

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

2015 - 2016

Department/Agency: ABS

Question: AET 214 - 220

Topic: Census

Reference: written - 23 February 2016

Senator: Brown, Carol

Question:

1. Could you just briefly outline the timeline for the development of the 2016 Census? When were the serve questions tested and finalised?
 - a. Were questions on the care relationship between household occupants, I am specifically thinking in relation to grandparent or other kinship carers taking primary responsibility for raising children, considered or tested at all in the processes of preparing the 2016 Census?
2. When will work commence of the development of the questions on the 2021 Census?
3. The Government response to the Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren notes that you are currently planning a major transformation of its population and household surveys.
 - a. Which surveys are included in this work?
 - b. What is the timeframe for this work?
4. Are questions on grandparents raising grandchildren actively being considered in the development of the 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers?
 - a. What is the timeline for the development of the survey tool?

Answer:

1. The consultation and review process for the 2016 Census began with the publication in November 2012 of 'Census of Population and Housing: Consultation on Content and Procedures, 2016' (cat. no. 2007.0) which invited submissions on Census content from organisations and individuals. Information on the types of submissions received has been published in 'Census of Population and Housing: Submissions Report, 2016' (cat. no. 2007.0.55.001). The submissions and the review process showed strong support for existing Census topics, and it was decided that the 2016 Census would repeat the topics included in the 2006 and 2011 Censuses and not include any new ones, largely due to the constraints of the paper form. While it is anticipated that the 2016 Census will be predominantly digital, there will still be a dependence for many on paper forms.
While the topics are unchanged from 2011, there have been some minor changes to the questions and supporting text used to collect information on the topics. These minor changes have been implemented to make the form easier to complete and to optimise the quality of the data produced. The changes have been designed based on an evaluation of the results of the 2011 Census, the public consultation process and

the 2016 Census testing program. Testing of the questions was undertaken from 2012 to 2015 and the questions were finalised in June 2015.

ABS outlined the content of the 2016 Census and the Census questions in 'Census of Population and Housing: Nature and Content, Australia, 2016' (cat. 2008.0) and this was released on August 20, 2015.

1a. Were questions on the care relationship between household occupants, I am specifically thinking in relation to grandparent or other kinship carers taking primary responsibility for raising children, considered or tested at all in the processes of preparing the 2016 Census?

The 2016 Census will continue to collect information on relationship in household and on caring responsibilities. In the Census, families are identified and classified in terms of the relationship that exists between a single family reference person and each other member of the family within that household. Three new variables were created for the 2011 Census to allow grandparent families (where there is no parent-child relationship) to be identified more easily, and this information will also be available from the 2016 Census. These variables enable grandparent families to be identified where there is a grandparent-grandchild relationship in a family and no parent-child relationship.

In addition, in the lead-up to the 2011 and 2016 Censuses, testing was undertaken in 2007, 2008 and 2012 of a relationship matrix-style question, which would allow the identification of family relationships between all household members. This style of question was found to be very complex for respondents, especially when using a paper form. Changes to this question have consequently been deferred for further consideration in the Census as it moves to being wholly digital in the future. A wholly online Census will have a better capacity to guide people through complex questions more easily. Given the complexity of this topic, considerable testing will be required to ensure that respondents can understand and answer such questions easily, given that an interviewer is not available in the Census.

2. The ABS is continually researching the changing needs for social and people statistics, and considering the best statistical collection or method to meet these needs. The ABS is currently undertaking a broad transformation of its people and social statistics, which may change our approach to future Census content. Under traditional timeframes Census topic submissions would be invited in 2017/18, however this is yet to be confirmed.

3.a. All ABS surveys are in scope for transformation. The plan to consolidate and integrate the existing suite of household surveys into one flexible, cost effective vehicle will enable the ABS to create more frequent and comprehensive statistics for our users.

3.b. The timing of the transition to the new program is still being determined; however we expect to roll out a fully integrated household survey program from 2019-20. More

information on this program will be released in the form of a discussion paper in the first half of 2016.

4. The 2018 SDAC is to be fully user funded and priority content for this next survey will be developed in consultation with our stakeholders and funding partners. The ABS will note the demand for information on grandparents raising children in the context of these consultations.

4.a. Development work for the 2018 SDAC is expected to commence in the final quarter of 2016. This will be conducted over several months and involve extensive stakeholder consultation and testing of the survey tool.