



NatStats08 Conference
"Working together for an informed Australian Society"
19 -21 November 2008

Statistics for Australia in the 21st Century – Draft for Discussion

We, the participants at the NatStats 08 conference in Melbourne in November 2008, representing a wide range of interests and perspectives in government, community, business and universities, have agreed on the following declaration to guide the development of a national statistics strategy for Australia in the 21st century:

1. Statistics are vital to the health and progress of Australia's economy, society and environment. They are a critical element of our democracy.

Decision making in the information age

2. We live in an information age that has seen massive growth in the volume and availability of statistics and the technologies to manage and communicate them. Yet valuable information is often wasted or locked away through lack of awareness and understanding, poor sharing practices, and inadequate investment in its maintenance and development. Better statistical policies and programs will improve knowledge, information, planning and decision-making, and therefore the wellbeing outcomes for all Australians.

Measuring progress

3. Measuring the Progress of Society - providing information about whether life is getting better - is gathering momentum around the world. Australia has been a leader in developing frameworks for measuring progress. The ambitious and landmark publication *Measures of Australia's Progress*, produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, has had an important influence internationally. A complementary focus has emerged through community indicator and state development plans in most states.
4. Measuring progress is about taking a wider view of our wellbeing than economic growth. It means understanding and measuring progress on the important economic, social and environmental issues that affect our lives.

Measuring the environment

5. One of the most immediate challenges is in the environmental field. To date, the development of statistics has largely focussed on the economy and society. In Australia there is an urgent need to make an equivalent investment in the statistical frameworks, systems, methodologies and data sources required to support environmental policy making, especially in water, natural resource management, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Better use of information

6. New technology allows us to measure and organise vast data sources. To fully realise the benefits, we will need especially to improve consistency and transferability between data sets; and to ensure that statistical information held in administrative systems is more visible, accessible and useful. New technologies also present exciting opportunities to coordinate different data systems and sources into more cohesive information systems; to improve data integration and data linking; and to develop world-leading electronic platforms to make statistics available and understandable to citizens and policy-makers alike.

The ABS and the National Statistical Service

7. As Australia's official, independent statistical agency, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) enjoys a high degree of trust in the community. It has a track record of over 100 years in providing authoritative and reliable statistics to the nation. As statistics become increasingly important for governance, knowledge and democracy in the 21st century, the leadership role of the ABS will become even more valuable.
8. However, the ABS is not the only contributor to a fully developed national statistical service. In many private and public organisations, statistical data of all kinds - scientific, spatial, administrative - are starting to be recognised and valued as strategic assets. Effective coordination and collaboration are essential to fully realise the benefits from these assets. In particular, all levels of government have key roles to play in delivering an improved national system of statistics in the next few decades of the 21st century.