognises them as their lineage and ask for specific things • At the moment we are managing well - asking for facilities to be built.
Confirming Hindu council position (Duncan)	• It's important that there is an accurate count of the Hindu religious community. • Concern if there is no a mark box for Hinduism then the ABS can't put them in the right group. For everyone to write in their response, people might write in a range of things. You to be confident we don't lose people in that process. • If we can still capture the data - it will still all be under Hinduism. • The population has been growing - with migration and there is an expectation that census shows where it's growing. • If ABS were to make a change and people can't report Hinduism and they wouldn't be grouped together - we'd be concerned about that.
Further insights about the question	Dr Shanti • My immediate reaction is that that should do (the question wording 'Do you have a religion'). Do you have drop down or tick boxes? Keep the boxes (for major religions) and encourage people to write. • There will be challenges for where some religions are grouped together eg. Islam. You get more detail with breakdown. • People confuse this (religion question) with ethnicity - Telugu, Malayali and Hindu. If blank (ie. no picklist), then it's hard to group them. Sai • Probably need for you to think of one way to extend the faiths and some way of identifying the mainstream and the behind the scenes - as people practice in different ways. • People think that things would be done at their level for their specific needs. Thinking that Government would be providing services for that lineage. Action: Sai will provide some more information via email.
Request for data training (Kanti)	• Once you're getting closer to the Census - is there any way in which we can have a similar discussion where you could work with us and you could tell us how the stats info is arrived at and how to extract information. Action: Note down for 2026 data release
Working together (Duncan)	• Would love to talk and work together for the Census - helping to explain to people in your community that the Census is important and how to fill out and how to get help.

	- When the data is ready, we have people available to do presentations to access data and organise seminars. - We worked with SBS with the 2021 Census data release and did a presentation on the changing diversity of Australia e.g., Indian, Nepalese populations. Action: Send a link to the recording.

Document 10

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW)**
Time and date	3:00 – 4:00pm (AEST) – Thursday 11 July 2024
Attendees (external)	S47F
Attendees (ABS)	**Duncan Young**, General Manager, Census and Population S22 Assistant Director, 2026 Census Content S22 Stakeholder Relationship Manager, 2026 Census Content
Briefing paper	S22

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1	S22	Follow-up email offering a meeting with other State/Territory branches of the Presbyterian Church of Australia >> Completed by Duncan as a reply to S4 follow-up email.

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introduction from the ABS	S47F, S47G

	S47F, S47G [redacted]
Information about the Presbyterian Church of Australia (NSW)	[redacted]
How the Presbyterian Church use Census data	[redacted]
Faith vs religion	[redacted]
ASCRG hierarchy	[redacted]

	S47F, S47G [redacted]
2024 Test question feedback	[redacted]
Education	[redacted]

	S47F, S47G [redacted]
Concluding remarks	

Document 11

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA)**
Time and date	21 August 2024 2:30pm
Attendees (external)	S47F [redacted]
Attendees (ABS)	Duncan Young - General Manager, Census and Population S22 [redacted] - Co-Director 2026 Census Content S22 [redacted] (minutes)
Briefing paper	S22 [redacted]

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1	S22 [redacted]	- Put the appropriate ABS people in contact with the NCCA for material explaining how to fill in the Census (likely covering CALD materials)
2		
3		

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introductions	- Duncan introduced the state of play for the religion question – ie question in test, historical background, reasons for no religion being at top of picklist etc. (see briefing paper) - Duncan asked if they were aware of what we were testing in 2024. NCCA asked for some background S22 [redacted] - While the NCCA keen to make representations for smaller churches. - NCCA: had a query about the comparability as question format was inconsistent with other questions. And mentioned the comparability to the national church survey – the test will let us know more
Why the data is collected	- NCCA asked what the data is used for? - DY couldn't give a total answer as data users will use the data for their own needs. We provide the data but how people choose to use it we can't measure. Religious groups and researchers (LGAs to a lesser extent) using the data for funding and planning.
Discussion on the term 'Christian'	- NCCA comment: People are likely to want to put in Christian/tick Christian as the most important representation of their religion. With prompting (ie a tick box) might describe their religion further. - Christian is becoming a more common descriptor of their faith. Particularly true with "new" churches as well as CALD populations as any are coming from nations where denominations have less meaning

	• NCCA: churches are moving towards independence and would call themselves “Christian” only. Pentecostal and migrant churches will often use the term exclusively. • ABS: More people are writing Christian in the box, which is actually the broadest possible level. If added to the picklist it would be inconsistent the other picklist options. But ABS will be considering if the option does need using. • NCCA have an interest the broad details – specific details not important to them ie ‘Christian’ has as much meaning as the specifics.
Differing opinions across church groups	• Lots of different members in the NCCA and what they are likely to put on the form differs widely. • Many will play it quite broad writing: Christian or catholic or similar • Orthodox communities much more likely to be more specific and spell out ethnicity. • “Smaller groups also use the Census to identify all their people” – orthodox churches might have a bit more of an agenda to calculate the number of their overall community and so some of the orthodox churches are specifically instructed to write very specific answers on the form
The form	• NCCA asked about whether or not there was a description of religions. And DY made it clear that there will be some examples [redacted] showed the test form examples • NCCA concerned prompts might alienate. Ie Sunni vs Shia. • NCCA said that any suggestions will influence people and what they answer – asked if ‘Christian’ could be included – NCCA expressed the importance of this term. • DY agreed that examples may influence but they are aimed at prompting detailed responses. • NCCA: how many questions are “No” then Yes… is it unusual/will it trap people. – reminded that the question is not final and that the language question also has this format. But ABS did mention that “yes” would outweigh the no so maybe yes should come first
Assistance to members	• NCCA: supports materials sent to churches about how to help fill in Census – see action item • NCCA concerned about the CALD pop. With picklist being a much easier option DY: we have intentionally gone to as wide a population as possible for the test to measure how people answer • NCCA: how do we support the religious groups and how they handle the census to help the process. [redacted]: we work with a number of service providers and have form filling sessions and things like that for the CALD population • Churches are now feeling more consulted with, the original “test” made them feel not listened to.

Document 12

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Australian Christian Churches (ACC) and other interested parties**
Time and date	11:30am – 12pm (AEST) - Tuesday 25 June 2024
Attendees (external)	**Pastor Wayne Alcorn -** National President, Australian Christian Churches **Jeffrey Bartlett -** General Manager, Australian Christian Churches **Pastor Brad Bonhomme -** National Executive, Australian Christian Churches and Senior Pastor, Horizon Church (former PM's church). Involved in 2021 Census consultation. **Daryl-Anne Le Roux -** National Communications and Media, Australian Christian Churches. Any messaging will be conducted by her.
Attendees (ABS)	**Duncan Young -** General Manager, Census and Population S22 - Stakeholder Relationship Manager, 2026 Census Content S22 - Content Designer, 2026 Census Content
Briefing paper	S22

Action items

	Owner	Action
1	S22	Follow up via email regarding use cases of Census data to describe why the data is important to the ACC – how it may be used to provide services or for planning.

