

Learning from the 2016 Australian Census and ensuring effective issues management during ABS' most challenging sensitive and divisive data collection

Samantha PALMER and Nick STATHIS (ABS, Australia)

samantha.palmer@abs.gov.au, nick.stathis@abs.gov.au

Abstract and paper

In 2016 the Australian Census was affected by a 40-hour webform outage which created significant communication, enumeration and reputational challenges in both the short and medium term. Exactly one year from the Census outage the Australian Bureau of Statistics was directed by the Australian Government to run a national wide census of all eligible Australian voters on whether the Australian law should be changed to allow same sex couples to marry. The ABS was given 99 days to deliver the outcome with communication and issues management a key plank to ensuring both high levels of both participation and trust in the results. Parliamentarians were to use the results as a guide to whether support legislation. This paper will outline how the lessons the learned from the 2016 Census were successfully applied to deliver effective communication to maximise respondent participation and ensure prompt successful issues management. Approaches to working with Government (within in the Independence of the ABS), engagement with Parliamentary Inquiries, measurement of sentiment, use of media and social media monitoring and readiness/preparation will be provided in this paper along with examples of how issues were managed and outcomes achieved.

Learning from the 2016 Australian Census and ensuring effective issues management during ABS' most challenging sensitive and divisive data collection

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Samantha Palmer, General Manager People, Capability & Communication, Australian Bureau of Statistics

Context

The Australian Bureau of the Statistics is Australia's national statistical organisation. The ABS produces around 500 statistical releases every year (around 2 major statistical products every working day), and then we also do a Census of Population and Housing, as well as a Census of Agriculture, every five years. ABS is a complex organisation working across a large country (almost the same size as the US) to a population of only 25 million. ABS has around 3000 staff with a range of skills including statistical, mathematical, economic, IT, information management, operations management, field interviewing and corporate (such as finance, risk management, HR). We provide national statistical services from 10 locations (every capital city and two regional cities), with most of our work programs located across several locations.

The Australian Statistician, rather than our Government Minister, is accountable for the operations of the ABS. This independence helps deliver the integrity of Australia's statistical system – but the ABS is not truly independent of Government or the Parliament in some very important ways. The Australian Government sets our budget funding (as well as a few Census related choices) and the Commonwealth Parliament establishes our legislative framework, while we provide statistical services to all governments and the broader community. The ABS operates in a context in which we have significantly less funding and staffing compared to 10 years ago and our fragile, ageing statistical infrastructure is being replaced over five years.

2016 Census overview

The Census in Australia is a major exercise, with the 2016 Census costing \$500 million, involving 38,000 field staff, and complex delivery models for different populations, such as Indigenous, remote, homeless, and elderly. The 2016 was the first to shift from a traditional drop and collect paper forms model to a digital first Census to be more efficient, align with the Government's digital transformation agenda, and deliver on community expectations about efficient, simple on-line transactions with government. A very tight timeframe to delivery, due to a range of reasons, led to a very quick internal privacy impact assessment process associated with the length of retention of names and addresses from the Census.

Australian Censuses have a long history of prompting privacy debates, particularly in the 1970s, around the late 1990s and then in the lead up to the 2006 Census. Australia appears to have quite a different public privacy discourse from other generally comparable countries who also undertake 5-yearly Censuses, such as Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Ireland. All of these countries retain their Census data permanently, and use it to generate quality statistics.

Because this is a consistent challenge the communication team ran community sentiment testing which showed that 97-98% of the community expected to fully and accurately complete the Census right through the media and social media debate about privacy, and the 2016 Census had stronger support for a compulsory response than was recorded in 2011.

Issues start - The Privacy 'slow burn' starts... and builds

As expected, the Australian privacy lobby commenced communicating negatively about the Census about 6 months before the Census. Coincidentally, the 2016 Census got caught up in the more combative political environment that has emerged in Australia over recent years. A lengthy Federal election campaign from May to early July precluded the usual factual briefing of Federal MPs and Senators in the lead up to the Census in August that year. As a result high profile independent politicians started to use media and social media to publicise their concerns about privacy and the Census, which was amplified in the political pre-election contested environment. One significant privacy social influencer started the #CensusFail hashtag with inaccurate stories abounding regarding what was actually happening with Census privacy.

Census fears: Greens senators join Nick Xenophon in withholding names

Sarah Hanson-Young and Scott Ludlam add voice to protest over privacy as Xenophon says he will seek amendments to act



▲ Nick Xenophon, centre right, and fellow Nick Xenophon Team senators Rebekha Sharkie, Skye Kakoschke-Moore and Stirling Griff. Xenophon says he will contest any fine for not complying with the census. Photograph: Brenton Edwards/AFP/Getty Images

The independent senator Nick Xenophon says he will refuse to include his name on his census form, knowing he could be prosecuted for it, because he is not convinced the national census does not present a huge privacy risk.

