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James Smith
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FOI ref: 201617/10

Dear Mr Smith

RE: YOUR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

I refer to your email of 8 August 2016 in which you sought access to the following information under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act):

The Australian Statistician has said "we know that if people supply their name they're more likely to provide accurate information in the other parts of the census."

I request the research which supports this statement.

Response to your request

I am an authorised decision maker under section 23 of the FOI Act.

The ABS has conducted an exhaustive search for documents relating to your request. I am now able to notify you that 8 documents exist pertaining to your request. The documents being released to you are in Attachment 2.

Please see Attachment 3 for links to other relevant material that is already in the public domain.

Statement of reasons

The ABS has prepared a copy of the documents. All 8 of the documents have been modified by deletions and redactions for content that is reasonably regarded as irrelevant to your request. Content deemed to be irrelevant includes research on matters other than names influencing the accuracy of information reported for statistical purposes.

Charging or Waiving of Processing Fees

There is no charge for this request.

Internal Review of the Decision

Section 54 of the FOI Act gives you the right to apply for an internal review of the decision by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Additionally you may request a review of this decision by the Information Commissioner. Details of both procedures involved in an application to review a decision are set out at Attachment 1.

If you have any queries on this matter please contact the ABS FOI Contact Officer at freedomofinformation@abs.gov.au or on (02) 6252 7203.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Williams', is positioned above the printed name.

Christine Williams
Program Manager
Governance and Parliamentary Liaison Branch
Australian Bureau of Statistics

10 October 2016

INFORMATION ON RIGHTS OF REVIEW

1. APPLICATION FOR INTERNAL REVIEW OF DECISION

If you disagree with our decision you have the right to apply for an internal review under section 54 of the FOI Act.

Application for a review of the decision must be made within 30 days of receipt of this letter.

No particular form is required but it would assist the decision-maker were you to set out in the application the grounds on which you consider that the decision should be reviewed.

Application for a review of the decision should be addressed to:

ABS FOI Contact Officer
Policy, Legislation and Assurance Section
Australian Bureau of Statistics
Locked Bag 10
BELCONNEN ACT 2617

OR

2. APPLICATION TO AUSTRALIAN INFORMATION COMMISSIONER (INFORMATION COMMISSIONER) FOR REVIEW OF DECISION

Section 54L of the Act gives you the right to seek a review of the decision from the Information Commissioner. An application for review must be made within 60 days of receiving the decision.

Applications for review must be in writing and must:

- give details of how notices must be sent to you; and
- include a copy of the notice of decision.

You should send your application for review to:

The Information Commissioner
Office of the Information Commissioner
GPO Box 5218
SYDNEY NSW 2001

AND/OR

3. COMPLAINTS TO THE INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

Section 70 of the Act provides that a person may complain to the Information Commissioner about action taken by an agency in the exercise of powers or the performance of functions under the Act.

A complaint to the Information Commissioner must be in writing and identify the agency the complaint is about. It should be directed to the following address:

The Information Commissioner
Office of the Information Commissioner
GPO Box 5218
SYDNEY NSW 2001

The Information Commissioner may decline to investigate the complaint in a number of circumstances, including that you did not exercise your right to ask the agency, the Information Commissioner, a court or tribunal to review the decision.

Please find below relevant extracts taken from 8 internal documents.

‘eCensus Usability Testing – Round 2 – May 2014’

Author: 2016 Census Data and Data Infrastructure)

Subject of questions

In some interviews, the addition of the new setup questions appeared to cause some confusion around who to list as "Person 1" when questions began. This did not seem to be due to the concepts of "persons present" and "persons away", as respondents appeared to understand what these mean when asked to explain their interpretation, as discussed above. Rather, the issue seemed to be caused by the flow of the instrument, the switching between the concepts of persons present and away, and the reliance on respondents to determine who each question loop is referring to.

The issue of respondents not knowing who the questions are about also appeared in other sections of the interview. Many respondents became confused at some point in the interview about who "the person" referred to in the question actually was. In some cases, this confusion led to minor usability issues that were easily resolved (e.g. as one respondent explained. "It's fine, I think it's just when it says 'the person', I have to think "oh, that's me"). However in other cases, it was evident that the lack of clarity in the questions could result in a significant reduction in data quality. For example, some respondents began answering questions for the wrong person at some point in the form, and took a substantial amount of time to identify this error. Other respondents doubted whether they were answering the form correctly when they reached the question asking for their own name, thinking they had already provided it earlier in the form.

To avoid these data quality issues, and to make the form easier for respondents to complete, it is recommended that the relevant person's name is inserted into the questions, rather than referring to the subject only as "the person". This will require establishing the names of all persons present and away at the beginning of the form.

Recommendations:

- 28. Establish names of people present and people away at the beginning of the form.
- 29. Insert the relevant person's names into all questions

Respondent Engagement in Multi-Modal Household Surveys – June 2014

Author: Statistical Services Branch

Personalisation of contacts has been shown to be an effective method of increasing response rates in mail and online surveys (Cook et al., 2000; Edwards et al., 2010).