Summary of discussion

Theme	Discussion points
Introduction from the ABS	Provided an overview of the: • decisions for the Government (topics) and decisions for the ABS (question design) • history of the Religious affiliation question • recent review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (little change within Christianity) • factors the ABS considers when designing the question (what the data is used for, what impact question design has on Australians completing the Census, and testing findings – cognitive testing and a large-scale test) • two changes to the question that are being tested (new question wording and removal of pick list for most common religions)

	• key concerns regarding the changes (comparability of data over time and other data quality considerations that could impact data use, and respondent burden given that the majority of Australians used the pick list). S22 [redacted]
2024 Test question feedback from the ACC	• Welcomed the dialogue with the ABS and expressed that the 2024 Test question is of merit and they are supportive of it. It should allow for more detail and gives everyone the opportunity to speak. • Would like Pentecostal to be one of the examples listed as a prompt for Pentecostal parishioners. • Need for conversations with religious leaders about how they can educate their parishioners on how to complete the 2026 Census.
Information about the ACC	• The ACC is one of 10 Pentecostal groups. Of 500,000 Pentecostal parishioners, the ACC represents 400,000 parishioners. Of the 2,000 Pentecostal churches, the ACC represents over 1,100 churches. • The ACC has over 3,500 pastors. • Nationality churches (Asian, African, Islander) are growing along with the multicultural expansion of Australia.
2021 Census question feedback from the ACC	• Expressed disappointment with how the 2021 Census question was designed. Pentecostal was not in the pick list despite the ACC expressing that they had a strong case backed by accurate metrics that Pentecostal church attendance exceeds that of the religions in the pick list. • Noted that Pentecostal parishioners commonly wrote “Christian” or the name of their local church rather than “Pentecostal”. Suggested that having Pentecostal in the pick list would have mitigated this and improved data quality.
Feedback on pick list religions from the ACC	• If the 2024 Test question design does not proceed, the ACC would like Pentecostal to be included in the pick list moving forward. • The ACC’s metrics show that Pentecostal affiliation is much higher than what the Census captures. Such metrics include the National Church Life Survey and the ACC’s own Census, which will take place in Oct/Nov this year, with data analysed in the following months. • The ABS noted that no decision on the question design has been made yet. The findings from the upcoming large-scale test will help to inform the decision (for example, any respondent burden on large households having to specify for each person). The ABS will also consider the impact of any changes on comparability of data over time.
Alternative question design suggested by the ACC	• Suggested having one ‘block’ for Christian, with denominations beneath. This ‘hybrid’ option would involve a tick box for Christian, then require people to specify their denomination or have tick boxes for each denomination. • The ABS expressed that the online form experience has the capacity to be rich, whereby once people select Christian, denominations to select from could appear. However, the paper form is limited by the space available, and although there are sometimes differences between the online and paper forms, the ABS aims for consistency.
Concluding remarks and next steps	• The ACC welcomed remaining part of the consultation process until the publication of outcomes in late 2025. The ACC would like to assist in improving data quality. Daryl-Anne Le Roux can assist with any educational communication to Pentecostal parishioners.

	• The ABS expressed that the Census is successful when there is a partnership between the ABS and the community. It is valuable if someone people already trust encourages them to participate and informs them how to participate to ensure their church is represented in the data. The ABS can provide talking points to the ACC. • The ACC queried if the ABS has preferred text for Pentecostal parishioners to respond with (e.g., Assemblies of God, local church name, etc.). Pentecostal parishioners are unique in that they don't think in terms of denomination and in that the religion names they identify with are quite diverse. • The ABS expressed that individuals have a choice in how they respond and that the ABS has a sophisticated coding system to manage responses and what meaning was intended in responses. Local church names could be problematic. The ABS can work with the ACC as the Census draws closer to help them understand which responses correspond to which religions in the classification (i.e., how the ABS classifies different responses provided). • The ACC expressed that the recent media reports regarding the question design were concerning for all church leaders. • The ABS apologised for the concern that the media reports caused and noted that it was a misunderstanding and has issued a clarification to the reports on its website. • The ABS requires information about use cases of Census data from the ACC – how the data may be used to provide services or for planning. This gives a defense for the Census, its topics, and its approaches. **Action:** S22 to follow up via email regarding use cases of Census data to describe why the data is important to the ACC – how it may be used to provide services or for planning.

Document 13

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Better Balanced Futures**
Time and date	9:30am -10:30am (AEST) - Thursday 3 October 2024
Attendees (external)	**Better Balanced Futures (BBF)** Murray Norman, CEO BBF [redacted] S47F
Attendees (ABS)	Denise Carlton - Program Manager Population Statistics Branch [redacted] S22 – 2026 Census Content [redacted] S22 - 2026 Census Content
[redacted] S22	

Action items		
	Owner	**Action**
1	Census Content	Census Content to follow up with [redacted] S47F to discuss/seek feedback on Islam and need for granularity
2	Census Content	Provide feedback on educational institution attending to Education SMA **- DONE 21/10**
3	Census Content	Census Content to pass feedback on ASCRG to SSI **– DONE 3/10**

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**

Introduction	**BBF**
	[redacted] S22
	• BBF members represent Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith communities, and can connect the ABS with other BBF members of other religions not represented in the meeting.
	ABS
	• Denise outlined that the ABS is:
	  ◦ keen to understand the usage of Census data and impact of change on comparability, and
	  ◦ testing changes to the religious affiliation question, however we are coming to the end of the process with a decision to be made on the final question design that

	takes into consideration feedback from consultation and testing outcomes. If feedback is received that cannot be implemented for 2026, this will still be useful for 2031 consideration.
How BBF, and representatives, use Census data	• [redacted] outlined that the Census question provides a wealth of information and they are very grateful for the data. People who [redacted] consult with like the question. • Data is used for gaining government funding and engagement such as for religious schools

Feedback on potential changes to the question design	• BBF have a positive view of the current question, and outlined that a change would impact the use and comparability. Concerns were raised about the use of a free text field, with potentially too much variety in self-description or reporting of sub-variants and people not being guided (as a picklist does). Feedback indicated granularity in the current picklist was helpful.
	• Attendees provided other suggestions and feedback, however were understanding of the complexities with implementation. This included:
	  • An option with all Christian options in picklist (narrow group), or including a heading for Christianity (and other world religions) and options listed underneath including a free text field for 'Other Christian'. [redacted]
	  • Christianity as a picklist option [redacted] mentioned this feedbacks comes to them a lot from clients).
	  • Uniting Church, Baptist etc not viewed by people as a religion.
	  • Granularity for Islam – there may be mixed feelings on whether its useful [redacted] to discuss with ABS separately once [redacted] gets a better understanding of community views).
	  • People don't always want to be associated with a religion, an alternative is gathering data at three levels, such as: "Do you have a faith?", "Is that associated with a world religion?" and then "What is the denomination?" (granular level). [redacted]
	  • [redacted] also noted concern around the language of faith vs religion and the lack of responses to those that deem their faith not as a religion. Proposed adding "Thinking about your faith and beliefs" to the description of the religion question to encourage further thought into religion and faith. [redacted] noted that in their own research they see people expressing 'faith'. The ABS noted that the question refers to religious affiliation rather than faith.
	  • [redacted] outlined there is a lack of visibility for Judaism (not being in picklist) with a higher number of people who aren't identifying/reporting as Jewish in the Census. There is a higher number of people wanting to being buried Jewish, but not identifying in the numbers. People will give as much detail in the form as they feel comfortable, and we need to ensure there are no barriers at step 1 (e.g. in a drill down/multi question approach).

Feedback relating to ASCRG	• Feedback provided on Brethren and Churches of Christ classification codes. NOTE: [redacted] provided details on this following meeting and this was forwarded to SSI for consideration.
Discussion on education data	• BBF interested if there is any way of getting further delineation of religious schools in educational institution attending Census data. This is something that Government departments are interested in/question BBF on. BBF mentioned that Independent Schools Australia would likely be supportive of data linkage. • ABS outlined the feedback will be passed on to the education SMA, as school enrolment data may provide further delineation and there could be the potential of linkage with Census data.