As millions of Australians prepare to enter their household details on Tuesday, Xenophon will be joined by Greens senators Sarah Hanson-Young and Scott Ludlam in refusing to put their names to the national headcount.

most viewed in Australia



Phelps backs getting off Nauru, as Wentworth narrows



Jane Caro poised to challenge against Tony Abbott Warringah



The Wentworth bye isn't just a loss for the Liberals. It's a disaster Katharine Murphy



The next election is Coalition's to lose - it doesn't mean it'll win Greg Jericho



Wentworth bye elects Kerryn Phelps force Morrison into minor government

Image 1: Example of media coverage: Senator refuses to participate in media

Census night outage

On Census night the online form suffered a DDoS attack and was taken off line for 40 hours, and having encouraged the community to complete it that night, outrage ensued as a result of the outage. The ABS suffered an immediate significant negative impact in reputation and trust. Once the Census on-line form was back operating from the afternoon of 11 August, we then received over a million more household responses on-line over coming weeks. Within a week of Census night, overall Census responses were back to our original expectations of the number of Census returns and the results from the Census were strong – 95.1% response rate, 63.3% online responses and net 1.0% undercount. The Prime Minister directed an Inquiry into the Census by his cyber-security advisory Alistair MacGibbon and the Senate also held an Inquiry which involved public dissection of all that went poorly with the operation of the Census.

Recovering to ensure the Census Data was trusted

The ABS put additional effort to our communication of Census data in April, June and October 2017. We prioritised better engagement with the media and key stakeholders around the time of the Census release so they were able to effectively use and communicate the plethora of Census data when it became available. This included pre-embargoed briefings days before to ensure coverage was accurate and ready on release day. We better prepared for a possible denial of service attack, or any business continuity disruption, including testing our response. Preparations for issues management were detailed and scenarios were practiced including for a real hacking of data and failure of website during release.

We broke with tradition of an 11.30am release and issued Census data earlier (at 9am) to thwart possible plans to disrupt.

The Chair of the Independent Assurance Panel that ABS had engaged to review our data and assess its fitness for purpose and quality, issued a report on the Census data quality and spoke at the launch, thus removing any speculation or commentary about the quality of the data.

National public sentiment testing after the data release showed 82% of respondents agreed they trust the ABS to deliver high quality reliable statistics for Australia (most remaining proportion were neutral).

First direction from Government to ABS to undertake a data collection on marriage equality

Prior to the 2016 Australian Federal Election campaign, the Liberal-National Coalition Government made a commitment that it would provide the Australian people with an opportunity to have their say on whether the law should change to allow same-sex marriage. The Government's preference was to deliver on that commitment through a compulsory attendance plebiscite however the necessary legislation was voted down. So one year after the 2016 Census the government announced that it would use its powers under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* to direct the Australian Statistician to request statistical information from all eligible Australians on the electoral roll as to their views on whether or not the law in relation to marriage should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry. The results were required to be provided 99 days later. The Prime Minister also announced that a Yes response recorded in the postal survey would facilitate the introduction of a Private Member's Bill to legalise same-sex marriage. Participation in the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey was voluntary.



Image 2: Media coverage of the announcement of the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey

As a result of the challenges associated with the Census – both privacy and webform outage – there was some cynicism about ABS' ability to deliver this important data collection.

