

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

1.1 On 31 August 2016, the Senate referred the 2016 Census to the Senate Economics References Committee for inquiry and report by 24 November 2016. The terms of reference include the following matters:

The 2016 Census, with particular reference to:

- a) the preparation, administration and management on the part of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Government in the lead up to the 2016 Census;
- b) the scope, collection, retention, security and use of data obtained in the 2016 Census;
- c) arrangements, including contractual arrangements, in respect of the information technology aspects of the Census;
- d) the shutting down of the Census website on the evening of 9 August 2016, the factors leading to that shutdown and the reasons given, and the support provided by government agencies, including the Australian Signals Directorate;
- e) the response rate to the Census and factors that may have affected the response rate;
- f) privacy concerns in respect of the 2016 Census, including the use of data linking, information security and statistical linkage keys;
- g) Australia's Census of Population and Housing generally, including purpose, scope, regularity and cost and benefits;
- h) the adequacy of funding and resources to the ABS;
- i) ministerial oversight and responsibility; and
- j) any related matters.

### Background to the inquiry

1.1 The 2016 Census of Housing and Population (census) was held in August 2016. There were two major changes for the 2016 census: the move to an eCensus with the majority of census forms to be completed electronically; and the retention of name and address information for a period of up to four years to enable more extensive uses of census data.

### Structure of report

1.2 This report comprises seven chapters:

- Chapter 2 provides a short history of the census in Australia, and why the census is an important public service;
- Chapter 3 discusses the preparations for the 2016 census, including the arrangements to deliver the eCensus;

- Chapter 4 considers the decision to retain names and addresses collected for the census for a period of up to four years;
- Chapter 5 outlines the proposed usage and protection of information collected as part of the 2016 census;
- Chapter 6 discusses the events of the evening of 9 August 2016 and other operational matters; and
- Chapter 7 considers the outcome of the 2016 census, including matters such as fines for non-compliance, as well as the adequacy of financial resourcing provided to the ABS.

### **Conduct of the inquiry**

1.3 The committee advertised the inquiry on its website and wrote to stakeholders and other interested parties inviting submissions.

1.4 The committee received 90 submissions as well as additional information and answers to a series of written questions on notice. They are listed at Appendix 1. The committee held one public hearing Canberra. A list of witnesses who appeared is at Appendix 2.

1.5 At the committee's public hearing on 25 October 2016, the Chair of the committee stated that the Australian Privacy Commissioner (Commissioner) had been invited to appear as a witness. The Commissioner was not invited to appear as a witness at the hearing.

1.6 The committee thanks all of the individuals and organisations that contributed to this inquiry. The committee would like to thank the ABS for their cooperation in this inquiry. The ABS was helpful and forthcoming with information requested by the committee. The committee notes that many submissions were prepared based on a limited knowledge of the actual events that preceded and took place on 9 August 2016 due to the timing of the inquiry.