

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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Topic – To charge or not to charge: Fundraising, access licences and costing models

**INFORMING THE NATION – OPEN ACCESS TO STATISTICAL
INFORMATION IN AUSTRALIA**

Submitted by Australian Bureau of Statistics¹

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has a legislative, and a fiercely held organisational commitment to the Australian community to publish the results of all statistical collections that it conducts. ABS recognises and values the assistance of businesses and households in providing the underlying data, and acknowledges that the outputs of the ABS would not have been possible without this contribution.

2. Statistics are an essential part of information infrastructure that underpins policy formulation and decision making in Australia. Like other core national infrastructure, there is an expectation from the community that ABS statistics are available for open access at no cost to the user.

3. In 2005, the Australian Government released cost recovery guidelines in order to “heighten the transparency, consistency and accountability of cost recovery by Government agencies”. The new guidelines require fees and charges set by Government agencies to reflect the costs of producing and providing the products and services. In addition, where Government agencies produce products or services in direct competition with private sector providers, the guidelines require that the prices be set to reflect commercial costs and to ensure that the Australian Government’s Competitive Neutrality principle be observed.

4. Following a comprehensive review of the then ABS charging practice against the Government guidelines, the ABS fine tuned its charging policy. ABS statistics are now divided into:

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· A Basic Information Set (BIS), which includes an extensive range of statistics for the wider Australia community. The BIS is funded by taxpayers and provided free of charge.

· An Additional Information Set (AIS) that comprises the ABS Supplementary Information Set (SIS) and Commercial Information Set (CIS). Pricing for the SIS is based on full cost recovery, and pricing for the CIS follows the Competitive Neutrality Principle.

5. In response to community expectations, and aspiring to expand the content of the BIS, in June 2005 the ABS sought and obtained additional funding from the Australian Government for free access to ABS publications on its website. In December 2005, the Minister made the announcement, in an event to mark the centenary for the establishment of the ABS, that as a centenary tribute to the people of Australia, all ABS statistical output on the web site would be made free of charge.

6. The recent advent of Web 2.0 technologies increases the potential to use, share and 'mix and match' ABS data sets to add value to ABS information. 'Mash ups' are an excellent example of how the value of a product may be significantly enhanced by including different layers of information with statistical information. To facilitate this, and other innovative uses of ABS data, the ABS needs to have an internationally recognised licensing framework for accessing, using and reusing its statistical information.

7. In December 2008, ABS introduced Creative Commons licensing by adopting the Attribution 2.5 Australia licence for its materials contained in the ABS website.

II. ABS PRICING POLICY

8. Open access to official statistics on the economic, social and environment conditions of Australia and its population is an essential element of a democracy.

9. In the late 2008 Consultation Paper on Digital Economy Future Directions released by the Department of Innovation, Communications and Digital Economy, it was argued that greater access to Public Sector Information (PSI) can promote innovation and the digital economy. The paper suggested that Australian governments explore policy to provide more open access to PSI in appropriate circumstances, and observed that:

10. “Internationally, the OECD’s 2008 Seoul Declaration and the supporting policy framework—Shaping Policies for the Future of the Internet Economy—provide principles and guidelines for access to publicly-funded research data. In Europe in 2003, the Council on the Re-use of Public Sector Information and the European Parliament adopted the Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information. In the UK in 2007, the Government welcomed the findings of the Power of Information Review that noted that PSI underpins a growing part of the economy and that amount is increasing at a dramatic pace.”

11. Therefore the pricing policy for access to Australia's official statistics must be set in a way to remove barriers to access.

A. ABS Pricing Principles

12. In late 2002, the Australian Government released Cost Recovery Guidelines (the Guidelines) in order to "heighten the transparency, consistency and accountability of cost recovery by Government agencies. The new guidelines require fees and charges set by Government agencies to reflect the costs of providing the products and services. In addition, where full commercial costs should be charged, the guidelines require that the prices must be set to reflect commercial costs and to ensure that the Australian Government's Competitive Neutrality Principle be followed. In short, this principle requires that private sector providers of services should be able to compete fairly with public sector organisations by requiring the latter's commercial products not be under priced through cross subsidisation by taxpayer funds.