Document 14

Religious affiliation meeting minutes

Religious group	**Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils and Australian Sangha Association**
Time and date	4:30 – 5pm (AEST) - Thursday 8 August 2024
Attendees (external)	**Dr Diana Cousens OAM -** President, Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) **Ayya Suvira -** Secretary, Australian Sangha Association (ASA)
Attendees (ABS)	**Dr David Gruen -** Australian Statistician **Brenton Goldsworthy -** Deputy Australian Statistician, Insights and Statistics Group **Duncan Young -** General Manager, Census and Population Division S22 - Content Designer, 2026 Census Content
Briefing paper	S22
Australian Sangha Association Inc notes sent ahead of the meeting	Australian Sangha Association Inc Note

Summary of discussion	
Theme	**Discussion points**
Introduction from the ABS	• Provided an overview of the decisions for the Government (topics) and decisions for the ABS (question design). S22
Hierarchical question design suggested by FABC – supported by ASA	• The FABC felt that the question design conflates Broad group religions and Religious groups • The FABC and ASA's agreed that dual religious identification is common within Buddhism and suggested a multi-response question design that drill down from Broad group to Religious group (targeted supplementary questions on the online form). • E.g, "Do you have a religion, and if so, which?" with a pick list of Broad group religions, followed by "Which denomination do you belong to?" with an automated pick list based on the previous answer as well as a free text field. • The ABS noted that multi-response questions present challenges in analysis, particularly between paper and online and over time • The FABC prefer including "Buddhism" as pick list option as simplicity is better for their members. Free text available for members who want to provide more detail
2024 Test question free text field feedback from the ASA	• The ASA expressed concerns with the 2024 Test question free text field, rather than a picklist with the three Buddhism Religious groups. • Concerns: use of competing classifications within Buddhism/ethnoreligious identification, respondents reporting sub-school instead of school & dual religious identification.

	Refer to the PDF document in the "Australian Sangha Association Inc notes sent ahead of the meeting" row for further detail.
ABS classifying Buddhism responses in future	• Classifying Buddhism will provide challenges as some responses will cross over religious groups and coding rules will be required
FABC and ASA use of Census data	• The ASA has used Census data (the percentage of the population who are affiliated with Buddhism) in communication with parliamentarians to obtain high-level meetings to enable them to advocate for their community. Ayya has personally used Census data on the Buddhism demographics of her local area (Western Sydney). The ASA can provide further information on its use cases if needed. • FABC prefer face-to-face information gathering rather than statistics but did conclude that they have also used Census data to lobby politicians.
2024 Test question wording feedback from the FABC and the ASA	• The FABC suggested: "identify with" over "have" as religion is an identification. • The ASA did not provide feedback
Concluding remarks	• The ABS still meeting with religious groups and reviewing their requests. They will then decide on question design, which will be made public.

ASA Notes for ABS Meeting August 8

With reference to the draft free response box circulated.

The ASA is the peak body which represents Buddhist monks and nuns of all traditions in Australia.

ASA recognises three traditions of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. ASA has previously affirmed that advocacy for other Buddhist traditions is outside of our scope of activities.

We would like to express concern with the use of a free response form for the religion question on the census, without a tickbox prompt for the three Buddhist traditions, for the following reasons:

- **The use of potentially competing systems of Buddhist identification by respondents** has been noted as a concern in relation to free response in the Buddhist community.

- **Ethnoreligious identification is widespread in some Buddhist communities internationally** (Pew Research, 2023). However, it is best to avoid conflating different categories such as nationality/ethnicity/culture with Buddhist tradition. Nationality/ethnicity is not the same as religious tradition and this is an imprecise and inadequate indication of which religious community one belongs to.

    - **Example 1**: self-response "Vietnamese Buddhist"
        - While this might be meaningful to the respondent, this is an inadequate way to describe one's religious community as the Vietnamese government recognises both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. If the same individual knew that Vietnamese Theravada communities also exist, they may begin expressing their tradition as "Mahayana."

    - **Example 2**: self-response "Tibetan Buddhist"
        - Vajrayana Buddhism is also practiced by other communities from Bhutan, Nepal and internationally. If the respondent was alerted to this, they may instead prefer to identify as "Vajrayana."

- **Respondents may also list their sub-school, rather than school**

    - **Example 3**: self-response "Zen Buddhist," "Pure Land Buddhist"
        - Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism are Mahayana sub-schools. Respondents should be prompted for Mahayana.

- **Dual religious identification** is possible within a number of Buddhist communities

    - **Example**: Some individuals may have more than one valid identification with a Buddhist tradition. E.g. could be contextually BOTH Ambedkarite/new Indian Buddhist and Theravada (or Mahayana).

- **"Buddhism" is only one of several possible terms used by Buddhists to describe ourselves.** Other terms in use in the community include "dhamma/dharma," etc. Out of context, this term is ambiguous.

- **Some people may be less familiar with the correct terms** and could be helped by the prompt of a tickbox

- Use of the free response box may lead to more **idiosyncratic responses.**

    - **Example**: self-response Teacher XYZ student (should probably just use the normal tradition categories)

- A tickbox default promotes the classifications which are **most widely understood in the community**

The correct names of Buddhist traditions should therefore be prompted for via a tickbox.

Sources:
https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/09/12/buddhism-islam-and-religious-pluralism-in-south-and-southeast-asia/

S22 [redacted]

From: Trudy Dantis S47F [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, 2 April 2024 12:20 PM
To: Georgia Chapman
Cc: Chris de Souza; S22 [redacted]; Anne Walker; Martin Teulan; census.content@abs.gov.au; S22 [redacted]
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 Georgia,

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,

DR TRUDY DANTIS
National Coordinator, Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
S47F [redacted]
NCPR National Centre for Pastoral Research
25 Years of PASTORAL RESEARCH

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: Georgia Chapman
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2024 11:58 AM
To: Trudy Dantis
Cc: Chris de Souza ; S22 [redacted] ; Anne Walker ; Martin Teulan ; census.content@abs.gov.au; S22 [redacted]
Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hi Trudy,

Thank you very much for providing the prompt feedback on the term 'Roman Catholic,' S22 [redacted]

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 [redacted] 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 [redacted] 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
Georgia

Georgia Chapman [redacted]
A/g Program Manager, Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) (03) 6222 5741
(E) georgia.chapman@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Executive assistant: [redacted] ***(P)*** [redacted] ***(E)*** [redacted]*@abs.gov.au*

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From: Trudy Dantis [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, March 19, 2024 4:24 PM
To: Georgia Chapman <Georgia.Chapman@abs.gov.au>
Cc: Chris de Souza [redacted]; [redacted] <[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; Anne Walker [redacted]; Martin Teulan [redacted]>
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 Georgia,

[redacted]

S22

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

Kind Regards,

DR TRUDY DANTIS
National Coordinator, Synod of Bishops 2021-2024
Director, National Centre for Pastoral Research | Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
S47F
NCPR National Centre for Pastoral Research
25 Years of PASTORAL RESEARCH

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: S22 @abs.gov.au>
Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 3:59 PM
To: Chris de Souza S47F
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 General Secretary,