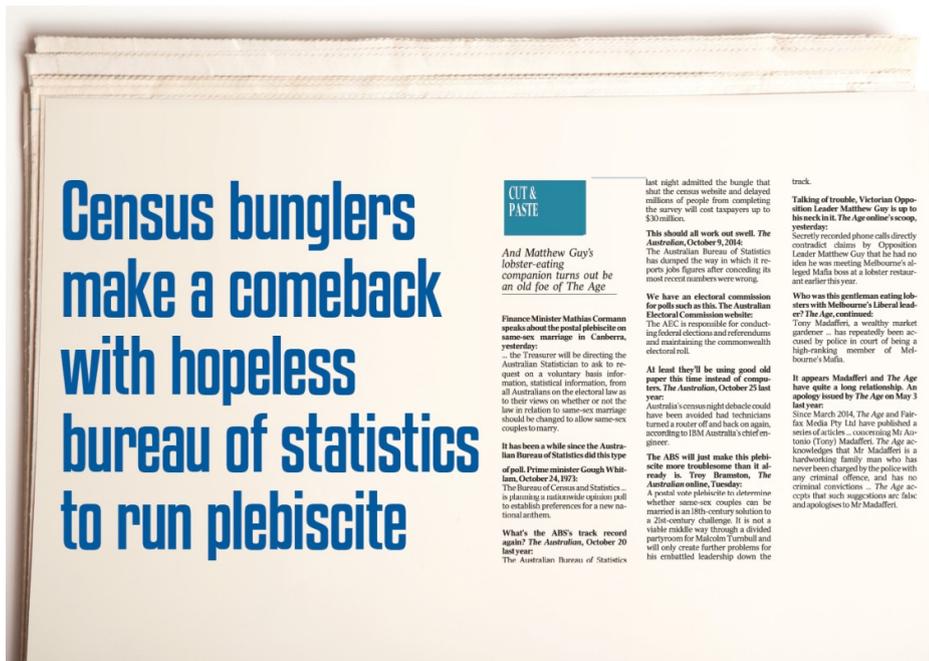


Image 3: Media coverage providing 'support' for ABS

Challenges

The AMLPS presented a number of challenges due to the complexity of the exercise, the tight time frame and the involvement of multiple agencies to deliver the AMLPS. Key challenges included:

- fewer than 100 days to plan, design and implement a large logistical exercise including IT operations, electoral roll updating, silent elector management, survey design, response collection, high volume printing, mail dispatch, return and scanning, community engagement, stakeholder engagement, advertising, communication and media inquiry handling, public engagement and service delivery, identity verification, fraud management, statistics production and publication, physical and data security
- rapid development of systems and processes that would sufficiently automate the handling of large volumes of materials
- supporting participation of those eligible Australians unable to participate through the postal service
- continuing to deliver on ABS business as usual work
- public expectations of a plebiscite-like process (around integrity of the process and opportunity to participate)
- prevention of fraud in ways that would not discourage participation
- promoting understanding and confidence in the steps taken to ensure anonymity of responses
- ensuring high levels of physical, IT and data security across multiple sites
- undertaking a large scale competitive procurement exercise in very short time frames
- operating sensitively and neutrally in an emotionally charged environment attracting high levels of media and social media attention alongside political and community debate
- coordinating across multiple departments and agencies
- this was the first time the ABS had undertaken a postal survey of this scale.

Building public trust – the ABS equation for the AMLPS

The team took account of the findings of 2016 Census Inquiries regarding ABS' failings and set about to ensure there was a high rate of public trust in the survey in order to ensure high response rate and the confidence of MPs to take account of the survey results in their voting on the legislation if a YES response occurred. In summary: make the survey as easy as possible to do, ensure it is inclusive so everyone can participate and be responsive to any and all issues and problems, concerns and questions.

$$\text{Public Trust} = \frac{\text{easy} + \text{inclusive} + \text{responsive}}{\text{negative public views}}$$

Being inclusive = Stakeholder support: working with others to avoid and manage issues

The Taskforce engaged early in the survey design process with a range of organisations in order to ensure the best possible strategies to support participation were in place, including:

- community organisations representing diversity groups (e.g. COTA Australia, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils Aust, Vision Australia, Disability Youth Network, Human Rights Commission)
- employers with large numbers of staff offshore (e.g. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Defence, Australian Antarctic Division, BHP Billiton and Santos)
- the Yes and No campaigns

This early engagement led to improvements in strategies and created some 'buy-in' from these stakeholders in the process. When issues arose during the survey, the earlier engagement supported direct contact between ABS and one of these groups, or vice versa, which supported more timely and effective resolutions. The ABS made some materials available to the campaigns to ensure that their advertising was accurate around core details relating to the AMLPS. This arrangement let the ABS leverage their campaigns to deliver clear and consistent messages.

Be responsive to previous concerns about Privacy

The survey had privacy and legal specialists embedded in the project from an early stage, supporting privacy consideration early in the design and development process. This ensured that privacy considerations informed system and process design and development and reduced the likelihood of privacy becoming a bigger issue. The survey also gained value from using an external prominent privacy expert to review the design principles and issue a public statement of assurance. The privacy policy was very clear on the website and could be accessed through all channels.

Make it easy = Behavioural Economics on materials – a key to effective response

We engaged behavioural economists to work together with the communication team to develop all AMLPS contact materials. These materials included the approach envelope for the survey, the letter, survey form, reply paid envelope, and material for specific audiences such as eligible overseas Australians and silent electors. These materials focused on the actions that the reader had to take, rather than the details that were more important to the ABS, and normally clearly found on respondent materials (i.e. the due date).

Survey materials were developed by the ABS and informed by public testing which found them to be overwhelmingly positive, with these materials viewed as direct and immediately communicating the purpose of the mail. They provided straightforward instruction on the upcoming survey and how to participate and elicited no negative feedback from potential respondents. Designs were focussed on ensuring the survey form was simple and easy to complete, instructions were impartial and easy to follow, and content and design were neutral and process-focussed. The covering letter advised people about the survey and how to participate using simple and directive instructions. Information was carefully structured and ordered to create urgency, maximise immediate response and ensure recipients keep their survey form safe (to reduce the likelihood of theft or fraud). The letter included translated information about how to receive in-language assistance from the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) in the top 15 languages for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) participants.

