

# *Drivers of culture change at the ABS*

## *Making the most of a 'fantastic failure'*

**Andrew Mann**

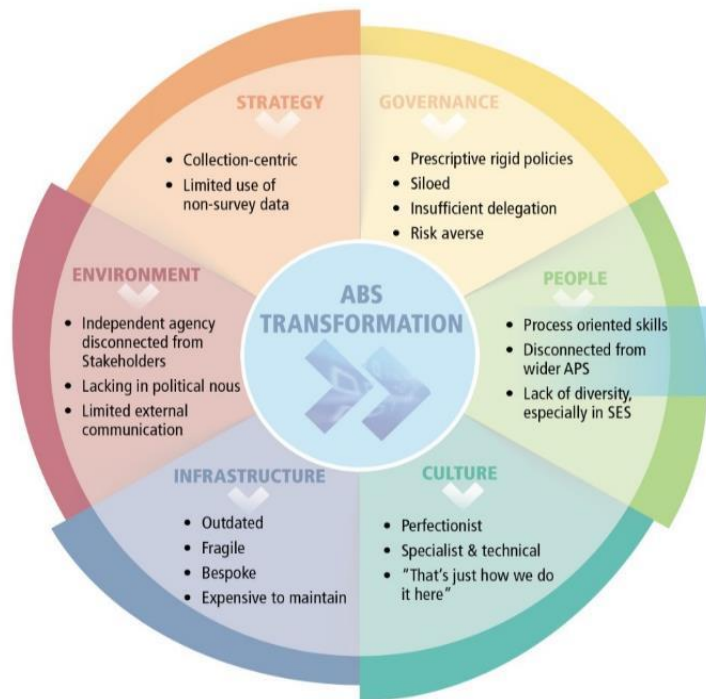
Program Manager, People Services Branch

Australian Bureau of Statistics  
Informing Australia's important decisions



# ABS Transformation

## Past ABS

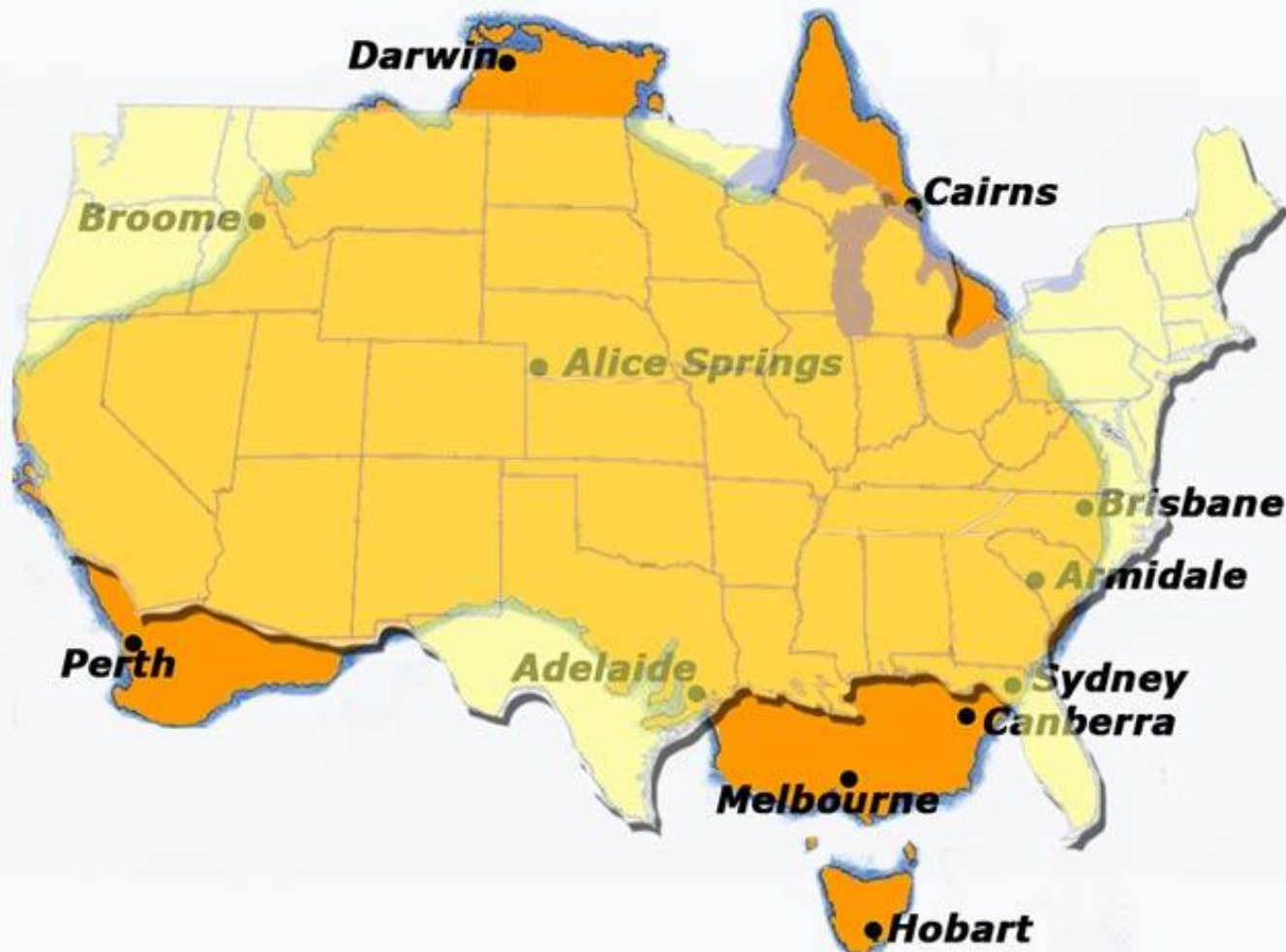


## Future ABS



# 2016 Census of Population and Housing









### *Australia and