Personalising by using the contact name provided by the respondent. The respondent is more likely to respond if their personal contribution is being directly sought than if the contact appears to be generic and mass-mailed (Dillman, et al., 2009).

‘Respondent Burden’ – Version current as at 15/10/2012

Author: ABS Methodology

a. Question Order

34. One strategy to minimise respondents' perceived burden is through the order in which questions are presented on a self administered questionnaire. Starting a form with an easy and broadly relevant question will give respondents a sense of self-efficacy (the belief that they can answer the questionnaire) and a feeling of topic salience.

35. The importance of placing the most salient questions first is reiterated through a study conducted by Mullner, Levy, Byre & Matthews (1982). These researchers conducted an experiment which employed two different questionnaire structures: the first version placed questions of greatest saliency at the beginning of the survey, whereas the second version had these questions at the end. The form with the salient questions first obtained a significantly higher response rate than the other form, 71.72% vs 67.46%.

‘Response Enhancing Techniques’ - Version current as at 06/08/2012

Author: ABS Methodology

De Leeuw and Hox (1988) investigated the use of personalisation on the cover letter and tested whether or not personalisation had any positive effect on the response rate. They also found that the use of certified mail may have a positive effect. They found that personalisation combined with the certified mailing of the final reminder resulted in a statistically significant increase in response rate. Both of these experimental treatments were based on the Total Design Method developed by Dillman.

Similarly, on the issue of personalisation, Linsky's (1975) meta analysis found that out of sixteen studies dealing with personalisation, three reported higher response rates for the non-personalised letters, nine reported higher rates for the personalised letters, and three reported more or less the same responses for both letters. While this may suggest that personalisation leads to a higher response rate, the types of surveys used for analysis would need to be looked at carefully. This is due to the fact that while personalisation may lead the respondent to believe that more effort has gone into the survey implementation, they may also feel threatened by the fact that their anonymity is challenged (De Leeuw and Hox, 1988) which would have negative implications for surveys which are sensitive in nature.

Bibliography: The four extracts above reference the following:

Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thompson, R. L. (2000). A Meta-Analysis of Response Rates in Web- or Internet-Based Surveys. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60(6), 821–836.
doi:10.1177/00131640021970934.

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, Mail and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (3rd ed.). New York: Wiley.

Edwards, P. J., Roberts, I., Clarke, M. J., DiGuseppi, C., Wentz, R. & Kwan, I., et al. (2010). *Methods to increase response to postal and electronic questionnaires*. (P. J. Edwards, Ed.)
onlinelibrary.wiley.com. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

De Leeuw, E.D. and Hox, J.J. (1988) The Effects of Response-Stimulating Factors on Response Rates and Data Quality in Mail Surveys; A Test of Dillman's Total Design Method, *Journal of Official Statistics*, Vol. 4, 241-249.

Linsky, A.S. (1975) Stimulating Responses to Mailed Questionnaires: A Review, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82-101.

Mullner, R.M., Levy, P.S., Byre, C.S. & Matthews, D. (1982). Effects of characteristics of the survey instrument on response rates to a mail survey of community hospitals. *Public Health Reports*, 97, 465-469.

P R I V A C Y

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LAW REFORM COMMISSION FOR DATA QUALITY

The stance behind the privacy issue is that persons object to the personal information they supply on their census schedules being available to collectors. Hence, by providing envelopes in which respondents' schedules can be secured, it stands to reason that the quality of the information obtained could be improved. Quality can be measured by two criteria - improved response, and greater accuracy.

Of the tests run to test the use of envelopes, however, this improved data quality has not been evidenced. The Sydney pre-test was the only one in which a control group was used, and hence measures of data quality can be compared. This pre-test used three sub-samples:

- A₀ - standard collection - full name required and collector checking.
- A₁ - full name required, but respondents provided with envelopes.
- A₂ - no name required, and respondents provided with envelopes.

The response rates for each question by each of these anonymity variables are displayed in Appendix A. These results indicate that as far as item response is concerned, the standard collection procedure (A₀) where the envelope is not provided is clearly better. Conclusions which can be drawn from these results are:-

- i The standard collection system (A₀) generally yields a higher response rate for questions than the other two collection systems. Collector checking would no doubt explain this. Of the analysis carried out, A₀ came up best in 17 of the cases (testing at the 95% level). Undoubtedly, better response rates are consistently obtained by collector checking.
- ii On the basis of question response rates, there is little to choose between named and anonymous collection procedures, if they are sealed in an envelope (.898 versus .896 total question response). Compared to the .925 total response for the standard collection procedure, it would seem that the envelope is the factor responsible for the drop in total response.
- iii It has been intuitively claimed that privacy becomes an issue when questions are more intrusive. Of all the census questions, income is regarded as being the most intrusive, however, the provision of an envelope did not increase response to this question - the highest response (.91) for this question came from the standard collection procedure (A₀). The difference in response for the income question between A₀, A₁ and A₂ is not sufficient to be significant, however it indicates that collector checking produces no worse response for this question.
- iv The overall result on question response of collector checking was to raise the average response level from 90% to 93%. It is interesting to note that where response is generally high, collector checking has little effect - it is only on those questions where response tends to be low that collector checking significantly increases the response rates.