The ABS liaised with both the Yes and No campaign on the design of the survey form.

The Communication team advised the ABS to be unspecific as to the nature of the mark (tick, cross, line) that should be placed in the Yes/No boxes on the survey form. This decision would avoid inadvertent invalidations caused by a misunderstanding of the instructions.

Make it easy by ensuring people are clear about what to do: the Communication campaign

The AMLPS was a high profile initiative and a highly sensitive issue in some parts of the community. The topic of the survey, the Government decision to conduct the survey and how the survey was being conducted (including by the ABS) were all issues of considerable public interest. The AMLPS attracted very high levels of traditional and social media coverage during its operation.

A communication campaign was therefore an essential component of the AMLPS. The campaign comprised integrated paid advertising, media and public relations, social media and online communication, stakeholder communication, special audience advertising and communication and the development and distribution of information materials. While there were high levels of awareness of the issue, there was a clear need for comprehensive, factual and neutral communication to maximise participation and inform people of:

- the need to be enrolled to vote or have up-to-date details on the Commonwealth electoral roll to be eligible to participate
- the survey collection process, key dates and how to participate in the survey
- the need to respond in a timely manner

All campaign material was ABS branded and authorised, and was deliberately designed to raise awareness. The communication campaign was conducted in an already crowded market with competing campaigns and information. Below-the-line communication, including the marriage survey website design, featured ABS corporate branding in an orange colour palette, to avoid association with any political party, the Yes and No campaigns, and other community or stakeholder campaign or brands.

Campaign structure

AMLPS advertising was rolled out across all demographic and geographic markets in three major phases across television, radio, press, outdoor and online (search, digital and social). Search and social advertising ran in overseas markets to raise awareness among eligible Australians travelling, working or living overseas. In addition, advertising appeared throughout the campaign in rural and regional markets, complementing targeted below-the-line media activity to promote strategies supporting people in regional and remote locations who were unable to use the postal service, including Indigenous communities.

Phase one of the campaign ran from 11 to 24 August 2017. This phase clearly communicated that the AMLPS was about to start, and included strong calls to action to enrol or update details on the Commonwealth Electoral Roll in order to participate in the survey. Phase 2 and 3 of the campaign focussed on the survey process and strongly encouraged eligible Australians to fill out and mail back their survey form quickly. Advertisements prominently featured survey materials to raise awareness and build recognition. Phase 2 and 3 advertising was translated for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous audiences, and placed in CALD and Indigenous media across television, radio, press and online. Television commercials for CALD audiences were translated into 7 languages, press advertisements into 15 languages, and radio and digital advertisements into 25 languages. Indigenous radio was translated into 7 languages.

Build trust through Media engagement and coverage

The AMLPS media strategy was developed and implemented to align with key phases in the overall survey process from the announcement of the survey to the release of the results. It aimed to harness the reach and power of 'free media', recognising the intense national interest in the issue.

As the ABS did not learn of the AMLPS until the day before it was publicly announced, the media strategy was informed by the survey process. There was no time for the pre-planning of strategies. The media team was required to hit the ground running from day one. Like the rest of the AMLPS Taskforce, the media team faced the early challenges of a rapidly evolving process. This required deft media management: providing media with clear, accurate responses to questions about a process which was still very much in the planning stage. For example, by day two of the survey (10 August) media inquiries were both constant and far ranging in their subject and included many requests for television and radio interviews. Questions ranged from enrolment details and cut-off dates to arrangements for silent electors and people travelling and living

overseas. Again, many of these details were still being finalised so our challenge was to give the Australian people as much information as we could, via the free media, in parallel with process development.

The AMLPS Media Team used the principles of risk communication and acknowledged areas of uncertainty to the media, telling them what we knew and underlining clear steps that were underway to find answers to their questions. Because of the paucity of some survey details at the start of the process, the AMLPS Media Team outlined to media the principles that underpinned the survey. These guiding principles, which included inclusiveness, privacy, security safeguards and quality assurance, informed the media of the central pillars, which supported the development of details.

The media team worked to transmit information to journalists, and respond to follow-on questions in a clear and concise manner. To support this, an ever-expanding Q&A document was drafted and was constantly added to and updated. The website was also an invaluable resource. By mid-August, the media was asking questions on many fronts, for example the ineligibility of 16 and 17-year olds to participate, codes on survey forms, secondment of staff from other government departments or agencies, and arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities, people overseas, and prisoners. In some instances, detailed information wasn't yet settled. In others, newly released information needed to be circulated in order to address previous media reports. The big picture goal was to ensure that there was no time lag or information gap between what the ABS had finalised and placed on the survey website, and the public discussion in the media.