13. In 2006, the ABS established the following Pricing Principles to guide its comprehensive review of its then pricing policy against the Government guidelines:

Principle 1 - ABS is committed to open access to official statistics by all levels of governments, and the community generally.

Principle 2 - ABS will provide free access channels to the Basic Information Set funded by appropriation.

Principle 3 - The ABS will recover the costs of accessing the Basic Information Set via non-free access channels (e.g. print on demand) on a marginal cost basis.

Principle 4 - Where cost effective to do so, the ABS will recover from users the costs of producing and providing information products and services that are additional to the Basic Information Set, including salaries, operating and capital costs and associated overheads.

Principle 5 - The ABS will recover the costs of products and services provided in addition to the Basic Information Set, on an incremental cost basis for those which only the ABS can provide (e.g. due to confidentiality considerations), and on a commercial cost basis, for those which may compete with products and services provided by other suppliers.

Principle 6 - The ABS will set its pricing policy, in conformity with Government guidelines on Cost Recovery and Competitive Cost Neutrality, with a view to :

- relieving the general taxpayer of those elements of the cost of the statistical service which have a specific and identifiable value to particular users;
- enabling the demand for ABS products and services to be used as one indicator of how ABS resources should be used; and
- encouraging users to address their real needs for ABS statistical products.

Principle 7 - The ABS strongly encourages secondary provision of ABS data, and will recover the cost of dissemination and product creation from on providers of ABS information. It will also recover from them the costs of compliance with licensing conditions.

Principle 8 - The ABS provides technical assistance to international agencies and other countries. Wherever possible it will use the applicable AusAID pricing schedule, which approximates charging on a marginal cost basis. Exceptions apply in the following situations:

- where the work is tendered in a competitive situation, the ABS will quote on a commercial cost basis;
- where international agencies have their own standard rates, the ABS may choose to apply those rates; and
- consistent with our international policy, ABS may partially recover, or waive, its costs for statistical work associated with international engagement if it is a strategically important initiative that the ABS has decided to support, and/or there are important staff development opportunities .

Principle 9 - The Australian Statistician or his delegate may, where public interest issues are involved, decide to charge products and services on other bases.

Principle 10 - In all cases where costs are recovered, the ABS will charge "efficient costs" i.e. the minimum costs necessary to deliver products and services that are fit for purpose.

Principle 11 - ABS will use simple and cost effective pricing schedules and administrative systems.

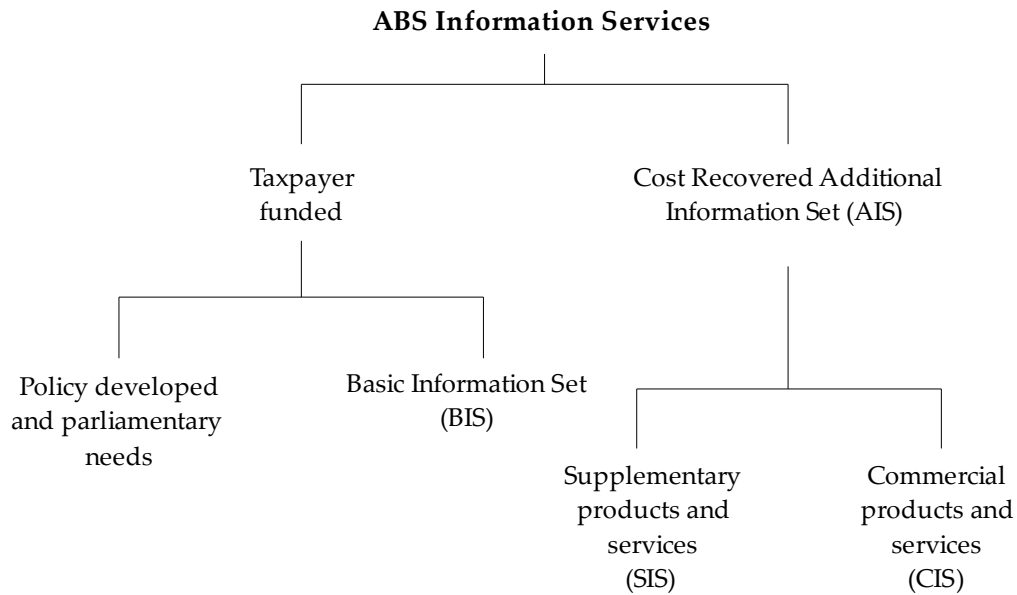
B. Classification of ABS information into Information Sets

