



Mr John Hawkins
The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Economics
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

ABN: 26 331 428 522

Locked Mail Bag 10

ABS House
45 Benjamin Way
Belconnen ACT 2617

Locked Bag 10
Belconnen ACT 2616

Telephone: (02) 6252 5000
Facsimile: (02) 6251 6009

Dear Mr Hawkins

Inquiry into Foreign Acquisitions Amendment (Agricultural land) Bill 2010

Thank you for inviting the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to make a submission to this inquiry. In response to that request, the ABS makes the following comments with respect to Amendment 3.

Background

The ABS is undertaking a new survey, the Agricultural Land and Water Ownership Survey (ALWOS) which will be collected under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, to address the current lack of information available on foreign ownership of agricultural businesses, including land and water entitlements.

This new survey has been designed to deliver the output requirements and priorities identified through consultation with key stakeholders including the Department of Treasury, the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF).

This collection will provide data on the following areas of interest:

- a. foreign ownership of agricultural businesses in Australia;
- b. foreign ownership of Australian agricultural land; and
- c. foreign ownership of water entitlements (used for agricultural purposes) in Australia.

The new survey will be despatched at the end of March 2011 with results expected to be available by the end of September 2011.

Proposed Amendment 3 - *Require online publication of information about foreign acquisitions of interest in agricultural land*

The maintenance of an online register that provides information on individual ownership of agricultural land is not consistent with the ABS's role as Australia's

national statistical organisation. Firstly, the collection of information for regulatory or compliance purposes sits outside the ABS's legislated functions. Secondly, consistent with its legislation, the ABS produces aggregate statistical information and does not publish unit record information in a manner that is likely to enable the identification of a person, business or organisation, including other government agencies.

The Agricultural Land and Water Ownership Survey (ALWOS) will provide some information on the level of foreign ownership of agricultural businesses, land and water to inform government policy in this area. The ABS does not have resources to undertake this work on an ongoing annual basis and there are no plans to continue the collection after outputs are released later this year.

Further information

If you would like clarification or to discuss this submission further, please contact Adrian Bugg on (02) 6252 5387 or <adrian.bugg@abs.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

Peter Harper
Deputy Australian Statistician
Population, Labour, Industry, and Environment Statistics Group

24 February 2011