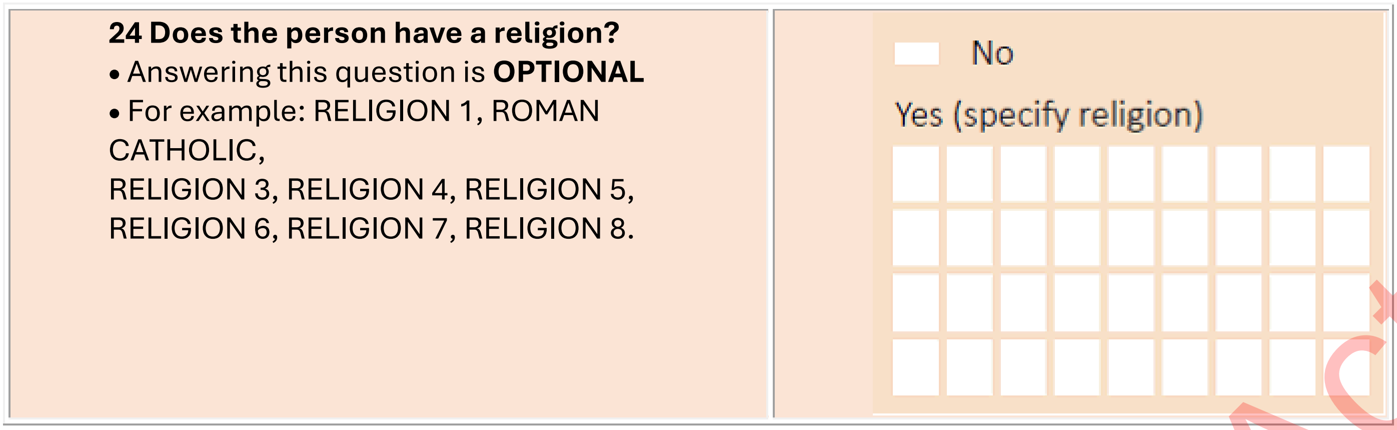
The next Census of Population and Housing will take place in 2026. Every Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a review to inform a recommendation to the Government on the topics for the next Census.

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)

Kind regards,
S22 [redacted]

S22 [redacted]

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

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

(E) S22 [redacted]**@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au**

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Document 16

S22

From: Georgia Chapman
Sent: Monday, 8 April 2024 6:44 PM
To: S47F
Cc: census.content@abs.gov.au; S22; S22; S22; 'Cc: Matthew Robson'
Subject: FW: For response: Follow up email from Anglican Church

Hi Anne,

Thank you for your patience and apologies for the delay in responding. I want to start by saying thank you for sharing your feedback on the proposed change to the Religious affiliation question at our meeting last month. I appreciate that it would have been quite a shock to receive our email if you were not aware of the public consultations that occurred and I am glad you requested the meeting to discuss further.

Please find the information you requested. I hope this is sufficient for your meeting with the Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia on the weekend.

Public consultations
There were three public consultation processes that considered the Religious affiliation question, one specifically on this question and the associated classification, and two on the Census topics.

2022 Review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and the Religious Affiliation Standard (RAS)
The ABS commenced a review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and the Religious Affiliation Standard (RAS) in 2022. The ABS consulted on the following preliminary scope of the review August-November 2022:

1. Investigation of the RAS – question wording and pick list
   a. Can the response options be changed to be more inclusive?
   b. Consistency between the question wording (refers to a person's religion) and the pick list options (a combination of religions and Christian denominations).
2. Investigation into Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism; and whether it is possible to identify additional religious groups.
3. Investigation into how Christian Orthodox groups appear in the ASCRG and the RAS.
4. Investigation into a possible restructure of the classification codes.
5. Investigation into the structure of Broad Group 7, Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation. Should secular beliefs continue to be included in a classification of religious groups

The ABS directly approached several religious organisations via email to inform of this review. This included the National Council of Churches in Australia which you referenced in your meeting, and the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations, of which we understand the Anglican Church of Australia is also a member. The ABS also promoted this review with a media release and social media promotion.

Most of the items in the preliminary scope were broadly supported for inclusion in the review and there were additional requests for the ABS to consider in the review of the RAS and ASCRG. This feedback is outlined in the link above.

2026 Census topic review consultation

The 2026 Census topic consultation process was conducted over two phases:

- Phase one: 28 February to 28 April 2023 - understanding what information the public would like the ABS to collect on the Census.
- Phase two: 27 July to 8 September 2023 - consultation on shortlist of topics being considered for inclusion, change or removal from the 2026 Census. This shortlist was developed based on feedback received during the first phase of public consultation and feedback received via other channels.

The ABS promoted the first phase of public consultation on the 2026 Census topics through Census email distribution lists, a media release, social media promotion and paid advertising. The ABS emailed all parties who provided a submission to the 2022 Review of the ASCRG and the RAS. Religious organisations that did not provide a submission were not notified directly about the Census content consultation process (unless they were part of an existing Census email distribution list).

We considered all feedback received and published the shortlist of topics being considered for inclusion, change or removal on the 27 July 2023. This included a change to the religious affiliation question. We specifically sought feedback on the impacts of any potential changes to questions, including the religious affiliation question during the second phase of public consultation.

The ABS promoted the second phase of public consultation to all parties who requested to be kept informed of updates on the consultation process (either through selecting this option when making a submission in the first phase of consultation, or by subscribing for updates) and through a media release and social media promotion.

The ABS published the outcomes of the second phase of public consultation and review on 12 December 2023. This included advising that we would be testing a change to the Religious affiliation question wording to 'do you have a religion', and using a free text field for responses.

As discussed at our meeting last month, potential question changes for the 2026 Census are tested extensively before the ABS decides on the final design. Changes to the Religious affiliation has undergone initial testing and have proceeded to the large-scale test scheduled for September 2024. No decision will be made on the question design prior to this test.

Next steps

We want to make sure that we understand all potential impacts prior to a decision being made on the religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census. While public consultation has officially closed, I want to extend the offer for the Anglican Church of Australia to provide us with any further evidence on the expected impact if data is not comparable between Censuses (e.g. what specific policies, planning, program monitoring or research will be impacted). This can be via a meeting or via email (census.content@abs.gov.au, cc'ing in S22 and myself). We will incorporate any information we receive from you into our final assessment of the benefits and impacts of the change. We will also analyse the data from the large-scale test to feed into our assessment. It would be appreciated if we could receive any feedback by the end of May 2024 at the latest, to provide sufficient time to include in our assessment.

My team or I will also be in touch if we have any questions or to 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 if you require further information before the weekend, or at any point after this.

Regards
Georgia

Georgia Chapman S47F
A/g Program Manager, Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) (03) 6222 5741
(M) S22
(E) georgia.chapman@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

Executive assistant: S22 ***(P)*** S22 ***(E)*** S22*@abs.gov.au*

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From: Anne Hywood | General Secretary [redacted]
Sent: Monday, April 8, 2024 3:27 PM
To: S22@abs.gov.au>
Cc: Matthew Robson S47F; S22
S22@abs.gov.au>; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Anglican Church of Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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

Dear S22

I am following up on my meeting with you and your colleagues by zoom on Monday 18 March 2024.

One of the agreed outcomes of that meeting is that the ABS would provide the Anglican Church of Australia with more information on the consultation process that has recently closed. Specifically how were individuals and organisations invited to the consultation and did this specifically include any faith organisations. How was the consultation process advertised or communicated and did it make specific reference to the review of the religious affiliation question.

I have a meeting with the Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia this weekend and would appreciate information to support the briefing papers I have presented to that meeting.

Regards, Anne

Anne Hywood, General Secretary
General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia I [redacted]
[redacted]

Anglican Church of Australia

From: [redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2024 11:17 AM
To: Anne Hywood | General Secretary [redacted]
Cc: Matthew Robson [redacted]>; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Anglican Church of Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Thanks for the quick reply Anne.

Do you have a longer lunchtime break that might be more convenient to meet?

Regards
[redacted]

[redacted]

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

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

(P)[redacted] **(E)** [redacted]@abs.gov.au **(W)** www.abs.gov.au

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From: Anne Hywood | General Secretary [redacted]
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2024 11:13 AM
To: [redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Cc: Matthew Robson [redacted]; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Anglican Church of Australia [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 for getting back to me [redacted]

I am attending a national meeting of bishops, and the break this afternoon is between 2.45pm and 3.00pm.