14. The Guidelines require that information be classified into the following Information Sets:

- A BIS which includes an extensive range of statistics for the wider Australia community. The BIS is funded by taxpayers and provided free of charge.
- An AIS which comprises the ABS SIS and CIS. Pricing for the SIS would be based on full cost recovery, and for the CIS should follow the Competitive Neutrality Principle.

15. Under the Competitive Neutrality Principle, public sector organisations must not use taxpayer funds to cross subsidise the production of products and services that are offered in competition with private sector providers, in order to provide a "level playing field" for all players.

16. The relationship between these Information Sets is illustrated in the following diagram:



C. BIS

17. The Guidelines stipulate that products and services produced for the wider Australian community should be free. The criteria for determining the contents of the BIS can be found in Attachment 1.

18. Although ABS publications have been provided free of charge to the Australian community via Australian libraries for many years, the range of freely available statistics was significantly extended when ABS made all the content of its web site accessible free-of-charge from late 2005. This includes Main Features (summary information), ABS publications (in Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) or Portable Document Format (PDF) format), Datacubes and Spreadsheets. Other ABS services that are freely available as part of the BIS include the national enquiry service and the ABS Information Skills Program, which trains government, business and community members on navigating the ABS website.

19. The revenue foregone after the introduction of BIS is about \$3m.

D. AIS

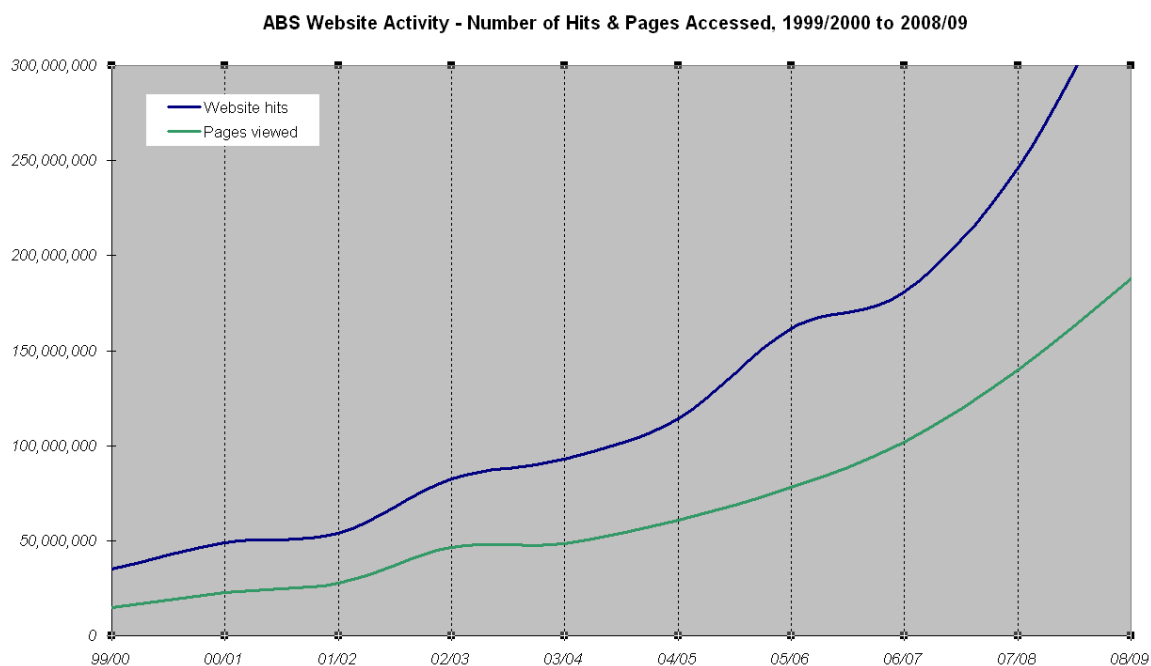
20. The AIS comprises the ABS SIS and the CIS. The criteria for determining the contents of the SIS and CIS can be found in Attachment 2.