The AMLPS media team accepted that during Phase 1 there was some ambiguity and ambivalence caused by imprecise knowledge and found ways of dealing with it by stressing the ABS's credibility and commitment to give as many Australians as possible the opportunity to participate in the voluntary survey.

Phase 2 Collection period (12 September – 7 November): The collection period involved initially distributing the 16 million survey forms, and then maximising awareness about how to respond to the survey. As detailed arrangements for the survey were confirmed and publicised during this time, the media team was able to supply more information to the media. As finalised and published details steadily increased, it became possible to offer interviews to the media. AMLPS Taskforce Lead Jonathan Palmer was designated as the ABS media spokesperson, and he participated in over 100 media interviews during the survey, ranging from live national tv, to remote community radio. These interviews enabled the ABS to repeat key messages, respond to issues of the day, address matters of local interest, and to put a face to the survey process.

Key messaging during distribution of forms (12–25 September):

- The forms are being posted out, and you will receive your form by 25 September.
- If you haven't received a form by 25 September, you can then request a replacement form.
- Complete and return your form right away.

With 16 million survey forms out in the field, there was significant media interest in lost or stolen forms, incidents of potential misconduct in local communities, conduct of the Yes and No campaigners, and other anomalies in the distribution and collection process. The media team was in regular consultation with the AEC, police, Australia Post, and other relevant authorities to assess the issues, and supply clear and timely responses to media. There was a need to ensure that eligible Australians clearly understood the survey process and guidelines, the safeguards in place, and how to request a replacement survey form if needed. On 3 October, the ABS released the first of its weekly estimates of number of survey forms received. This weekly update enabled the media to tell the story of the strong level of response to the survey, and provided an opportunity to reiterate the other key dates and messages relevant to the week. The story of strong response and progress also enabled any negative, isolated incidents to be placed in appropriate context. The weekly updates coincided with (and were a likely cause of) a spike in interview requests and also served to inform reasonable public expectations about the likely final level of response. These announcements consistently received high levels of positive/neutral traditional and social media coverage.

Significant efforts were made during the collection phase to engage with media outlets in rural and remote communities, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media outlets. The media team made over

50 proactive approaches to local media to promote awareness of regional/remote location visits, and around a dozen proactive approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander radio outlets in order to maximise participation nationwide. The ABS's inclusive approach involved reaching out to not only rural and remote communities. Other groups included: people with a disability; people from multicultural backgrounds; people experiencing homelessness; people in aged care facilities; silent electors; Australians overseas.

Key milestones in the survey process were highlighted in the media to remind people who had not already done so to return their surveys. Media messages contained clear calls to action to generate awareness and a sense of time is running out and they needed to act now. The Media Team used media releases that contained in-house generated audio and video messages for media outlets to use as they saw fit. This proved to be an effective approach because networks, particularly radio AM and FM, used the ABS audio, which contained key messages and drew attention to upcoming milestones.

Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey

13-25 SEP	25 SEP-20 OCT	27 OCT
Look out for your survey and do it today	Requests for replacement forms	Post your survey back – time's running out

For more information:
marriagesurvey.abs.gov.au
 1800 572 113

Image 4: Phase 2 and 3 key messages for campaign and media

Phase 3: Survey closure and release of results. After the 7 November closure of the survey and the release of the last participation numbers, media interest moved to the counting and release of results. At this point media attention focused on the technical arrangements for the release of the survey results. Following the decision to announce the results at a media conference at ABS House on Wednesday 15 November, all major media outlets were contacted. In recognition of the national significance of the announcement, television and radio networks opted for a live broadcast with the television networks agreeing to 'super pool'. In the days leading up to the announcement there was stringent technical testing and two pre-announcement, media run-throughs to ensure the success of the broadcast.

The announcement of the results at a different time to our normal releases (to manage disruption) by Australian Statistician David W Kalisch was followed by the opportunity for media questions. The media conference was attended by many Australian and some international media outlets.

Activity and coverage results throughout

The ABS issued 30 national media releases and media alerts during the survey, to communicate key messages and calls to action in line with survey operational phases and key dates. All media releases were published on the website <https://marriagesurvey.abs.gov.au> and issued directly to media via the ABS' contracted media monitoring provider which also provided AMLPS media monitoring throughout the survey. A further 30 localised media alerts were distributed to promote regional visits by ABS staff. As well, proactive approaches by the media team were made to local media to promote the 27 regional visits.

An analysis of Australian media coverage produced in the 99 days between 9 August and 15 November 2017

found 15,574 items. This coverage reached a cumulative audience of 427,197,563. An analysis of coverage produced in the two days between 15 November and 16 November found 2,166 items. This coverage reached a cumulative audience of 49,021,703. Media and social media monitoring showed that coverage of the ABS and the survey process was mostly positive or neutral in tone.