Would you be free at 2.45pm. If so please call me on my mobile - [redacted]. If it has to be at 3.00pm I can make myself available.

Regards, Anne

Anne Hywood, General Secretary
General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia I [redacted]
[redacted]

Anglican Church of Australia

From: [redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2024 11:04 AM
To: Anne Hywood | General Secretary [redacted]
Cc: Matthew Robson [redacted]; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; [redacted]
[redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Anglican Church of Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hi Anne,

Thanks for getting back to me.

Would you have time this afternoon to meet? Let me know if 3pm would suit you and I will send an invite with dial-in details.

Kind regards
[redacted]

[redacted]

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

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

(P) [redacted] **(E)** [redacted]**@abs.gov.au** **(W)** **www.abs.gov.au**

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From: Anne Hywood | General Secretary [redacted]
Sent: Sunday, March 17, 2024 11:10 AM
To: [redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Cc: Matthew Robson [redacted]
Subject: RE: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Anglican Church of Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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

Regards, Anne

Dear [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] but would like to discuss the proposal with you.
I would appreciate any advice on representation by the Anglican Church of Australia throughout the consultation process. I do not recall receiving an invitation prior to this correspondence, but I may be wrong.

Please let me know the best way to engage with the ABS on concerns we have about the proposal.

regards

Anne Hywood, General Secretary
General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia I [redacted]
[redacted]

Anglican Church of Australia

From: [redacted]@abs.gov.au>
Sent: Wednesday, March 6, 2024 11:42 AM
To: Matthew Robson [redacted]
Subject: 2026 Census topic review: Religious affiliation - Anglican Church of Australia [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Dear Matthew,

Lovely to speak with you today. Thank you for passing this information on to the appropriate contacts in the Anglican Church of Australia.

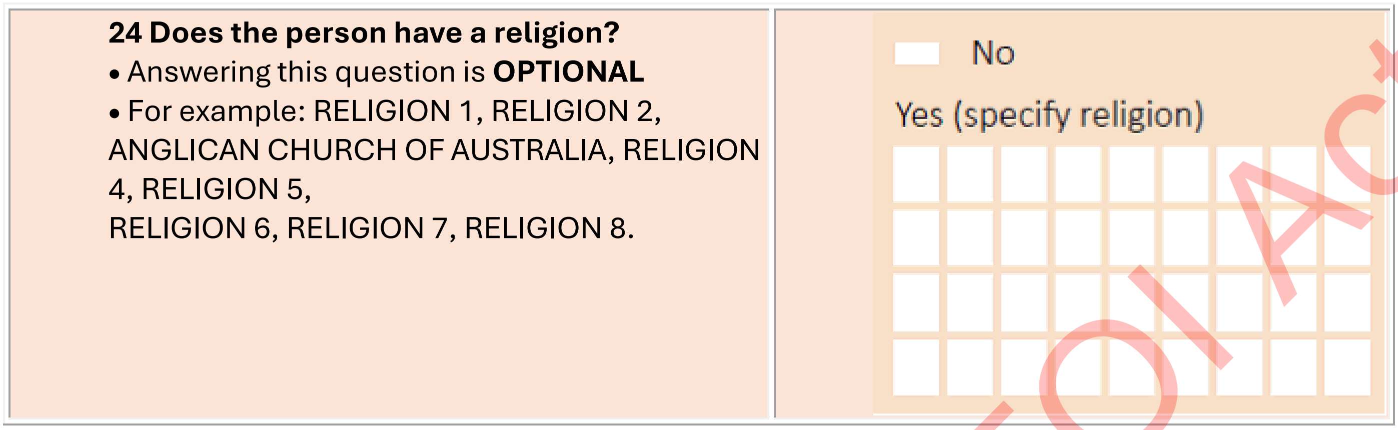
As mentioned, the next Census of Population and Housing will take place in 2026. Every Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) undertakes a review to inform a recommendation to the Government on the topics for the next Census.

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). The Anglican Church of Australia is proposed to be included as one of the eight listed examples.

We would like to check with the Anglican Church of Australia 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, RELIGION 2, ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA, RELIGION 4, RELIGION 5, RELIGION 6, RELIGION 7, RELIGION 8.

☐ No

Yes (specify religion)

Kind regards,
[redacted]

[redacted]

Stakeholder Relationship Manager

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

(E) [redacted]**@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au**

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[redacted]

From: Asa Secretary [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, 8 August 2024 4:11 PM
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted] Duncan Young; [redacted] [redacted]; Brenton Goldsworthy
Subject: Re: Meeting with the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) and the Australian Sangha Association Inc (ASA) [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]
Attachments: Final ASA Notes for ABS Meeting August 8.pdf

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

Dear [redacted]

For the benefit of the meeting participants, I've attached the following notes from the ASA which outline the ASA's feedback and concerns about the 2024 test question circulated.

I look forward to seeing everyone online.

Regards,
Suvira Bhikkhuni

On Fri, 21 Jun 2024 at 09:56, [redacted]@abs.gov.au> wrote:

> Dear Diana, Ayya Suvira and Ven. Chokyi,
>
> Thank you for responding and for your interest in meeting to discuss the religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census.
>
> Recently the ABS released a Clarification - reports published regarding religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census. Included in this link are screenshots of the 2021 Census question and the 2024 Test question.
>
> [redacted]
>
> Regards
>
> [redacted]
>
> Executive Assistant to the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen AO
>
> Australian Bureau of Statistics
>
> (P) [redacted]
>
> (E) [redacted]@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

S22

[redacted]

Document 18

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: Friday, 21 June 2024 1:00 PM
To: [redacted]; [redacted]; Duncan Young; [redacted]; Brenton Goldsworthy
Subject: Re: Meeting with the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) and the Australian Sangha Association Inc (ASA) [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

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

Hi [redacted]

Thank you for the invitation which I accept.

I have reviewed the link to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups. This made a lot more sense than either of the questions in the 2021 census or the proposed question in the 2024 census where, unfortunately, broad categories are conflated with minor categories. Please note, there is a difference between a religion and a denomination and you need to ask two questions so as to clarify both categories. This is reflected in the ASC.

The ASC structure is of five major religions or ‘broad groups’:

Thus, on the basis of a broad application of all the classification criteria, supported by the size of the religions in Australia, the first five broad groups within the classification are:

1. Buddhism
2. Christianity
3. Hinduism
4. Islam
5. Judaism

This application of the criteria enables the delineation of appropriate narrow groups (constructed on the basis of a more rigorous application of the criteria) as subsets (sub-categories) of these broad groups.

And then narrow groups and religious groups. The example is given of Anglicans:

Broad group	**Narrow group**	**Religious group**
2 Christianity		
	201 Anglican	
		2012 Anglican Church of Australia
		2013 Anglican Catholic Church

Broad group	**Narrow group**	**Religious group**
		2019 Anglican, nec

This would provide meaningful data. So ideally the question would ask:

Q. 1 Does the person have a religion? If so please select one of the following broad groups.

Broad group

1 Buddhism
2 Christianity
3 Hinduism
4 Islam
5 Judaism
6 Other Religions
7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation

Q. 2 Does the person wish to specify a denomination within their religion?

Here you could have a free text space and people could write in their choice, or, considering the survey is online, you could provide further tick boxes as you are not constrained by the paper format. Here are some examples but these are not exhaustive:

Islam

Sunni
Shia
Ahmaddiya
Ishmaeli

Buddhism
Mahayana
Vietnamese
Tibetan
Japanese
Theravada
Other

Christianity
Roman Catholic
Protestant
Anglican
Presbyterian
Quaker
Pentecostal

Orthodox
Greek
Syrian
Russian
Ukrainian

I think it is useful to collect the detail but essential not to conflate broad and narrow categories. I think it is useful to enable free text space for answers for both broad and narrow categories as there are so many religions and denominations. I don’t think you can obtain meaningful data without asking two questions, not one. The data will never be meaningful if you don’t separate broad and narrow categories.