21. The SIS comprises products and services where costs are recovered for:
- a) further dissemination (using additional channels and/or formats) of a product already included in the BIS; or
 - b) additional work undertaken to modify or expand taxpayer funded information to meet the demands of a specific client or group where there are no actual or potential competitors for these products and services.
22. The SIS comprises content of the ABS website delivered via media other than the ABS website (e.g. by custom printing an electronic publication or map); information and statistical consultancy services, services for approved remote access to ABS confidentialised unit record files; and secondary distribution services.
23. Charges for SIS products and services that are incurred in the further dissemination of the BIS only include direct costs such as labour and materials, and on-costs for labour. Capital and overhead costs are not included. However, for all other products and services in the SIS (i.e. other than those which are purely further dissemination of the BIS) the capital costs and overheads are included.
24. ABS revenue from SIS ranges between \$14 to \$20m. The policy of free statistics on the ABS website does not have any discernable effect on this revenue stream.
25. The CIS contains those products and services which compete with, or potentially compete with those provided by the private sector. Pricing for the CIS is governed by the Australian Government Competitive Neutrality principle. The CIS comprises Information and Statistical Consultancy Services which provide extraction or analysis of data from published data sets in BIS.
26. ABS activities on CIS were minimal.

III. WEBSITE ACTIVITIES

27. One of the changes in ABS dissemination activities following the provision of free statistics on the ABS website in 2005 was a dramatic reduction in the demand of printed publications, met with an equally dramatic increase in the access to the ABS website, including the download of ABS publications and other statistics.
28. Indeed, in 2000/01, nearly 800,000 copies of printed publications were distributed by the ABS, accompanied by some 91,000 downloads of electronic publications. By the first year of free statistics on the ABS website (2005/06), the pattern of use was in the opposite direction, with only 183,000 copies of printed publications distributed, and over 650,000 electronic publications downloaded.
29. During the same period, downloads of other ABS statistics from datacubes, spreadsheets, or time series also experienced an exponential growth.

30. ABS website activities as measured by website hits and pages viewed during 1999/2000 to 2008/2009 are illustrated in the following diagram:



31. There has been steady growth in the access for ABS statistics since 1999/2000, but accelerated growth was observed following the availability of free statistics. For example, it took about 5.5 years for page views to double from 30 million pages in mid 1999 to 60 million pages in end 2005, but only two years to double again to 120 million pages in end 2007. A similar but more spectacular story exists for website hits.

IV. PUBLIC SECTOR INFORMATION LICENSING

A. Why change licensing arrangements?

32. As previously mentioned, access to ABS information on its website has been free since mid 2005. However, until December 2008, any significant redistribution of that information was subject to licensing which was administered by the ABS. Although the ABS allowed quite broad use of the content of its website under licence (often at no cost to the user), the licensing process itself had the potential to pose an undesirable barrier to those wishing to re-use significant amounts of data.

33. The recent advent of Web 2.0 technologies significantly increases the potential to use, share and 'mix and match' ABS data sets to add value to ABS information. 'Mash ups' are an excellent example of how the value of a product may be significantly enhanced by combining other information with statistical information. To facilitate this, and other innovative uses of ABS data, the ABS needs to have a simple, open and internationally recognised licensing framework for its statistical information, i.e. open licensing.

34. An open licensing framework clarifies the responsibilities and obligations of ABS users in using, sharing and reusing ABS data. This will in turn create an environment which will optimise the flow of ideas and information for social and economic benefit.

35. In the 2008 Cutler Report (Venturous Australia) on the National Innovation System, released by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, it was suggested that:

“Along with the rise in support for access to information has come a growing recognition of the need for users to be able to search and interact with data and content. Legal frameworks must also be developed to facilitate access and reuse. This points to the need for an Australian National Information Policy (or Strategy) that optimizes the generation and flow of ideas and information in the Australian economy ... for social and economic benefit.”

