



**THE SENATE
SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
Public Hearing –7 December 2018
Questions Taken on Notice
Australian Bureau of Statistics**

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Senator MOORE: ...Perhaps for the flow, I should get the Bureau of Statistics questions and get them on record. I'm interested because the Bureau of Statistics provided really strong evidence at the first hearing. The two key bits out of that were what you were doing in Australia and how you were trying to help our neighbours to develop capacity around their ability to have data, which is one of the core aspects of the SDG agenda—to have transparent, accurate data on which people can base planning and see how they're going. Is there anything you could add today in terms of what the Bureau of Statistics is doing, particularly in our neighbourhood?

Mrs Walter: Probably building on what we said earlier—I didn't actually bring any information from our international relations section—

Senator MOORE: That's okay. If you want to follow up on that outside, that's fine.

Mrs Walter: We can do that. As you know, we do assist a number of different countries in our region, and that is specifically to assist them with their data-building statistical capability and understanding that that is extremely important for reporting generally and to make sure that they are consistently reporting against some of the indicators for SDGs in particular. I'm happy to take it on notice and get some more information—

Senator MOORE: Up to date.

Mrs Walter: More up-to-date information.

Senator MOORE: The website doesn't give a lot of detail. We now have the website we can go to. Particularly around goals 16 and 17 in partnerships and monitoring—how that works and building capacity—and also working within the Australian frame to get the data together. It's practical stuff.

Mrs Walter: Some details about the actual programs we're running in those countries?

Senator MOORE: That'd be good, thank you.

Answer:

**SUMMARY of ABS DFAT-FUNDED WORK AND ABS INDO-PACIFIC STATISTICAL
CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Summary of Indo-Pacific Regional Statistical Development Programs

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to support regional statistical capability development and institutional strengthening in the

Indo-Pacific region under Australia's aid program. The ABS currently supports five long-term partnership programs to provide technical assistance and statistical leadership support to National Statistics Offices (NSOs) in Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Pacific region. Through these partnership programs, the ABS supports statistical development across economic, social, environmental and governance statistics. This is in recognition that relevant, quality and timely statistics support a strong evidence base for national decision-making and policy, as well as international and regional reporting obligations such as the SDGs. All programs operate on a fly-in fly-out basis with officers sharing their knowledge and expertise, with an objective of sustainably building statistical capabilities. An overview of each of the five programs is provided below.

Indonesia: The ABS has a long standing relationship with Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS)) dating back to 1995. From 2013-18 the ABS supported a formal bilateral assistance program through DFAT's Government Partnership Fund. A new three year program took effect from July 2018 under the DFAT funded Australia Indonesia Economic Cooperation (Prospera) Program. The statistical capability building partnership focuses on: institutional and statistical development transformation; integrated economic statistics (including System of Economic and Environment Accounts) and integrated population statistics (includes the Indonesian 2020 Population Census).

Timor Leste: Since 2013, the ABS has delivered a bilateral assistance program with General Directorate of Statistics (GDS) in Timor-Leste funded through DFAT's Governance for Development Program. The Australian Embassy in Timor-Leste renewed a three year program from 2018. Key areas of statistics support include macro-economic statistics (business activity survey, consumer and producer prices and national accounts), as well as leadership and governance.

Papua New Guinea: With funding from the Australian High Commission in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the ABS supports a bilateral assistance to support progression of the reform agenda of the PNG NSO. Technical assistance is provided to assist with improving macro-economic statistics production, particularly the compilation of National Accounts. Specific attention has been paid to the production of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures and improving the methodology, collection and compilation processes for PNG Consumer Price Index (CPI). Two ABS officers were out-posted to the NSO for 12 months over 2015-16, with the program moving to a fly-in fly-out model from 2016-17.

Fiji: The ABS has a long standing relationship with the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and has supported a bilateral assistance program since 2014, funded by DFAT's Government Partnership for Development Program. The current three year program (2017-2020) is funded by the Australian High Commission in Fiji and aims to support strengthening official statistics produced by Fiji. Along with other development partners the ABS has supported the Fiji 2017 Census of Population and Housing, statistical methodology, IT, macroeconomic statistics and staff capability development.

Pacific: In the Pacific, the ABS delivers a regional assistance program supporting DFAT's 'Pacific step up' and strengthened governance and economic diplomacy agenda, as well as the objectives of the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPSS). The program is funded by DFAT's Pacific Division and the current program is for 2018–2020. Key areas of statistics support include macro-economic statistics with the Solomon Islands; Civil Registration and Vitals Statistics assistance bilaterally and regionally; hosting an annual Pacific Statisticians Leadership Forum; collaboration with regional development partners; participation in the Pacific Statistics Standing Committee (PSCC) and Heads of Planning and Statistics (HOPS).