Happy to discuss further.

Regards,

Diana

From: [redacted]
Date: Friday, 21 June 2024 at 9:56 am
To: [redacted] ,
Duncan Young , [redacted] , Brenton Goldsworthy
Subject: Meeting with the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC) and the Australian Sangha Association Inc (ASA) [SEC=UNOFFICIAL]

Dear Diana, Ayya Suvira and Ven. Chokyi,

Thank you for responding and for your interest in meeting to discuss the religious affiliation question for the 2026 Census.

Recently the ABS released a Clarification - reports published regarding religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census. Included in this link are screenshots of the 2021 Census question and the 2024 Test question.

Please use the dial in details below to join the meeting via video conference

Let me know if the proposed time does not work for you.

Regards

[redacted]
Executive Assistant to the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen AO
Australian Bureau of Statistics
(P) [redacted]
(E) [redacted]@abs.gov.au (W) www.abs.gov.au

[redacted]

S22

[redacted]

Australian Bureau of Statistics

FOR INFORMATION

MS24-000021

Title:	**Religious Affiliation in the 2026 Census**
To:	**The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**
Cc:	*The Treasurer, The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP* *Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary to the Treasury*
Recommendation:	1. That you note the work underway to improve the question on religious affiliation in the 2026 Census.
	Noted ☑ — **Please Discuss** ☐
Signature:	S47F **The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury** — 7 / 5 / 24 **Date**

S47E

S47E

Executive summary

- This brief provides information on ABS's progress on considering improvements to the question on religious affiliation in the 2026 Census to support your engagement with stakeholders.
- There has been some inaccurate reporting on the changes the ABS is considering.
- The Australian Statistician will offer to meet directly with stakeholders before making a final decision.

Key points

- The ABS has determined that updates are required to the way religious affiliation data is collected in the Census to better reflect the diversity of the Australian community and address concerns regarding quality of data with the existing question.
- The changes being considered and tested by the ABS look to remove the assumption that a person has a religion, and also to treat equally the 139 religious groups in the classification by not having a picklist for the 9 most common religions.
- The concerns raised are that the data will not be comparable between Censuses, that the question concept is being changed in undesirable ways, and/or that the question will be harder for people to complete and reduce data quality, particularly for minor religious groups.
- The ABS is continuing to test and consult on potential changes to this question for the 2026 Census, with these changes due to be included in a large-scale test in September 2024.

Cleared by:	Duncan Young, General Manager Census & Population Division	**Contact officer:**	Duncan Young, General Manager Census & Population Division
Date cleared:	03 May 2024	**Contact number:**	s22
Consultation: Nil			

- The ABS will consider all available evidence before deciding on the final question design for the 2026 Census.
- The final topics and question for the 2026 Census will be published on our website in late 2025.

Issues/sensitivities

Concerns around comparability over time

- Some stakeholders, in particular those connected to religious groups that had a mark box on the 2021 Census form, have raised concerns about the impact of the change on comparability of data over time. The ABS has considered feedback received to date on the impact of losing data comparability over time.
- The most common use cases for religious affiliation data presented to the ABS relate to the size and distribution of the current population (rather than change) in a religious group to support service delivery. However, the measurement of change has also been identified as important from a research perspective in understanding the move away from traditional religions as well as the rise in non-denominational Christianity.
- The ABS will consider conducting testing to measure the impact of a question change on the data collected, for example on the extent of change for people reporting 'No religion' or 'Catholic', if there is a sufficient need for this information. This would require a significant sample and would need to be considered against the cost and other priorities.
- While maintaining consistency in questions to support comparability over time is a consideration for the ABS, this is balanced against changes to improve accuracy, relevance and inclusivity.
- The religious affiliation question has undergone five major changes since 1911: including instructions that question was optional (1933); including instructions that a person could report they had no religion (1971); introducing a pick list (1991); changing from religious denomination to religion (2001) and moving the 'no religion' option to the first mark box (2016).
- A case could have been made against each of these changes about the impact on data comparability.
- People have always been able to write in their response to answer the question. In 2021, 2.5 million responses (over 10% of respondents) were reported via write-in. As an example, this included 4,123 Yezidis in Australia, up from 63 in 2016. This information is only available from people writing their religion in the free-text field, the ABS having a comprehensive classification and coding capability.

Inaccuracies in media

- Articles have made the statement that there is a mark box for 'No religion' but not for 'Yes'. This is incorrect, there is a mark-box for each. This incorrect statement is understandable as an earlier draft of the question, shared with stakeholders did not contain a mark-box for 'Yes' but this has been updated in the current version (see Attachment).
- The statement that the potential question change is making it more difficult for smaller religions is also incorrect. The experience for 130 / 139 religious groups is unchanged as they have always relied on a write-in response. There is likely to be some improvements for these smaller religions as people will not select a mark-box for convenience (e.g. Catholic which is then classified as Western Catholic) rather than responding with a more precise denomination (e.g. Chaldean Catholic).

- The statement that the inability for people to enter perfect data in a free text box will lead to poor data is not necessarily correct. The Census has many free text boxes and advanced coding processes that successfully classify responses against a classification. This is the process for majority of religious groups currently.

Background

S22

- The question design used in the 2021 Census does not support the new ASCRG as it provides mark box options for Buddhism and Islam as broad groups and thus would not capture the granularity of these religious groups in the same way that it does for Christianity. The mark boxes exclude Christianity as an option, despite it being the fourth most common response (reported via the text box).

S47E

- In reviewing the question used in the 2021 Census, the ABS is of the view that the question “What is the person’s religion?” contains an assumption that the person has a religion and makes the answer “No religion” grammatically incorrect. The question “Does the person have a religion?” is thought to be a better question with two options for response: “No”, and “Yes (specify religion)”. Other questions follow this design – for example, the question is “Does the person use a language other than English at home?” not “What language other than English does the person use at home?”
- The ABS large-scale test in September 2024 will provide insight on public response to the question, including whether non-response increases, whether the question successfully collects greater diversity of religious affiliation and how the results of the new question design different from those produced previously.
- ABS consultation in 2024 is seeking to ensure that all impacts on data use of changes to the question and impacts on comparability over time are being considered.