36. This and other observations in the Report led to a recommendation (7.8) that “Australian governments should adopt international standards of open publishing as far as possible. Material released for public information by Australian governments should be released under a Creative Commons licence”.

37. Additionally, in its comprehensive Report on Government Information and Open Content Licensing: An Access and Use Strategy the Office of Economic and Statistical Research of Queensland Treasury concluded that Creative Commons is considered to be a best-practice example of open content licensing systems.

B. What is Creative Commons?

38. According to its website (<http://creativecommons.org>), Creative Commons is:

“.. a non-profit corporation dedicated to making it easier for people to share and build upon the work of others, consistent with the rules of copyright. Creative Commons provides free licences and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others share, remix, use commercially, or any combination thereof...”

39. Creative Commons licences provide a standardised way for creators to grant a variety of permissions to use their work. There are six types of Creative Commons licence:



i) Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives - allows others to download the creator’s works and share them with others as long as they mention the creator and link back to the creator, but they can’t change them in any way or use them commercially.



ii) Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike - allows others to remix and build upon the creator’s work non-commercially as long as they credit the creator and license their new creations under identical terms.



iii) Attribution Non-commercial - allows others to remix and build upon the creator's work non-commercially as long as they credit the creator and their new works are non-commercial. However, they do not have to license their new works under the same conditions.



iv) Attribution No Derivatives - allows for redistribution, commercial or non-commercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged, in whole and credited to the creator.



v) Attribution Share Alike - allows other to remix and build upon the creator's work even for commercial reasons, as long as they credit the creator and license their new creations under identical terms.



vi) Attribution - allows other to remix and build upon the creator's work, even commercially, as long as they credit the creator for the original creation.

40. It has been estimated that in 2008 there was at least 130 million works licensed under Creative Commons, rising from about 90 million in the previous year.

C. Introduction of Creative Commons licensing in the ABS

41. The ABS decided to adopt Creative Commons as a framework for licensing its information released on the website in mid 2008. This followed discussions with the 'Open Access to Information' community and consultation with the relevant Government Departments. The decision was made in line with the ABS' philosophy of providing free and open access to information via its website. It is also consistent with Recommendation 7.8 of the Cutler Report, *Venturous Australia*, from the review of Australia's National Innovation System, which was released in September 2008.

42. Creative Commons licensing was successfully implemented on the ABS website on 18-19 December 2008. This involved the addition of an updated Copyright Statement and Disclaimer and information on 'Attributing material sourced from the ABS website', as well as adding a Creative Commons image and link to the licence on the footer of every page on the site.

Fig. 1 Creative Commons image (with link to Attribution 2.5 Australia licence) appears on the footer of every page on the ABS website.

Fig. 2 Copyright and Creative Commons logo and statement appear at the end of every page printed (or previewed) from the ABS website

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43. Creative Commons licensing (Attribution 2.5 Australia) applies to HTML content on the ABS website, and most of the material contained in files accessible from those web pages. The exceptions are PDF files of publications with their own copyright statements which override the Creative Commons licence. Typically, these are jointly authored publications for which ABS does not hold the entire copyright.

44. By introducing Creative Commons on the ABS website, we are also improving the visibility and potential re-use of ABS material, and demonstrating leadership in the practical application of open access to public sector information. Search engines such as Google, and browsers such as Firefox, allow for filtering by usage rights, based on which Creative Commons licence is carried by the work. By using Creative Commons licensing, we can reach users utilising this feature. Consequently, our implementation of Creative Commons assists in maximising penetration of ABS data to the wider community.

45. ABS is at the forefront of Australian government bodies implementing open publishing standards and its leadership role has been acknowledged among advocates of open publishing standards. The new arrangement not only supports the ABS' Mission to 'assist and encourage informed decision making, research and discussion within governments and the community, by leading a high quality, objective and responsive national statistical service', but also delivers a resource saving through reduced licence administration.

