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ABS Submission

to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee Inquiry into the *Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Amendment Bill* 2016

- High-quality statistics are essential to support the productivity and sustainability of Australia’s dynamic agricultural industries, and are used by government, industry and farmers themselves to inform decision-making and policy.
- The *Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Amendment Bill 2016* (the Bill) has the potential to open up new opportunities for improving the quality and availability of agricultural statistical information for the benefit of both government and industry.
- The Bill designates the ABS as an eligible recipient of levy payer information (along with Rural Research and Development Corporations – RDCs) and enables the ABS to use the information to perform any of its functions under the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*. Access to the levy data will enable the ABS to address a number of key stakeholder concerns raised by industry bodies, RDCs, farmer representative organisations and government agencies during consultation for the National Agricultural Statistics Review (NASR) – that is, it will assist in:
 - Reducing respondent burden by providing an alternative data source to substitute for, or substantially supplement, data collected through farm surveys;
 - Improving data quality by providing an additional validation source for survey data; providing data for rarer commodities that are more difficult to capture in surveys; and potentially improving the timeliness of data collection; and
 - Improving coordination and governance across the statistical system by opening up opportunities for collaborative work between the ABS and the RDCs in addressing industry information needs using the data.
- The Bill also notes that enabling access to the levy data by the ABS supports the Government’s Public Sector Data agenda which ABS is strongly engaged with. It will also support the recommendation from the NASR that more should be done to institute a culture of open data in Australia’s agricultural statistical system, to reduce respondent burden, avoid duplication of effort and improve data quality and efficiency.
- In accessing and using the levy data to generate agricultural statistics, ABS will draw on its strong, established culture of protecting the data that it holds, which is further supplemented by legislative obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* to protect information from misuse and unauthorised access or disclosure.
- In conclusion, the ABS supports the proposed amendments to the legislation. As an organisation with significant expertise in working with administrative data and a long history of protecting the confidentiality and privacy of respondents’ data, ABS is well-positioned to draw the value out of this data in a safe way for both government and industry.