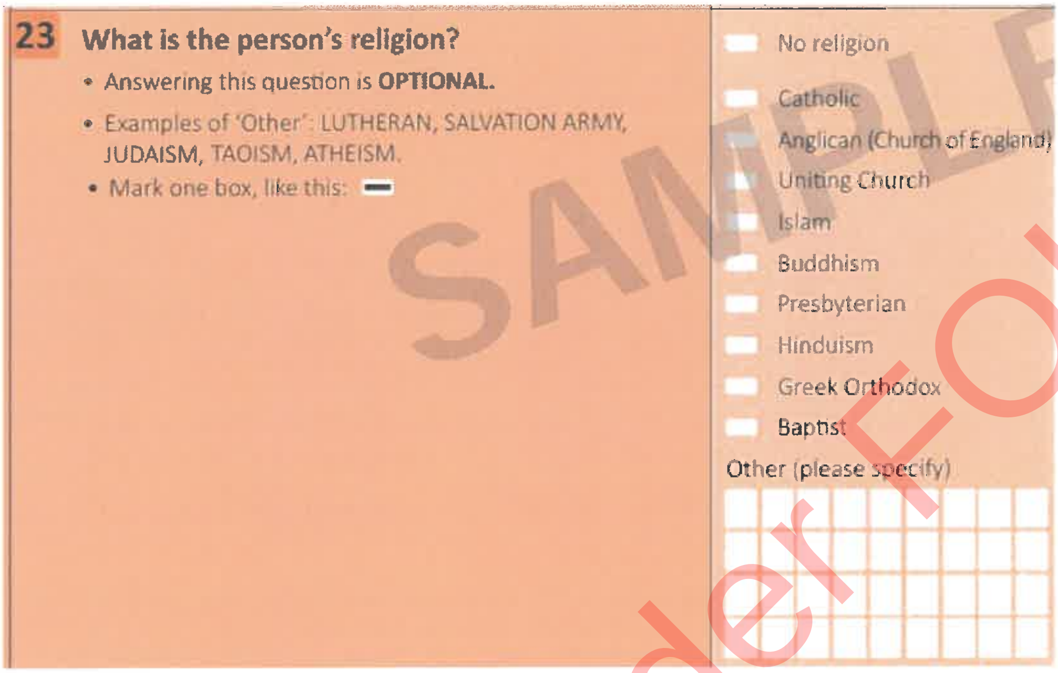
- ABS will make the decision based on the results of the test, what people provide in their feedback, and information about potential impacts. This decision is required by the end of 2024 to meet 2026 Census paper form deadlines.
- The final topics and question for the 2026 Census will be published on ABS website in late 2025.

Attachments

Attachment – 2021 Census question on religion and 2024 Census test question on religion

ATTACHMENT

2021 Census Question



23 **What is the person's religion?**

- Answering this question is **OPTIONAL.**
- Examples of 'Other': LUTHERAN, SALVATION ARMY, JUDAISM, TAOISM, ATHEISM.
- Mark one box, like this: ▬

☐ No religion

☐ Catholic

☐ Anglican (Church of England)

☐ Uniting Church

☐ Islam

☐ Buddhism

☐ Presbyterian

☐ Hinduism

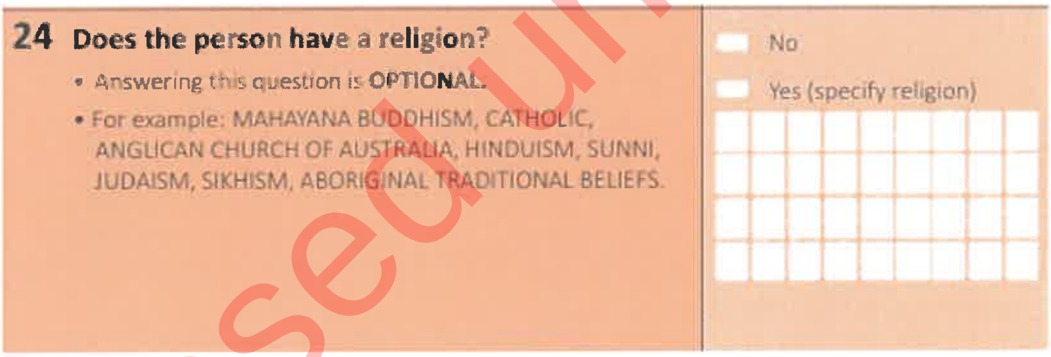
☐ Greek Orthodox

☐ Baptist

Other (please specify)

SAMPLE

2024 Census Test Question



24 **Does the person have a religion?**

- Answering this question is **OPTIONAL.**
- For example: MAHAYANA BUDDHISM, CATHOLIC, ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA, HINDUISM, SUNNI, JUDAISM, SIKHISM, ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL BELIEFS.

☐ No

☐ Yes (specify religion)

Document 20

[redacted]

From: Denise Carlton
Sent: Thursday, 3 October 2024 6:47 PM
To: [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]
Subject: RE: Religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Terrific – thanks [redacted]. We'll pass this on to the classifications area.

Regards,

[redacted]

Denise Carlton [redacted])

Program Manager Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) (02) 6252 5448 **(M)** [redacted] **(E)** denise.carlton@abs.gov.au **(W)** www.abs.gov.au

Executive assistant: [redacted] ***(P)*** [redacted] ***(E)*** [redacted]*@abs.gov.au*

The ABS 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 and present.

From: [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, October 3, 2024 6:35 PM
To: Denise Carlton ; [redacted] ; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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

Thanks Denise to you and your team for the excellent work you do on the Census and for consulting with us.

��

Just on the tidying up of some of the ASCRG groupings that I mentioned:

��

1. Narrow group ���Brethren��� (2514) should in Religious group have a distinction and separate out:

���Plymouth Brethren��� from

���Open Brethren��� and add the new naming of open Brethren being

���Christian Community Churches of Australia��� (currently listed under ���Other protestant��� as 253114)

��

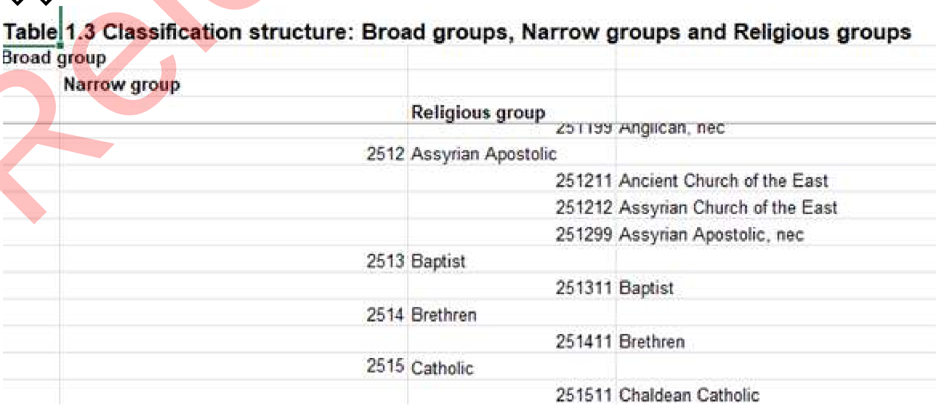


Table 1.3 Classification structure: Broad groups, Narrow groups and Religious groups

Broad group	Narrow group	Religious group
		251199 Anglican, nec
	2512 Assyrian Apostolic	
		251211 Ancient Church of the East
		251212 Assyrian Church of the East
		251299 Assyrian Apostolic, nec
	2513 Baptist	
		251311 Baptist
	2514 Brethren	
		251411 Brethren
	2515 Catholic	
		251511 Chaldean Catholic

��

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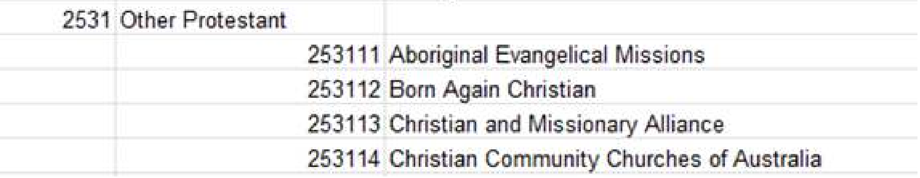


2531	Other Protestant		
		253111	Aboriginal Evangelical Missions
		253112	Born Again Christian
		253113	Christian and Missionary Alliance
		253114	Christian Community Churches of Australia

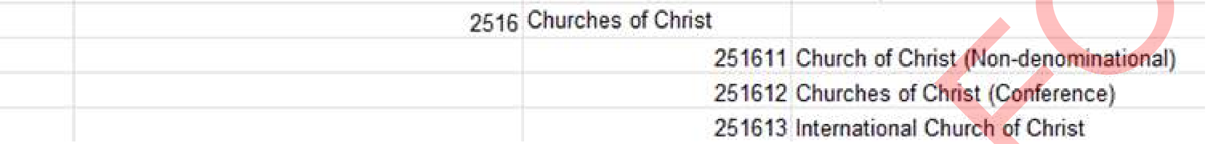
Contact for confirmation:

[redacted] S22

��

2. Churches of Christ (2516) in Religious group should have separated from it ���International Church of Christ��� (251613) perhaps into ���Other Protestant��� as it is not affiliated with the denomination Churches of Christ.