D. Which Creative Commons licence does the ABS use?

46. The ABS uses the Attribution 2.5 Australia licence, which is the most flexible. People are free to re-use, build upon and distribute our data, even commercially. This makes a wealth of data more readily available to the community, researchers and business, facilitating innovative research and development projects based on quality statistics, and promoting the wider use of statistics in the community. There is no limit to the quantity of data involved, and transformation of the information, including the creation of derivative works, is allowed.

47. Creative Commons licensing lessens the restrictions on the use of this information considerably by changing the copyright from "all rights reserved" to "some rights reserved". In effect, what the ABS is asking users of most of its web content is only that it be acknowledged as the source of the data. There are still some instances where Creative Commons licensing is not applicable to web content, for

example, jointly authored publications where ABS does not hold the copyright to all of the information. Such publications carry their own copyright statement.

48. The next phase of the ABS Creative Commons licensing project will see the use of “injector” software to add Creative Commons licences to downloadable files, firstly as part of the work flow for new releases and later for historical releases. This will help the user be alerted to the licensing conditions even though the materials have been downloaded from the ABS website.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

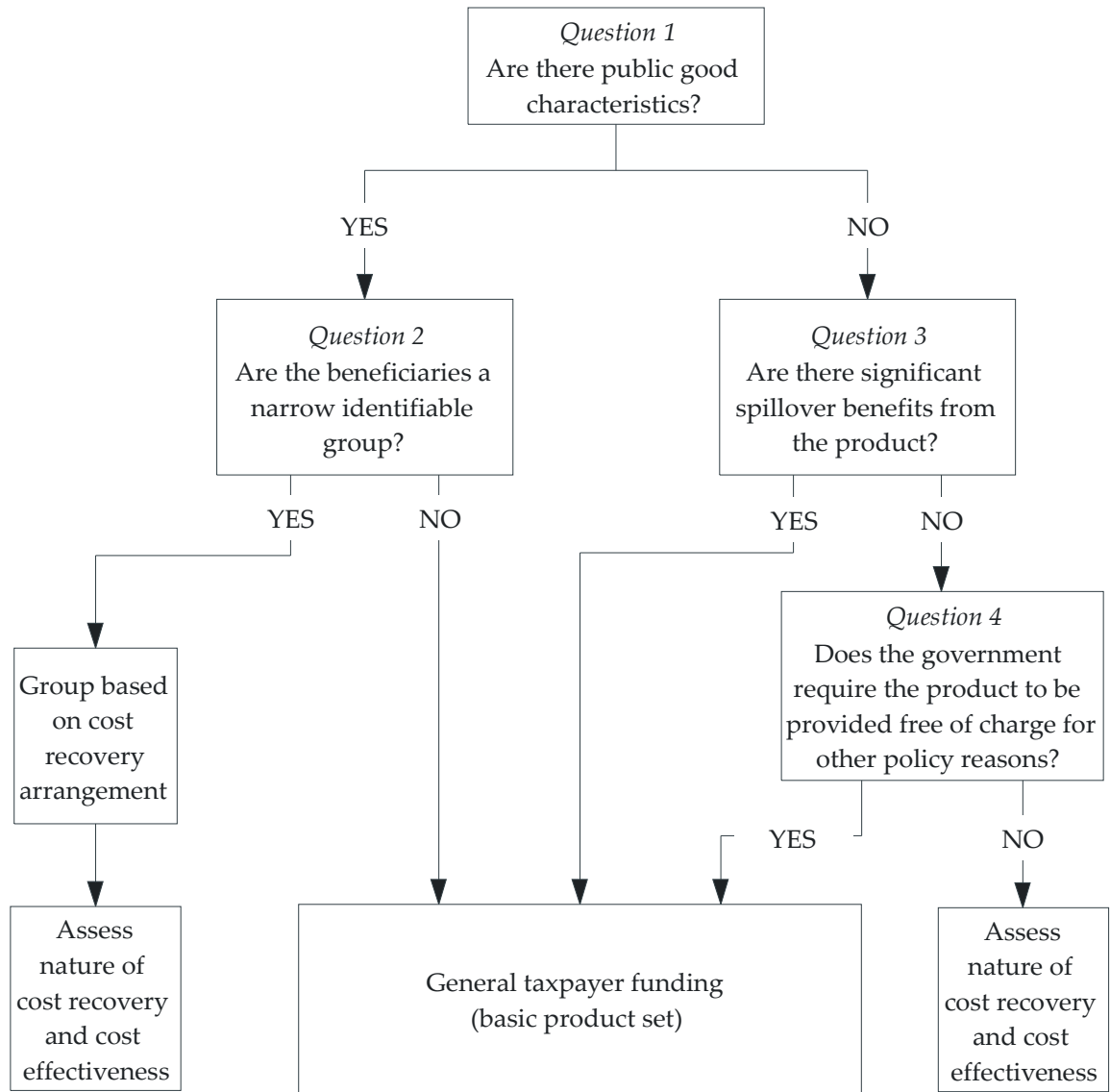
49. One of the hallmarks of a democracy is freedom to choose one’s own affairs. Choice requires decisions and in turn good decision making requires information. Therefore, open access to statistical information is fundamental to a democracy.

