

8 Sept 2016

Submission to Senate Enquiry into the Australian Census 2016

From:

1. Until 2016, I have participated willingly in the Census. I am a conscientious objector this year, on the basis that it is an invasion of privacy. I am grateful to, and admire, the Australian Senators who have taken a public stand as conscientious objectors this year. I am also grateful for this Senate Enquiry, which will clarify the purpose of the Census and the constraints on its operation.
2. I understand that the primary purpose of the Census is to collect data for use in government planning. Up to now this data has been population statistics. (I was not aware, until recently, that some names and addresses had started to be kept in the last Census, without individual permission.)
3. This is a submission from an ordinary Australian citizen. I am not an expert in this field. I am Mathematics teacher and I use census data for a secondary purpose - to teach students about the meaning and value of statistics.
4. My first objection to the 2016 Census is the mandatory retention of name and address information. My second objection is that the decision to keep this information was decided by bureaucrats, despite the special legal status of the Census, and without proper public or parliamentary consultation.
5. The Census is not an agency to collect information on individuals for the purpose of government data collation, integrity, tracking and surveillance OF INDIVIDUALS. Australians have long supplied their data voluntarily to the Census knowing it was anonymous - that name and address information was used just to check that the forms were collected properly, and would not be retained.
6. There is a claim that social media, such as Facebook, collects and sells individuals' data, so Australians shouldn't (or won't) care if the government does so. This claim is wrong. I am not legally required to use Facebook, nor am I legally required to tell the truth on Facebook. I am legally required to complete the Census and I am legally required to tell the truth in the Census.
7. There is a claim that the information collected on the Census is known by the government in one way or another anyway, so why would we object unless we have something to hide. This claim is wrong. I have nothing to hide, but I do not know in what ways the information that could be used (or misused) in the future, or what other questions may be asked in the future. The retention of name and address information is an invasion of privacy.
8. My family attempted to complete the Census this year, using the paper form, but we have not submitted it due to problems with name and address retention. Some

members of the family wished to complete the Census as it stood, while some objected. The form did not allow this range of viewpoints to be represented. In particular, I could not be a conscientious objector without making a liar of the person completing the form, as the person completing the form is expected to state how many people are in the household, what their names are etc.

9. I considered a trip to New Zealand for the night of the 2016 census – but I have work commitments that did not allow for a holiday at that time. I was also tempted to go walkabout for the night of the census, (for example, sleep in my car in some unspecified place) but I am a mother and my children needed me at home that night: one of my children was sick. I understand that the only way to legally avoid the Census is to be out of the country for the night, but I object to this financial and social imposte on individuals, and I object to the long-term skewing of the Census data in this way.
10. The digital collection of Census data is a secondary and minor issue. For example, the problem with the network outages on the night of the Census (and for some days after) is secondary. While I would prefer the ABS to be technically competent, and less open to hacking, my primary objection is that the ABS intends to make use of personal data across government agencies. This problem is an invasion of privacy issue and is independent of whether the Census is electronic or paper-based.
11. The use of linkage keys and multiple files in order to make data look anonymous while it is NOT actually anonymous, is inadequate. If the data is not anonymous, it can be misused and hacked.
12. Conscientious objectors to the 2016 Census should not be fined. This Enquiry is taking place during the time in which the Census is expected to be completed.
13. I sincerely wish the Census to resume its status as a trusted and important tool of government planning, in the form of (anonymous) population statistics.

My thanks to the Senate for this Enquiry.

Sincerely,