The ABS responded to more than 750 media enquiries about the survey, and the Marriage Collection Taskforce Lead and spokesperson, Jonathan Palmer, was interviewed around 105 times. Having a single spokesperson reduced the risk associated with potentially inconsistent information being communicated in this rapidly and fast moving activity.

Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey is your chance to have your say on whether Australian law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry.

From September, eligible Australians will receive a survey form in the mail. You'll be asked to answer one question. Choose either 'yes' or 'no' on the form. Put it in the Reply Paid envelope and mail it back straight away. Your response will be completely confidential.

If you face difficulties completing the survey, e.g. you're travelling overseas or live in a remote area, please visit our website or call the information line below.

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey 2017. Have your say.

Information Line: 1800 572 113 | Visit: www.marriagesurvey.abs.gov.au

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey 2017 closes 7 November.

Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?

This is your chance to have your say on whether Australian law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry.

Just answer 'yes' or 'no' on the form. Put it in the Reply Paid envelope and mail it back straight away. Survey responses must be received by 7 November. Your response will be completely confidential.

Have your say.

Information Line: 1800 572 113 | Visit: www.marriagesurvey.abs.gov.au

Image 5: Phase 3 advertising. Ad on right with closing date only ran during final weeks

Social media: a particular challenge

The AMLPS advertising campaign included social media and digital advertising across all phases. This channel was particularly important for targeting young people and was also effectively used to target eligible Australians overseas. The ABS successfully broadcast thematic messages and calls to action (via 'pinned' posts and tweets) aligned with survey advertising and operational phases through a 'ghost' Facebook account, through the ABS Twitter account, and by serving advertising without profile via Twitter. This enabled comments to be disabled in this channel to avoid direct connection to partisan discussions on the issue of marriage, and to help manage trolling and limit commentary that may be negative or 'fake news'.

This approach aimed to push service delivery to the website and Information Line channels (where they could be handled sensitively and privately), restrict the volume of conversation about the survey process and present a neutral position on the issue and by extension a neutral position towards the ABS. It was also important that the ABS be seen as apolitical and impartial through its conduct and in turn through its communications campaign. Given the significant interest in the survey, where questions were asked in social media, helpful individuals and campaigns often got involved in the conversation to answer and provide advice and links to the marriage survey website. Content was moderated to ensure that it meets the Facebook Content Policy (and community standards). The advertising agency's social team assisted with monitoring and moderation of social media advertising, providing weekly moderation reports while social media advertising was in market.

Market research

The ABS conducted market research to focus test phases two and three advertising creative and materials, and to evaluate the campaign. Advertising research found that the campaign was extremely strong and effective against its objectives. Overall the advertisements were found to:

- make the survey process very clear
- convey simplicity of task to maximise participation
- have appropriate information hierarchy to assist comprehension and direct messaging without overwhelming or confusing audiences
- use a good level of visual story-telling
- be calm, neutral, impartial and engaging in tone and language

Testing found there was no misinterpretation or distraction among audiences and no privacy concerns.

AMLPS advertising campaign research comprised benchmark, tracking and final evaluation phases. The benchmark was conducted prior to the commencement of the campaign during the enrolment phase of advertising and prior to the start of the survey. Continuous tracking research occurred throughout the campaign from 11 September to 6 November 2017 to provide ongoing public sentiment information. Final campaign evaluation research was conducted from 8 to 15 November 2017. Total results from tracking research as at 25 October 2017, prior to the commencement of the final reminder phase of advertising, showed overall awareness of the survey was almost universal at 99 per cent, up from a 96 per cent benchmark. Close to half (43 per cent) of respondents were aware that the ABS was conducting the survey.

Issues Management

The ABS established a comprehensive issues management framework to categorise, manage, coordinate and respond to issues arising from program operations. This included appointing a designated Issues Manager and a small team. The issues management team established strong working relationships across all work program including the communication team and developed issue management plans for each work stream. These plans were in place early in the process to enable the efficient handling of issues as they arose.

External experts were contracted to provide external expertise in business continuity and issues management and to assist with developing issue recovery plans. These plans complemented the issues management framework and provided independent assurance over processes. The Issues Manager worked closely with the Risk Manager to monitor emerging issues that potentially required a risk management strategy to resolve. Equally there was a strong working relationship with the Fraud Manager in the event that issues involved suspected fraud.

The issues management framework shown below ensured a common understanding of terminology amongst all work streams and a clear understanding of the escalation path.

A total of 8 issues arose during the operations of the AMLPS with the majority of issues occurring in the early stages of the program, in particular the period where survey forms were being mailed out (between 12 September 2017 and 25 September 2017). All issues were resolved well before the close of the survey, with the majority closed within a day of the issue occurring. Throughout the AMLPs there were no issues elevated to a crisis situation.

