

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

Given it has been a while since the ABS has appeared at Estimates, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide an opening statement.

The ABS's purpose is to provide information that informs the important decisions of governments, business and the community, including informing Parliamentary and public debates and contributing to our democratic processes.

Our key data users are increasingly influencing the composition and prioritisation of our statistical program and we are increasingly looking for innovative ways to meet customer needs in a timely and cost effective way.

Last year we released over 500 statistical products (more than recent years), supported more than 16 million visits to the ABS website and enabled about 2.5 million data downloads. Demand from our customers for statistical information continues to grow and change.

Following the limited on-line Census form outage in August 2016, the ABS worked very hard to ensure Australia received quality Census data through the entire collection period. ABS achieved this, delivering quality data comparable to previous Australian Censuses and censuses in New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Over the past 12 months, ABS has delivered a series of data releases from the 2016 Census. Australians now have an accurate, contemporary understanding of how Australia is changing, and the changing nature of our cities and regions. The Census provides invaluable information for our population estimates, including at small area levels, our family structures, religious adherence, estimates of Indigenous mortality, characteristics of our housing stock, homelessness and transport usage. The 2016 Census did not fail and the resultant high quality data is being used for key policy purposes.

Maintaining the trust of the community to provide the ABS with their information is fundamental to our ability to deliver information. We are working to make it easier for providers of information to engage with us.

But to maintain trust, we must assure the community their information is secure, private and confidential. My entire team at the ABS holds its legal requirements to protect the secrecy of personal and business information very firmly in our focus at all times. We continue to enhance protections around the sensitive data we hold while also ensuring effective and safe use of this national data resource. ABS expertise and processes are invaluable for Government pursuing greater but still safe use of public data.

The success of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey has helped restore community trust in the ABS. We were able to harness a whole-of-ABS effort and work with many partners to deliver an outcome on time and for \$40m less than the budgeted amount, with

participation that exceeded community expectations. Many of the learnings from the 2016 Census process were put into practice, including improved approaches to customer engagement, procurement, partnerships, cyber security, digital transformation, agile work practices and risk management.

ABS, like all government agencies, must manage within the resources provided by government.

Governments have many competing priorities and the extent to which Governments fund the national statistical agency is one of the competing choices that government must make.

To ensure that we are delivering best the best possible value to the taxpayer, the ABS has:

- a. focused on achieving efficiencies by reducing corporate overheads, including reducing property costs through activity based working;
- b. increased our use of administrative and transactional data collected by other entities in order to reduce direct costs to collect information from households and businesses; and
- c. prioritised our statistical activities and ceased some activities.

The ABS regularly reviews the relevance and effectiveness of our statistical program. Recently, we have been enhancing the measurement of the non-market sector of the economy, productivity, the labour market and the CPI, while also developing our data integration capability and assets. This has been made possible by diverting existing ABS resources and some additional funding by government.

A review of our work program in 2017 confirmed that our customers are satisfied that the ABS is allocating its resources to the highest priority statistics, including economic and population measurement.

The ABS is becoming increasingly reliant on additional user funding to produce some significant statistical information, particularly social statistics. Major surveys of time use and mental health have not been undertaken for over a decade and cannot be undertaken without additional funding.

Since ABS last appeared at Estimates in 2017, it has been a very productive period for the ABS and we thank the Committee for their interest in our work measuring and providing statistical insights into the economy, society and environment.