50. Firmly committed to informing the nation, and enhancing decision making, research and discussion within the Australian community, the ABS has been publishing, disseminating and communicating statistics for over 100 years.

51. In recent times, through such initiatives as free publications and free statistics on the ABS website, there has been exponential growth in the access to statistical information.

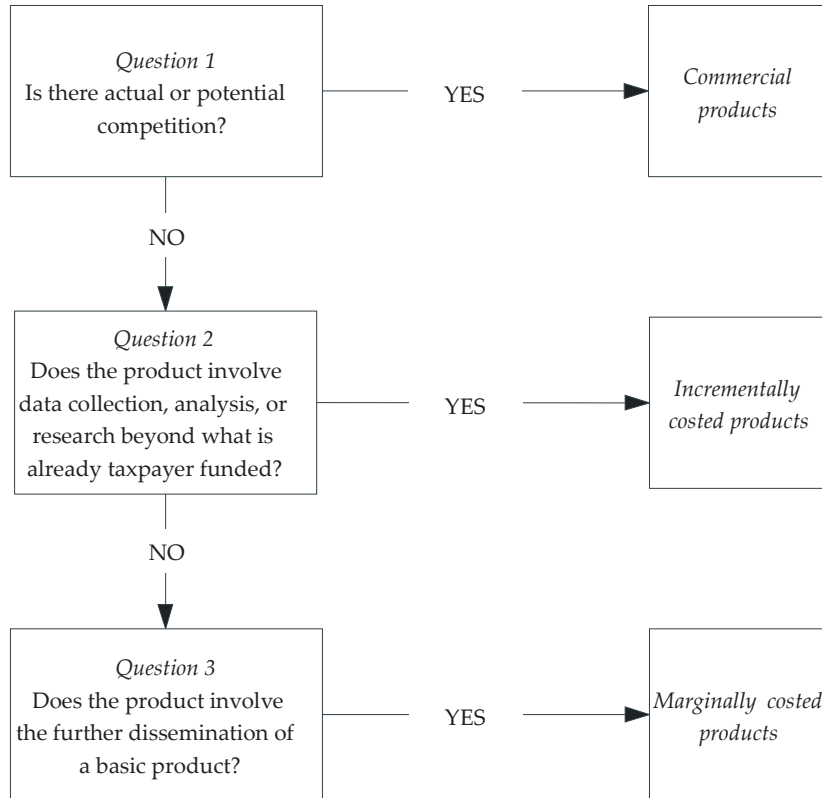
52. Most recently, the introduction of Creative Commons licences, an internationally recognised licensing framework, onto the ABS website provides clarity on responsibilities and obligations on users of ABS statistics when using, sharing and reusing ABS information. It is our belief that this initiative will facilitate an environment for creativity, innovation, and the development of value added products, all of which will lead Australia to be a better place for its citizens.

Attachment 1: Identifying the Content of the Basic Information Set



Source: Department of Finance and Administration. Australian government cost recovery guidelines, July 2005, p31

Attachment 2 - Accessing the Nature of Cost Recovery for AIS



Source: Department of Finance and Administration. *Australian government cost recovery guidelines*, July 2005, p35

Note: Marginally and Incrementally priced products comprise the Supplementary Information Set

VI. REFERENCES

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