Crisis management simulation

The ABS engaged a crisis expert that assisted with the Census 2016 data release to facilitate an issues workshop to test the Issues Management team readiness to prevent, prepare, respond and recover in a crisis situation. A set of scenarios were used that focused on the management of likely crises and the efficiency and effectiveness of the public and internal communication channels. The scenarios ranged in complexity and covered threats to physical security, data integrity, sabotage, staff safety and theft. This approach proved highly useful and was able to inform the ABS's approach to risk management, issues management and fraud control.

Figure 1: Issues management process

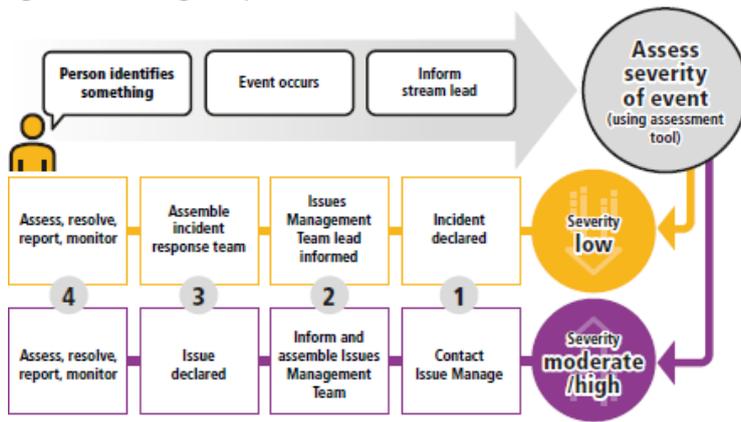


Figure 2: Issues management framework

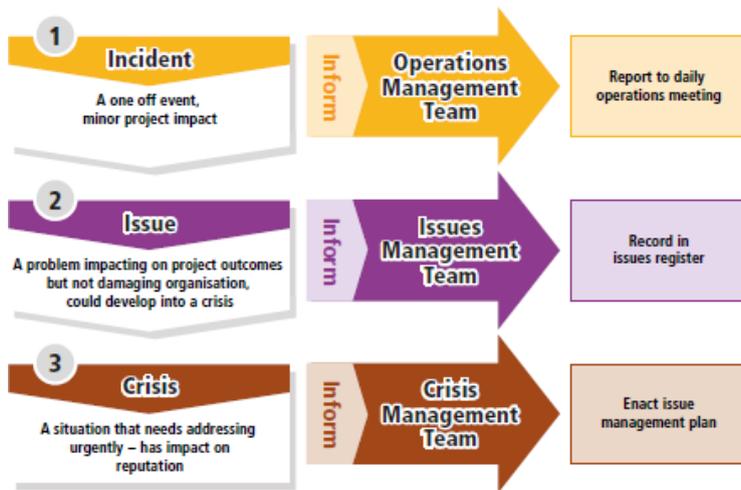


Image 6: Issues management framework and process

Issue management case study: 1 Offensive language in randomly selected barcodes

On Saturday 16 September 2017, a journalist contacted the ABS to query a survey form barcode that included an offensive word. The codes used to generate the unique barcodes used an algorithm generating more than two quintillion combinations (2,000,000,000,000,000,000) of letters and numbers in order to generate highly secure barcodes. Within 40 minutes of the query the ABS was able to identify that the code was authentic and issue a public statement acknowledging the issue, apologising for not undertaking an offensive word check on the barcodes and offering the opportunity for anyone affected to have their code/form replaced. The ABS ensured that all existing bar codes with offensive words were not issued. The story appeared in the media 4 days later (20 September). There was only one reported issue of this type.

Issue management case study: 2 Attempts to sell survey forms online

On 30 August 2017 the media reported the sale of survey forms online via sites such as eBay and Gumtree. This action raised serious security concerns that would reduce trust in the outcome. The ABS engaged quickly with online marketplaces such as; eBay, Facebook, Gumtree, Amazon, Alibaba and Digital Industry Group seeking their assistance to remove any listing and an assurance that future listings would be blocked and promptly removed. The sale and/or purchase of survey materials or responses may be an offence under the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* or the Commonwealth Criminal Code. Penalties for these offences range from fines to imprisonment. All allegations of fraud or criminal actions were investigated by the ABS and 18 matters were referred to police for investigation.

Issue management case study: 3 Bogus Australia Post worker using torch to identify No responses

On 13 September 2017 an individual claiming to be an Australian Postal worker tweeted that they were using a torch light held against the reply paid envelope to see the response on the survey form and throwing

out No response surveys. This raised issues around tampering with survey responses, privacy concerns and the integrity of Australian Postal workers. Australia Post investigated and confirmed that the person was not an employee and noted that tampering with mail is a Commonwealth offence and carries serious penalties of imprisonment of up to two years. The criminal consequences were highlighted in responses to media questions and in media appearances by the Taskforce lead. There was no visible identifying information on any response form such as a name or an address to identify an individual and therefore there was no breach of privacy. This fake claim about Australia Post's handling of forms was an isolated report and there were no such incidents at any point in the process.



