Australian Bureau of Statistics

ABS Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy

2026-30

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS
Informing Australia's important decisions

CONTENTS

Message from the Chief AI Officer 3

Context 4

The AI journey to date 5

AI Implementation Enablers 6

Strategic Framework 7

MESSAGE FROM THE CAIO



Marcel van Kints

Chief AI Officer (CAIO) and General Manager Statistical Infrastructure and Integration Division

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how organisations operate, make decisions, and deliver value. At the ABS, we recognise the transformative potential of AI to strengthen how we produce and share trusted data, statistics and insights, while enabling our people to work more efficiently and effectively.

The ABS has a long history of innovation and has been applying machine learning and advanced analytics in statistical production for many years. As AI capabilities continue to evolve, we have an opportunity to build on these foundations to improve the quality, timeliness and accessibility of our data and statistics, reducing burden on respondents, and supporting our people to focus on higher-value work. At the same time, we recognise that trust is our most valuable asset. The use of AI must be transparent, responsible and aligned with the high standards Australians expect of the ABS.

This strategy sets out how we will harness AI to deliver greater value for Australia while maintaining the integrity, security, and trust that underpin everything we do. It sets a clear direction for building capability, strengthening governance, empowering our workforce and scaling AI in line with our strategic priorities.

AI is a tool that, when used responsibly, will help us better serve the Australian community and ensure the ABS remains a leading national statistical organisation in an increasingly digital world.

CONTEXT

Rapid advances in AI, particularly generative and agentic AI and machine learning, present significant opportunities for the ABS, including becoming a core enabler of statistical production, data services and organisational efficiency. It can improve the working environment for ABS teams, enhance the quality of statistical outputs and data services, and create more accessible and engaging experiences for users of ABS data, statistics and insights.

The ABS AI Strategy is an enabling strategy that supports delivery of the Enterprise Strategy, outlining how the ABS will use AI to support its strategic priorities and achieve organisational objectives. While the Enterprise Strategy defines the ABS's purpose, priorities and future direction, the AI Strategy sets the direction for how AI will be used to help achieve those outcomes.

The ABS AI Strategy:

- sets out the principles, missions and objectives that will guide AI adoption and defines how success will be measured
- is supported by regularly updated initiatives that outline the actions underway to advance its vision and missions
- will be refreshed regularly to reflect the continually evolving AI landscape
- aligns with the AI Plan for the APS and supports the National AI Plan by strengthening AI capability, data foundations, infrastructure and responsible use
- complements the ABS Data Strategy, IT Strategy and Workforce Strategy by leveraging the data, technology and capabilities required for responsible and effective AI adoption.

While AI adoption presents opportunities, it also creates new and amplifies existing risks. The ABS will take a proportionate approach to managing AI-related risks, which will be handled through established enterprise risk and AI governance arrangements.

THE AI JOURNEY TO DATE

Acronyms
LLM: Large language model
ML: Machine learning
NLP: Natural language processing
RAG: Retrieval Augmented Generation

Legend
- Governance and Frameworks
- ABS AI Initiatives

External environment

2019
- Australia's AI Ethics Principles

2020
- Predicting self-response and dwelling occupancy using ML for 2021 Census
- Intelligent Coder for automated text classification
- Aerial Imagery Recognition using ML

2021
- Census automatic coding using NLP
- Census website Chatbot "Claire"

Pre-2024

2022
- Machine Learning Capability Uplift Strategy endorsed

Sep 2024
- Policy for the Responsible Use of AI in government

Oct 2024
- AI in Government Fundamentals training
- AI Accountable Official appointed

2024

Feb 2025
- ABS public transparency statement released

2025

Mar 2025
- End of Survey feedback analysis using NLP and LLM

Jun 2025
- Whole of Australian Government Coding Service

Jul 2025
- GovAI
- Copilot for Microsoft 365

Oct 2025
- Staff guidance on public generative AI

Dec 2025
- National AI Plan
- AI Operating Model endorsed
- Chief AI Officer appointed

Nov 2025
- AI Plan for the Australian Public Service 2025

2026

May 2026
- PSPF Policy Advisory 001-2026 - Cyber Security Readiness in the Frontier AI Era
- AI Advisory Group established
- AI Use Case Register developed

