

Module 5: Issues in Establishing an SBR

Confidentiality, Access and
Dissemination

International Perspective

The United Nations Statistical Commission identifies confidentiality as one of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*, with principle 6 stating: *Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.*

What is Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to the obligation of organisations that collect information to ensure that no person or organisation is likely to be identified from any data released.

Why Confidentiality

- Organisations that collect data depend on the goodwill and cooperation of the community, businesses and other organisations to provide the information.
- By protecting the confidentiality of the information provided, organisations that collect data help maintain the trust and goodwill of providers, and are better able to collect the required information.
- Maintaining public trust helps achieve a higher response to data collections and results in better quality data.

- There are also legal obligations which must be met in relation to the collection, management, use and dissemination of information.

Australian legislation

In Australia this requirement is recognised in the

- [Commonwealth Privacy Act \(1988\)](#)
- various state and territory privacy legislation.

It is also reflected in legislation, procedures and protocols in relation to specific government-activities where information is collected.

Examples include

- [Social Security \(Administration\) Act 1999](#)
- [Taxation Administration Act 1953](#)
- [Census and Statistics Act \(1905\)](#).

Penalties apply if the secrecy provisions set out in these Acts are breached.

ABS legislation

CENSUS AND STATISTICS ACT 1905 - SECT 19

Secrecy

(1) A person commits an offence if:

(a) the person is, or has been, the Statistician or an officer; and

(b) the person, either directly or indirectly, divulges or communicates to another person (other than the person from whom the information was obtained) any information given under this Act.

Policy

ABS policy ensures that identifiable information about individuals and organisations:

- is not released publicly;
- is available to authorised people on a need to know basis only;
- cannot be derived from disseminated data;
- and is maintained and accessed securely.

Keeping data confidential in ABS

ABS keeps data confidential by:

- Employee undertaking
- Building security
- Systems security
- Need to know for ABS staff access
- Secure disposal of forms

Confidentiality information sheets on the ABS website.

Access

Access to ABS data:

- Internal access
 - needs to know
- External access
 - equity of access
 - subject to confidentiality policy

Dissemination

Confidentialising data involves removing or altering information, or collapsing detail, to ensure that no person or organisation is likely to be identified in the data (either directly or indirectly).

The following basic techniques are applied to tables of statistics likely to contain cells which should be kept confidential.

1. Limiting the detail available (eg collapsing detail in classifications, combining cells).
2. Slightly altering outputs so that results from analysis based on the data are insignificantly affected yet the original values cannot be known with certainty. This method is usually adopted for count data such as released from the population census.
3. Suppressing information.

Data integration

Data integration

- is an emerging issue for answering policy questions
- raises questions about confidentiality, access and dissemination
- ABS Data Integration Steering Committee is responsible for approving and monitoring all ABS data integration projects

ABS Business Register issues

- Confidentiality
 - MOU with data providers
 - Resolving quality issues with admin data providers
- Access
 - Need to sign a Conditions of Use Statement
- Dissemination
 - List releases
 - Business Counts
- Data integration
 - Business case for data integration on ABS BR
 - Working with statistical areas to help them integrate ABS BR with other datasets

Resources

- <http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.NSF/pages/Confidentiality+Information+Sheets>