Image 7: Social media generated issue – fake Australia Post worker claims tampering with mail.

Outcomes

A high overall participation rate was achieved - 79.5 per cent or nearly four out of every five people, with consistent distribution across age groups, gender and geography, and is a strong indicator of quality. The ABS received a number of endorsements relating to the conduct and management of the AMLPS.

Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Alastair McEwin, commended the ABS on their approach to ensure people with disabilities were included in this survey. He noted, *“The ABS proactively engaged with the disability sector in order to determine best practice supports... appropriate adjustments were also made available within a relatively short period of time. In my view, this set the Bureau apart as a leader in implementing accessible alternatives on a national scale.”*

Commonwealth Ombudsman, Michael Manthorpe, congratulated the Australian Statistician on the manner in which the AMLPS was run, noting that *“Given the enormous public interest in the recent survey conducted by the ABS about same sex marriage, I anticipated that some volume of complaints might come our way about its administration.... In the end we received just three complaints about the ABS's management of the survey”*.

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils Australia (FECCA) made a submission to the Senate Inquiry on the conduct of the AMLPS acknowledging the ABS' work to support participation by multicultural communities of Australia. *“FECCA would like to commend the ABS for their role in ensuring that Australians from CALD backgrounds were able to full participate meaningfully in what has been a historic process.”*

Protiviti was engaged to provide independent assurance of the rigour and quality of survey processes and commented that *“The approach adopted by the ABS was innovative, thorough and comprehensive and has supported the transparent and rigorous management of risks to the Survey”*.

Malcolm Crompton AM, Managing Director, Information Integrity Solutions Pty Ltd, and Privacy Commissioner of Australia 1999–2004 provided the following statement: *“The ABS has taken a strong ‘privacy by design’ approach to protecting the privacy of Australians in designing the survey. I am satisfied with the range of privacy measures that the ABS has embedded into the design of the survey and supporting functions. I am also satisfied that the mitigation strategies and response plans are effective and appropriate in the context of the survey”*.

Senator Matt Canavan – Leader of the Parliamentarian “No” campaign — wrote to the Australian Statistician to advise: *“I am thankful for the work you have done to ensure that Australians can be assured of the integrity of the survey”*.

National public sentiment testing demonstrated very strong levels of trust in the ABS and reflected agreement the survey was easy to complete.

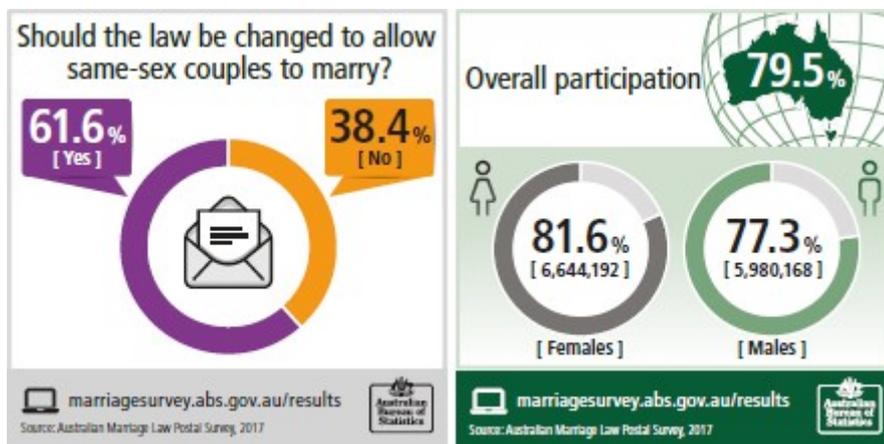


Image 8: Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey response rate and results

Views on Postal Survey – Overall

(% Strongly Agree/Agree)

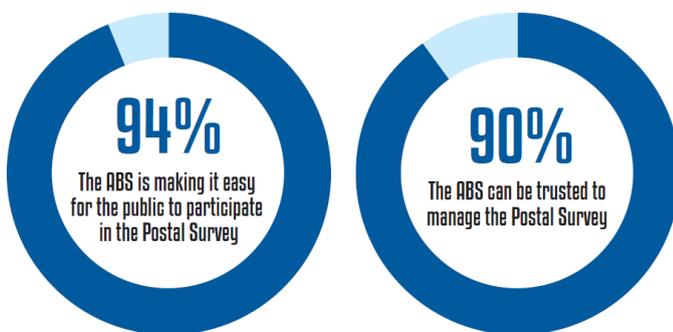


Image: National public sentiment testing results