Jun 2026
- Copilot guidance released

Aug 2026
- ABS Census Assistant "Claire" upgraded to RAG chatbot

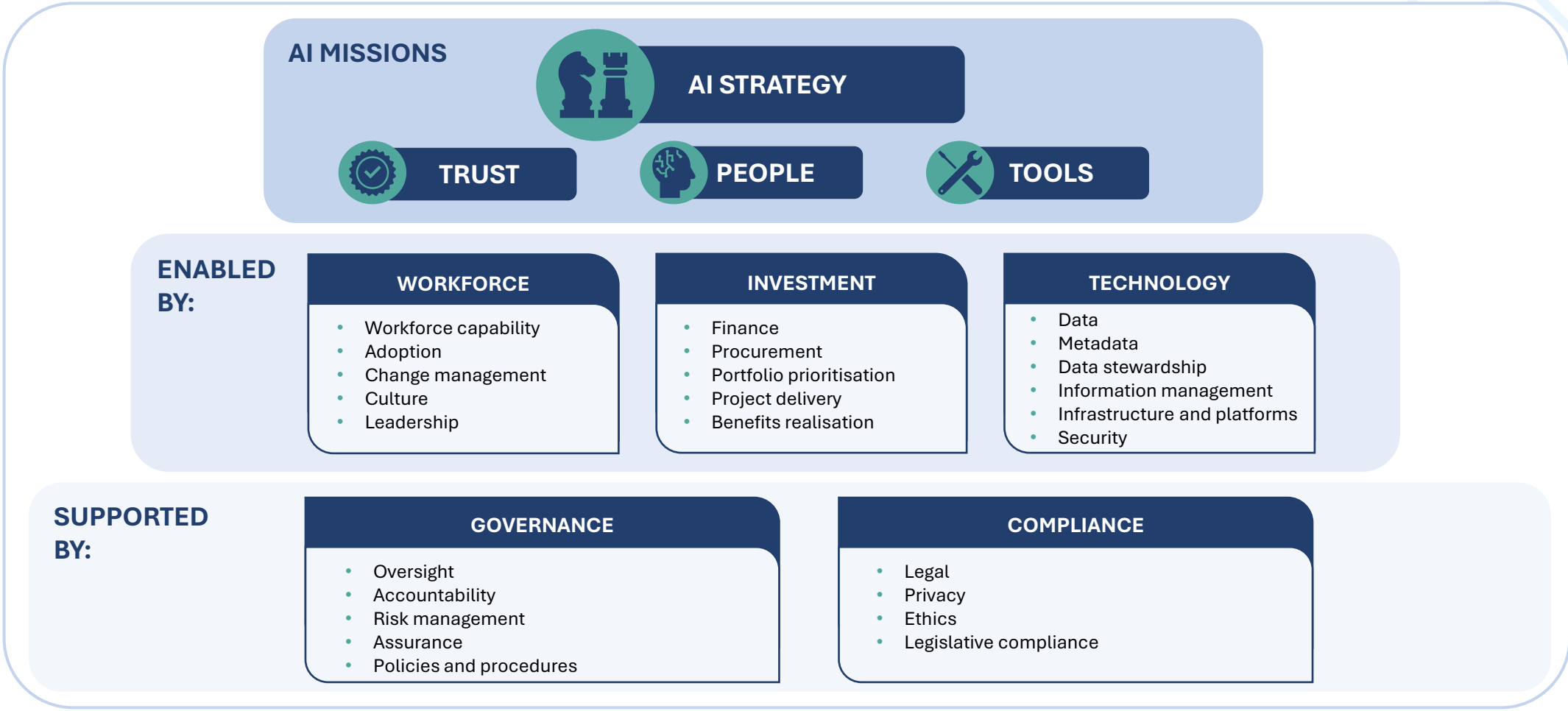
Oct 2026
- AI Strategy 2026-30 endorsed
- AI Governance Framework endorsed
- Responsible Adoption and Use of AI Policy endorsed

Internal environment

AI IMPLEMENTATION ENABLERS

Successful AI adoption relies on a range of organisational capabilities, enabling foundations and governance safeguards working together to ensure AI is used responsibly, delivers measurable benefits, and maintains the trust and confidence of the Australian community.

The ABS will establish an enterprise governance and assurance framework, supported by policies and guidance that enable the safe and responsible adoption of AI while protecting privacy, preserving confidentiality and meeting legislative obligations.



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Vision

Harness AI responsibly and ethically to strengthen trust, improve efficiency and deliver timely, relevant and objective data, statistics and insights for Australia.

Principles

- We will use AI transparently, ethically and with appropriate human oversight to maintain confidence in ABS statistics and services.
- We will protect privacy, confidentiality and information security, ensuring AI is used in secure and governed environments.
- We will empower our workforce with the skills, tools and support needed to use AI responsibly and effectively.
- We will focus on AI initiatives that deliver measurable benefits for data providers, data users, the ABS and the Australian community.
- We will prioritise reusable, scalable and sustainable AI solutions that maximise value and reduce duplication.
- We will encourage experimentation and continuous improvement while managing risk and maintaining trust.

Mission 1
Trust

Objectives

1. **Transparency**
   Be open and accountable in the use of AI, ensuring clear and consistent communication
2. **Privacy, security and ethics**
   Practice the highest ethical standards, ensure privacy protection and manage security of information
3. **Governance**
   Establish robust governance, assurance and risk management frameworks

Mission 2
People

Objectives

1. **Capability building**
   Provide all ABS employees with the knowledge, skills and support required to use AI safely, responsibly and effectively in their work.
2. **Engagement and adoption**
   Empower staff to identify, experiment with and adopt AI solutions that improve efficiency, statistical production and service delivery outcomes.
3. **Leadership and culture**
   Foster a culture of responsible AI innovation supported by leadership, collaboration and knowledge sharing across the ABS and broader APS

Mission 3
Tools

Objectives

1. **Statistical products, data assets and data services**
   Apply AI to improve the quality, accessibility, efficiency and value of ABS statistical products, data assets and data services, and scale where appropriate for reuse.
2. **Enterprise efficiency**
   Support teams to use standard AI tools in day-to-day workflows to enhance efficiency and streamline processes
3. **Custom solutions**
   AI solutions tailored for specific workflows or specialised use cases

Contact:

datasystemsandstrategy@abs.gov.au

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS
Informing Australia's important decisions