��



2516	Churches of Christ		
		251611	Church of Christ (Non-denominational)
		251612	Churches of Christ (Conference)
		251613	International Church of Christ

Contact for confirmation:

[redacted] S22

��

��

Thanks,

��

[redacted] S47F

��

[redacted] S47F

��

��

��

From: Denise Carlton <Denise.Carlton@abs.gov.au>
Sent: Thursday, 3 October 2024 6:26 PM
To: [redacted] S47F
[redacted] S47F [redacted] S22
[redacted] S22 @abs.gov.au>; Murray Norman [redacted] S47F
[redacted] S47F
Subject: RE: Religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census [SEC=OFFICIAL]

��

Many thanks [redacted] S47F ��� and thanks to you all for your time and very useful discussion today.

��

Regards,

��

[redacted] S47F

Denise Carlton �� [redacted] S47F

��

Program Manager Population Statistics Branch | Australian Bureau of Statistics

(P) (02) 6252 5448 ����**(M)** [redacted] **(E)** ��denise.carlton@abs.gov.au **(W)** ��www.abs.gov.au
Executive assistant: [redacted] ��***(P)*** [redacted] ��***(E)*** [redacted]*@abs.gov.au*

The ABS 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 and present.

��

From: [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, October 3, 2024 10:44 AM
To: Denise Carlton <Denise.Carlton@abs.gov.au>; [redacted] [redacted]; [redacted] <[redacted]@abs.gov.au>; Murray Norman [redacted] [redacted]
Subject: Religious affiliation question in the 2026 Census

��

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

Hi Murray

��

Here���s a mock-up of what I proposed on the call. This uses the same categories from the 2021 Census

��

☐ **No Religion**

Christianity

☐ Catholic

☐ Anglican (Church of England)

☐ Uniting Church

☐ Presbyterian

☐ Greek Orthodox

Other Christian (Please specify)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

☐ **Islam**

☐ **Buddhism**

☐ **Hinduism**

Other (Please specify)

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

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��
��
Kind regards

S47F

��

QB24-000003

Census of Population and Housing

KEY MESSAGE

[redacted]

S22

- The final topics and questions for the 2026 Census will be published on the ABS website in late 2025.

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

[redacted]

S22

Office Responsible	The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP		
Contact Officer	Mark Harding	**Contact Number**	S22 [redacted]
Division Responsible	Census and Population Division	**Date of Update**	02 October 2024

Census of Population and Housing

- Religious Affiliation: The ABS is considering changes to the way that Religious Affiliation data is collected in the 2026 Census. The ABS has undertaken testing on the potential changes and consulting with stakeholders. The potential changes will support the updated Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups, which now recognises sub-groups of Buddhism and Islam. The potential changes are also intended to make the question more inclusive and capture higher quality data. The ABS is considering the impacts on reporting burden and data comparability.

S22 [redacted]

BACKGROUND

S22 [redacted]

Office Responsible	The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP		
Contact Officer	Mark Harding	**Contact Number**	S22 [redacted]
Division Responsible	Census and Population Division	**Date of Update**	02 October 2024

Census of Population and Housing

[redacted]

Office Responsible	The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP		
Contact Officer	Mark Harding	**Contact Number**	[redacted]
Division Responsible	Census and Population Division	**Date of Update**	02 October 2024

Document 22

Australian Bureau of Statistics

For Information

MS23-000022

Title:	**Update on 2026 Census Topic Consultation and Development Process**	
To:	**The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	
Cc:	*The Treasurer, The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP*	
	Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary to the Treasury	
Recommendation:	1. That you note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics will publish outcomes from the first phase of consultation on 2026 Census topics and commence the second phase of consultation on 27 July 2023.	
	Noted ☐	**Please Discuss** ☐
Signature:	…………………………………………… **The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP** **Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury**	………../…………/………… **Date**

S22 [redacted]

Key points

- The ABS assessment during phase one of the topic consultation has identified there is strong public value for the inclusion of 12 new topics and to make changes to 16 existing topics. Four existing topics have been identified for potential removal from the 2026 Census. The shortlisted topics are detailed in Attachment A.

S22 [redacted]

- In late 2023, the ABS will share the outcomes of phase two, including the topics recommended for removal and topics that have proceeded to testing.

  The Australian Government decides which topics are collected in the Census. The ABS will make a recommendation to Government in mid-2024 on the topics that could be included in the 2026 Census.

Cleared by:	Duncan Young General Manager, Census Division	**Contact officer:**	Duncan Young General Manager, Census Division
Date cleared:	25 July 2023	**Contact number:**	S22 [redacted]
Consultation: Nil			

Issues/sensitivities

S22

Background

- The ABS is conducting a two-phase consultation process for the 2026 Census. This process involves the public earlier than the 2021 consultation process did and aims to increase transparency and public awareness, and to encourage broader participation. The ABS has published details on the review process on the ABS website.
- Phase one of the 2026 Census topic consultation was open from 28 February to 28 April 2023. This consultation invited submissions on information the public would like the ABS to collect in the Census.
- During phase one, the ABS also reviewed other input including 2021 submissions, correspondence received by the Australian Statistician and Ministers, feedback from other recent ABS consultations and statistical standard reviews, and recommendations from parliamentary inquiries.
- The ABS considered 780 pieces of feedback as part of phase one consultation, including 260 submissions received during the consultation window and five petitions with over 7,000 signatures in total. In total there were 930 data requests across all topic themes, with some feedback including more than one data request. S22

S22

- The addition of any new content to the Census needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the public benefit of the data outweighs the cost to the Australian taxpayer of developing the questions, collecting the data and then processing it. The ABS also needs to consider the burden on Australian households of answering additional questions, and whether a longer Census form will decrease the quality of the data collected.

S22

- Phase two consultation aims to ensure that stakeholders (including the public) are aware of the 2026 Census topic process and current topic consideration. It seeks views on topic directions and the impact of changes.
- Awareness and understanding during phase two will be supported by an information kit for Members of Parliament, social media promotion, a media release, distribution of radio release audio grabs, live webinar and ABS media spokespeople. The call to action will be to visit the ABS website and consultation hub to access further information and make a submission.
- The ABS will contact parties that provided submissions in phase one who requested to be kept informed of the process and subscribers to the email distribution list. The ABS will also engage directly with stakeholders, including meeting with the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics and the forming an advisory committee on Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation.
- During phase two, the ABS will assess topics against the same assessment criteria to determine whether data on the topic can be collected efficiently and whether a representative of a household would be willing and able to answer questions on the topic for each member of the household.
- In late 2023, the ABS will release the outcomes of phase two, including the topics recommended for removal and topics that have proceeded to testing. Not all topics that are tested will be recommended to the Australian Government for inclusion in the 2026 Census.

Attachments

Attachment A: Summary of outcomes of phase one topic assessment process

S22

Attachment A: Summary of outcomes of phase one topic assessment process

S22

The [redacted] proposed changes (across [redacted] existing topics) that have strong public value and are shortlisted for further consideration in phase two are below.

Theme	Topic	Proposed change
Cultural diversity	S22	
	Religious affiliation	Update question design and response categories to align with potential new standard
S22		

S22

[redacted]

S22

[redacted]