

Senate Economics Legislation Committee, 25 February 2015

Australian Statistician, Mr David W. Kalisch opening statement

It is an honour and a privilege to be appearing before you today as the new Australian Statistician, together with my new colleagues at the ABS. The ABS has a very proud history of delivering robust reliable information that the community needs.

The ABS operates in a very dynamic information environment, where there are growing expectations around what we could deliver, the cost of traditional survey collection methods has been increasing over time, and new information opportunities are emerging – both in terms of new data sources and expanded ways to use data that provide new insights.

I come to the ABS largely from the perspective of a user of information rather than a producer of statistics. Over the past 30 years, I have seen a transformation in the information environment, with the phrase being regularly used that we live in an information age. The ABS is part of this information age, but it will have to adapt to ensure that it remains at the forefront of delivering its mission:

- There is a desire for more timely and more accurate information, that desirably costs less and is less intrusive and less costly on households and businesses to supply the information;
- Information collected by governments and businesses in the course of their operations are increasingly seen as information resources;
- Previous ways of collecting information are being progressively replaced by new, more efficient and more accurate means, just as we have seen transformation of the information-rich retail and financial services sectors;
- Wicked policy problems generally require more complex data and analysis that deal with the complexity of people's lives and the array of services they receive; and
- The ABS is part of an interconnected information sector, and partnerships with other information producers and users will be more important for us in the future.

I have observed that the ABS statistical infrastructure is aged and fragile, which increases the risks of the ABS making errors and having less efficient processes. The current business model is primarily run by bespoke cottage-industry approaches to our different statistical collections, where best practice would be a consistent enterprise wide approach to data capture, production, use and dissemination.

Despite these systems constraints, the ABS has a professional and expert workforce who are committed to delivering the key information that Australia needs. The ABS has also been the subject of a recent capability review that called for transformation of the way the ABS works, and I am already progressing reforms to our leadership, strategy and delivery.

Over coming years, we need to do three aspects very well:

- make sound choices about the information we can produce within the funding that is available to us, drawing upon our extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders;
- enable more effective use of our information, mindful of our legislative constraints; and
- transform the way in which the organisation works, so we can manage quality risks, enable us to respond to new information requirements in a timely manner and achieve efficiencies.

Thank you,

David W. Kalisch

Senate Economics Legislation Committee
Additional Estimates 2014-15, 25 & 26 Feb 2015

Tabled Document (6)
By: Mr David W. Kalisch, Aust. Statistician,
Date: 26/2/15 ABS