The post-enumeration survey attempted to measure data accuracy by comparing census answers with answers obtained in an interview situation. The results of the PES showed that there was no significant difference in data accuracy between the three systems tested, and this was so even for the intrusive income question. Using the Gross Difference Rate as a measure of answer accuracy, the report on the Sydney pre-test claims:

"The anonymity of the collection system seems to have done little to improve (or indeed affect) the accuracy of census answers The fact that the Gross Difference Rates for income were not affected by collection systems is quite significant. Obviously people do not feel more inclined to give more truthful answers to contentious questions under the protection of an anonymous system."

CONCLUSION

The adoption of a mandatory envelope procedure is not advisable. Evidence has shown that where everyone is supplied with an envelope, excessive numbers of schedules are returned blank, group leader workloads become too burdensome, and response rates tend to decline. An optional envelope system, however, may be feasible, although the real results of such a system can not be tested because of the unknown factor - adverse media publicity. In the neutral atmosphere of the pretests, the optional envelope system has emerged as a possibility. However, bad media publicity, as experienced in some areas in the 1976 Census, can render the optional envelope system a defacto mandatory envelope system, with drastic results in terms of response. It is felt, therefore, that an optional envelope system can only be adopted in a Census situation, if it is carried out in conjunction with an extensive Bureau publicity campaign to counter any detrimental publicity which may develop. The following recommendations, therefore, are made under the assumption that such a campaign will be mounted throughout the country. If, for any reason, an extensive campaign of positive Census publicity can not be developed, the recommendations of this report are that a contingency plan must be developed for the Field system to attempt to counter the bad response. Such a plan would be extremely costly in terms of staff resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That since the Law Reform Commission find it in the interests of every individual's rights to privacy for envelopes to be provided for Census schedules, sufficient envelopes be printed and transported so that if every person were to request one, they would be available. (The cost of providing these envelopes is given in Appendix C).
- 2 That the fact that envelopes should be made available be written into the Census regulations.
- 3 That an envelope will be provided, upon request, to any household when the collector calls to pick up the completed schedule.
- 4 That respondents should be made aware of the availability of envelopes by means of it being written on the Census schedule. It is the responsibility of the ABS to ensure that all respondents are aware that they are entitled to use an envelope; and the responsibility of the respondent to request an envelope if they wish to avail themselves of it.

APPENDIX A: 1974 SYDNEY PRE-TEST RESPONSE RATES

TABLE 1: RESPONSE RATES FOR EACH QUESTION AND ANONYMITY FACTORS

	A ₀	A ₁	A ₂
Dwellings:			
Type of dwelling unit	.96	.96	.96
Material of outer walls	1.00	.98	.99
Source of water supply	.99	.98	.98
Rooms	1.00	.98	.99
Fuel - cooking	.97	.97	.98
- home heating	.92	.87	.89
- water heating	.94	.90	.91
- lighting	.97	.94	.95
Motor Vehicles	.98	.94	.96
Mortgages - (a) owned	.95	.92	.93
(b) mortgage	.95	.96	.94
(c) mortgage holder	1.00	1.00	1.00
- payments, 1st	.98	.99	.98
- payments, 2nd etc	1.00	1.00	1.00
Rent - yes/no	.91	.88	.87
Rural holdings	.99	.99	.99
Persons:			
Relationship to head	.97	.94	.96
Sex	.99	.98	.98
Age	.95	.94	.91
Present marital status	.95	.94	.94
Usual residence	.99	.99	.99
Usual residence 3/7/73	.98	.97	.97
Usual residence 3/7/69	.97	.95	.92
Holidays	.99	.97	.98
Country of birth	.99	.98	.98
Nationality	.98	.97	.98
Resident/visitor status	.98	.98	.97
Birthplace of father	.98	.96	.96
Birthplace of mother	.97	.95	.95
Language - at home	.98	.96	.96
Language - not at home	.92	.89	.88
Racial origin	.93	.91	.89
Religion	.95	.95	.95
Pre-school	.91	.90	.90
Child-minding	.89	.87	.89
Handicaps	.93	.88	.89
Life assurance	.73	.63	.66
Medical benefits	.92	.88	.89
Hospital benefits	.87	.81	.85
Educational institution	.82	.76	.78
Level of schooling	.89	.81	.83
Qualifications	.95	.91	.91
Retirement benefits scheme	.93	.91	.91
Social security benefits	.90	.87	.86
Licence - motor vehicle	.96	.92	1.00
- motor cycle/scooter	.53	.47	.47
Issue - ever married females	.94	.90	.90
- present marriage	.92	.88	.90
Duration of present marriage	.93	.91	.91
Income	.91	.89	.88
Do any work last week	.98	.98	.98
Have a job	.91	.86	.74
Looking for work	.89	.81	.83
Usual hours worked	.94	.94	.91
Occupational status	.95	.95	.93
Occupation	.96	.95	.95
Industry - trading name	.94	.94	.90
- address	.91	.86	.83
- kind of -	.87	.86	.83
Mode of travel to work	.96	.95	.95
TOTAL:	.925	.898	.896