

Introduction

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) welcomes the Discussion Paper *Modernising Business Registers Program* and also the opportunity to comment. The ABS supports efforts to integrate business registry functions to more effectively provide government services to business and the community and to better support government operations. The ABS is Australia's national statistics agency and as such, this submission focusses on the role of administrative business registers as data sources that increase the value of statistical information to be used as an evidence base for government policy decisions and research.

Proposals for Law Change

Question 1 - What flexibility would you like to see introduced into the relevant legislation?

ABS supports the proposals for law change. A registrar with the flexibility to decide what information to collect, record and disclose will provide more opportunity to respond to emerging requirements. The ability to update registers in a more timely and accurate manner would also be beneficial to ABS in reflecting economic changes in statistical outputs.

The ABS would like greater flexibility to link data items that might be available from different registers hosted on the platform. The full potential of the available data will be realised when different registers are linked and integrated on a single platform. This will enable a greater understanding of business demography and composition, provide greater context and enhance the usefulness of the information through a more complete dataset. Data collected by ABR and ASIC at the ABN level, for instance, should be visible through a single interface on the platform (noting appropriate accesses will need to apply). As other registries on-board these should also be available in a similar way.

If this change is implemented and a registrar decides to collect new information, ABS would encourage strategies to ensure the stock can also be populated within a reasonable period, in addition to collecting information about the new registrants.

It should be clarified that the registers in scope of the law change are administrative business registers. The ABS Business Register is a statistical business register that operates under the *Census and Statistics Act, 1905*, so would not be in scope of the proposed legislation change.

Enhanced Registry Services

Questions 2 - What modern services should be provided for Australia's business registers?

The ABS would support fewer business registers where non-sensitive content of common interest is shared across government agencies and actively maintained (eg. via maintenance strategies) so that the information has currency.

Data access and analysis underpins many ABS processes and outputs. The ABS supports capability for analysts to access and/or extract data of interest (subject to access) based on user specifications and search criteria. Further, the ABS would like registry data that identifies relationships between businesses

and a historical dimension for time-series analysis to better understand the nature of business demography changes over time.

New registrations or updates to business information could be facilitated through a single portal, with updates flowing across all registries in real time.

Search capability for any data field to interrogate information held across any registry would also be very useful.

The ABS would like to see appropriate support services for users such as knowledge documents, training material and a helpdesk.

Question 3 - What services should be provided to allow direct connection from business systems to the registers?

The ABS supports direct connection to a single register considered to be a source of truth. This will address current issues with data inconsistencies, duplication, harmonisation and scope. Where multiple systems exist, the ABS encourages a design that facilitates system synchronisation of business interactions with government in real-time.

The ABS is currently implementing a range of contemporary platforms for data exchange that allows the ABS to extract, transform and load data to a centralised store. The systems and tools being implemented give flexibility to make direct connection to the whole of government register platform possible. Specifically, the ABS is also developing a contemporary portal where partner agencies can securely submit their data using defined standards and formats under flexible, user centred design principles. The whole-of-government approach to modernising business registers aligns with this objective. The ABS therefore supports seamless data provision from registers through connected systems and automated processes leveraging current and emerging technologies. This will bring improved user experience, increased data quality and reduced risks.

The capability to connect business systems to access and search register data will bring efficiencies to ABS processes including data investigations, quality assurance and data validation.

Compliant business software and any tax agents could have authenticated connectivity to update information on the registers. Normal business operations such as lodgement of BAS could also automatically connect to update registry information.

Question 4 - What interactions with the Registers should be considered to improve the quality of the registry data?

The ABS supports greater interaction between businesses and administrative registers. A user-centred data model allowing businesses to have a consolidated view of their data in one place that also encourages them to manage and update their data in a timely manner would improve data quality and currency. Fewer business registers with a single entry point for businesses would also mean greater data consistency and less duplication. Interaction with registers resulting in modification to the information held, could trigger a validation request to the business representatives to ensure the quality of the data captured. Consistency in design and use through the harmonisation of concepts and data definitions across registers will provide a platform for greater data quality. This can be facilitated with the use of centralised coding tools that are based on agreed standards. The implementation of the coding tools

should enable analysis of user patterns to support future improvements (eg. retaining all entries for business activity during the registration process).

There is significant demand for regional economic data by policy analysts. The ABS encourages the collection, storage and maintenance of business location data including where business activity takes place (as compared with only collecting and maintaining head office locations). A facility for businesses to interact with registers to ensure this information is easily provided and maintained would address this demand. It would enhance the range of data available from the ABS to address Government policy needs, potentially reducing the need for additional surveys and the associated provider load on businesses. It also has the potential to improve the state accounts (a measure of the size of the state economy).

Similarly, the ABS would benefit from having access to standardised contact information on the registers. A facility on the registers for businesses to provide and update these details is encouraged. Having the tools to collect, validate, and code address information at the point of entry would be a leap ahead in statistical geography for businesses. Validation of this information could easily be facilitated using an address API.

Register support services for business system owners to query data, provide feedback and report data issues will provide a platform for greater collaboration to improve data quality.

5. What interactions should be considered to ensure the registry data remains up to date?

To ensure registry data remains up to date it would be beneficial to have a cross registry checking capability. Where applicable, there should be real time updates to other registries or a notification facility so other entities can confirm and validate the data they hold.

6. How do you consider registration, annual review and renewal processes could be improved?

7. How do you consider search functions within the Registers could be improved?

It would be beneficial for a single search function capability enabling searches across all federated registries to easily discover and access any information contained in all registries. Search functionality across different fields that link information together would also be useful, eg. search via ANZSIC, or geographical location, or business types, director identification number etc. Search functionality needs to be underpinned via appropriate metadata and data dictionaries

Funding Registry Infrastructure

The current cost recovery arrangements are not sustainable and limit opportunities for effective re-use of registry information across government. In some instances this results in additional burden placed on business to provide data to multiple agencies. ABS support the free access to registers data for regular or agreed outputs or bulk data access arrangements for Commonwealth Government agencies. This would result in more effective and efficient data sharing arrangements (where approved) to support whole of government objectives, including using data to support policy development.