ABS International Engagement

Beyond the DFAT-funded regional statistical development programs, the ABS' international engagement is prioritised annually to ensure the ABS has a 'seat at the table' at key international

forums which decide on statistical standards, to contribute to the development and keep abreast of, the latest statistical methodologies, techniques and measurement developments in other leading NSOs. Among others, the ABS is an active contributor to the United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission, the UN Conference of European Statisticians, and the UN High Level Group on Modernisation of Official Statistics. The Australian Statistician is also currently Vice Chair of the Bureau of the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy.



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Senator MOORE: I know ACER's work, but, in terms of the development of that in particular—and this is a good example—they're doing work about an international assessment tool, so they bring the work that you do internationally around that, because it's an area that Australia has worked in as part of their ODA. Does that also bring in their domestic work? That comes back to the department of education's primary responsibility for that goal in Australia. With the work that you're doing with ACER about the tool, is Education, as a department, as the primary department responsible, involved in those discussions as well?

Dr Rogers: I wouldn't be able to tell you with any certainty.

Senator MOORE: Could you take that on notice?

Dr Rogers: Yes, I can take that on notice. The discussions actually happen through global mechanisms, and ACER are on some of those as technical advice. Where it comes into it for us in the aid program is in relation to the Pacific, where they, of course, have their own standardised testing, and they've chosen not to go with PISA and the other international testing regimes. It's very relevant there because we're looking at how you can actually track education progress in the Pacific, and ACER has been doing that work about benchmarking against those international criteria. It's extremely challenging and technically complicated work but very important for the Pacific.

Senator MOORE: Absolutely. I get that clearly from the international perspective, but I'm not sure about something. We are supposed to be looking at education in Australia with just as much scrutiny to see what's happening in our domestic process, and early childhood education, development of process, benchmarking and those things are also areas of great debate within Australian policy. What I'm trying to get clear in my mind is this: if this organisation, which is very well regarded, is working so strongly for our Pacific engagement, is the Australian department of education as involved in trying to ensure that we know exactly what's happening in early childhood education? I know they're doing it, but is it actually feeding back into the SDG process? That's, again, where you have to link in to state governments, and it is those consistent policy linkages, which lead to an awareness of what exactly is going on, that I'm trying to get to the bottom of. I just don't get any certainty that all those things are tied up—that departments, particularly in Australia, when they're looking at policy issues, such as early childhood education, are engaging with the SDG agenda in the work they're doing—and that that's discussed when you come back to the IDC and you're going around the table. We've had so much debate around higher education in Australia; has the Department of Education actually thought, when they come to the IDC on the SDGs, that this is a topic that they need to report on and that does have relevance for the SDG agenda? I know there are no minutes from the IDCs and, because of the way we operate, everything is segmented. That's part of the ongoing questioning in the employment

and education Senate process, not in the PM&C process or—the jargon is killing me!—in the DFAT process. As a nation, how do we get awareness of what each of these responsible departments is doing, because it doesn't appear on their websites?

Dr Rogers: Just so I'm clear, you're asking us to check—

Senator MOORE: I'm trying to find out the process for ensuring that an issue such as you've just defined, early education, is one that the federal and state education departments are feeding back on as part of their responsibility under the SDG framework.

...

Dr Rogers: What I can check in relation to that is the engagement of the department of education in the international body that is talking about these standards, and I can find out, I hope, whether or not the fact that there is, I think, some movement on the indicator has been communicated back. I guess, if they're engaged in the international technical working group on it, they'll know that the indicator has been developed.

Senator MOORE: That would be good. Is there an indicator, statistically, through the education SDG?

Mrs Walter: I'd have to check.

Senator MOORE: On notice is fine. That's the other thing going full cycle, pulling it all together—the statistical data. We know it's an ongoing battle in Australia to get the states all signed up to the same sort of statistical basis for information. Education is a good one. The other one is health, with all the work that is done in our health departments.

Answer:

For Education the relevant SDG indicators are under Goal 4 - Quality Education, these relate to Target 4.2. There are 2 indicators – 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. Indicator 4.2.1 is currently categorised as a Tier III meaning it does not yet have an established methodology. Development of the methodology for this is being led by UNICEF. Indicator 4.2.2 has been reported by Australia and is included on the SDG data platform.

Target 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

- Indicator 4.2.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/tierIII-indicators/files/Tier3-04-02-01.pdf>

This indicator is a Tier III – Therefore, the indicator is not reported, as there is not yet any established methodology.

- Indicator 4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex

<https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/goals/quality-education/4.2.2>

Tier I - reported on line. This is available at the web address above.



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Additional Written Question on Notice, Senator Gallacher (Chair)

Will the Australian Government's Reporting Platform on the Sustainable Development Goals Indicators include data on states and territories and local government areas?

Answer:

Where appropriate and available the platform currently includes data at the state and territory level. For example, indicator 4.2.2. Local government area data can be supported by the platform if the Agency loading the data has obtained data and deems it appropriate.