



RESEARCH NOTE

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Stand Up and Be Counted: Census 1996

Introduction

Tuesday 6 August 1996 is the date of the next Census of Population and Housing. This, the thirteenth national Census, will be conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to provide information on the number and key characteristics of people and dwellings in Australia.

Censuses are required by law to be conducted and the conditions under which they are conducted are set out by the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*.

Historical Census Dates

The first national Census was held in 1911, although population counts, known as musters, were held as early as 1788!

It was intended that Censuses be held every ten years and the 1921 Census was conducted to schedule. However, the Depression at the end of the 1920s and early 1930s caused the postponement of the 1931 Census to 1933 and the second World War caused the cancellation of the 1941 Census. A post-war Census was held in 1947 and the 1951 Census was postponed until 1954 - the mid-point between the 1947 and the proposed 1961 Censuses. After the 1961 Census the next one was held in 1966 and from that time the Censuses have been held five yearly.

Timing

The day and month of the Census is selected for a time of year when most of the population is expected to be at home (or 'usual place of residence'). In 1911 and 1921 this was in early April. From 1933 to 1986 the date was

changed to the end of June for the additional reason that Census results would be better aligned with other end of quarter and end of financial year statistics.

With the change to a four term school year in all mainland States and Territories, from the late 1980s and early 1990s, school holidays now occur around the end of June so the Census date was moved to August for the 1991 Census and remains so for 1996.

Who is Counted?

The Census aims to count all people (full-blood Aboriginals were excluded from Censuses prior to the 1966 Census) in Australia on Census *night*, with the exception of foreign diplomats and their families and foreign crew members on ships.

Visitors to Australia are counted while Australians abroad are, generally, not. Naval personnel on board ship outside Australian waters are counted as are oil rig workers. Residents and visitors on board ship between Australian ports are counted as migratory.

Census Topics

Some topics are asked in every Census. These are:

- name and address
- age and sex
- family structure/marital status
- country of birth/year of arrival
- religion
- attendance at an educational institution
- labour force status
- occupation
- industry of employment

- number of rooms/bedrooms
- rent, and
- type of dwelling.

In each Census there are also other questions that are asked. These questions can change from Census to Census and the topics vary from mortgage repayments to highest level of educational attainment and from previous address to family income. The additional topics (along with the usual topics) are recommended by the ABS, after guidance from public consultations and public submissions, and decided by the Government.

Census Areas

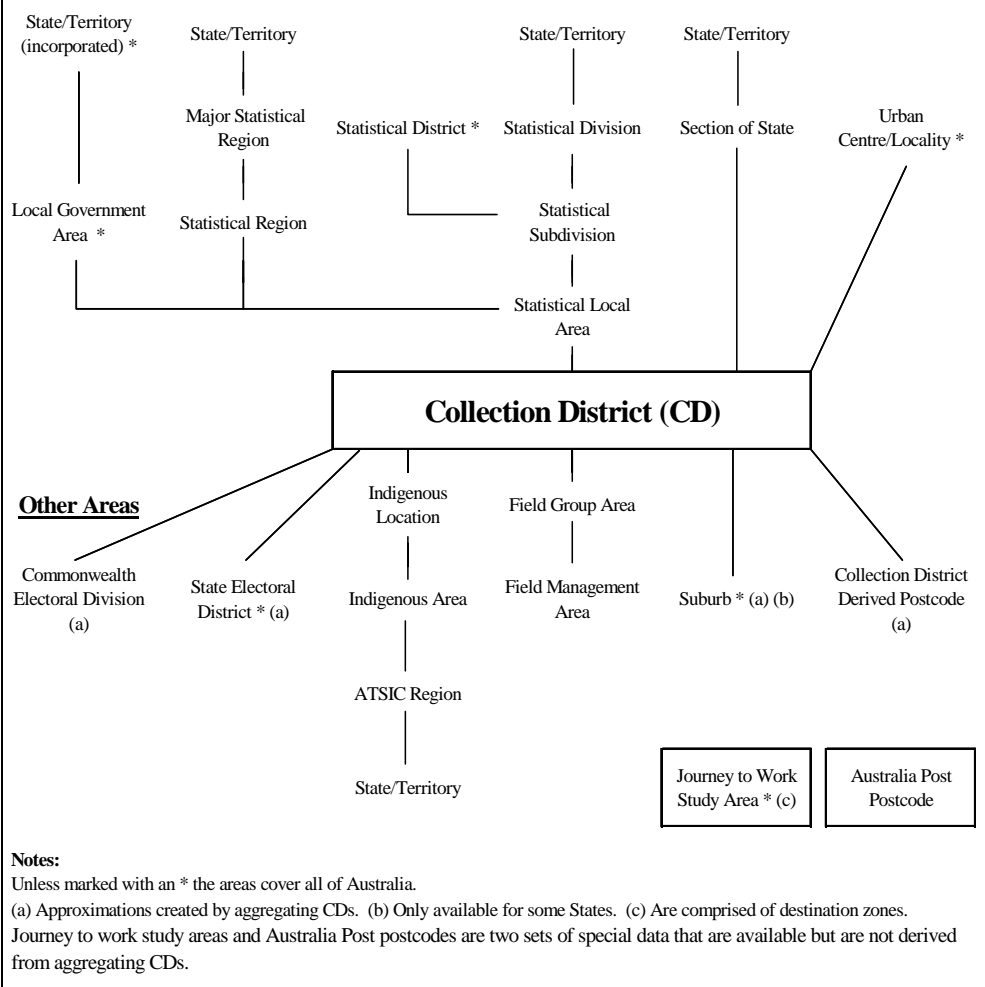
The Census' aim is to count everybody in Australia on Census night and to do this Australia is divided up into *collection districts* (CDs). CDs cover Australia without overlap or omission and each one averages about 200 dwellings. For the 1996 Census there will be 34,393 CDs.

CDs are the building blocks for aggregation into larger areas right up to State, Territory and National level. The hierarchy of



Figure 1: 1996 Census Geographic Structure

Australian Standard Geographical Classification Areas



characteristics then would identify those areas that may require the assistance of government programs or the establishment of schools, roads, hospitals or some other community amenities. They may also indicate the areas where business ventures may be best located.

Census information is also very useful for social research because it allows cross-classifying of population characteristics at a point in time as well as allowing comparisons to be made over time.

Data Release Dates

A two stage release is planned for the 1996 Census. In the first stage, a wide range of data for all geographic areas will be available by June 1997. The second stage, with data that require more extensive coding, will then be progressively released and completed by March 1998.

areas is shown in Figure 1.

Privacy

Privacy of their responses and how the information is going to be used are usually the two main concerns of respondents.

There are privacy provisions under the Act to protect respondents from the time of delivery of their forms through the processing and publication stages to the pulping of the forms at the end. Names and addresses are not retained and the published results for small areas are randomly adjusted to prevent the identification of individuals.

Although the Census collects information regarding each

person and household in the country it is not the data relating to the individual that are of concern but rather the aggregation of these data into community profiles.

Census Information

Accurate regional population estimates are required for determining the number of seats each State and Territory has in the House of Representatives and for the allocation of Commonwealth funding to State and Local governments.

However, small area data also allow government and business to identify areas within the community that have particular characteristics of interest. These

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