Europe Area size comparison*

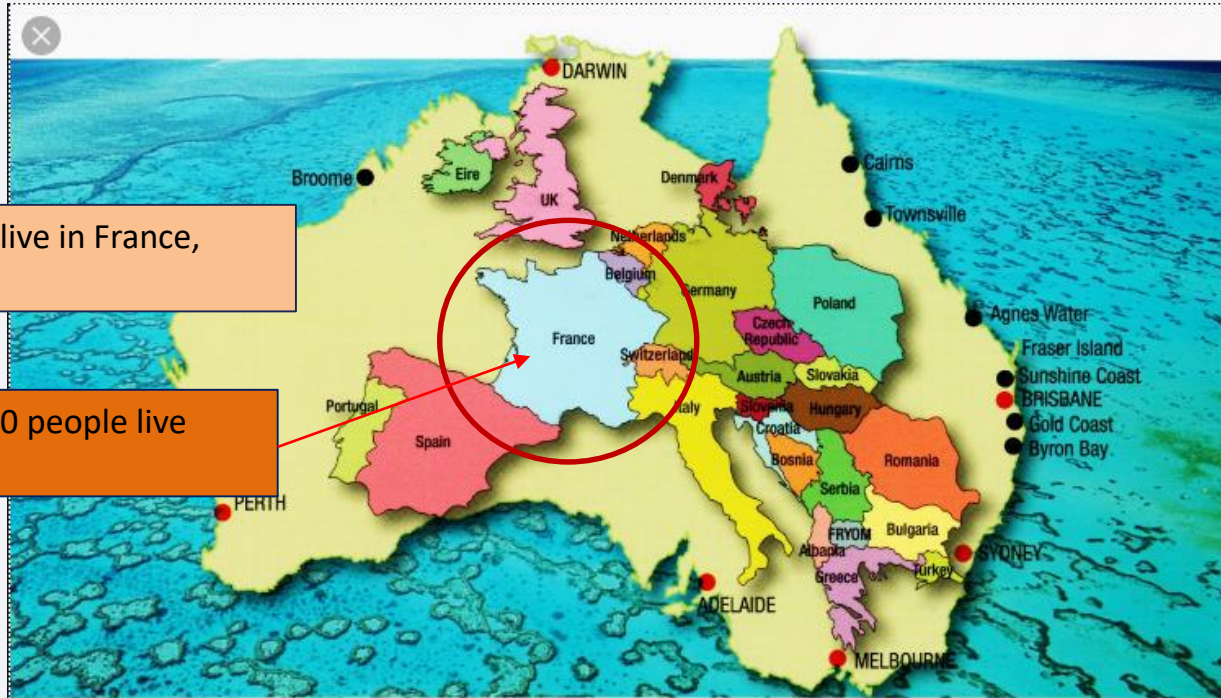
Darwin to Perth 4396km • Perth to Adelaide 2707km • Adelaide to Melbourne 726km  
Melbourne to Sydney 887km • Sydney to Brisbane 972km • Brisbane to Cairns 1748km



# How empty is Australia?

66 million people live in France,  
but...

In Australia, 41,000 people live  
here



## *Australia and Europe area comparison*

Australia's area: 7.7 million sq km

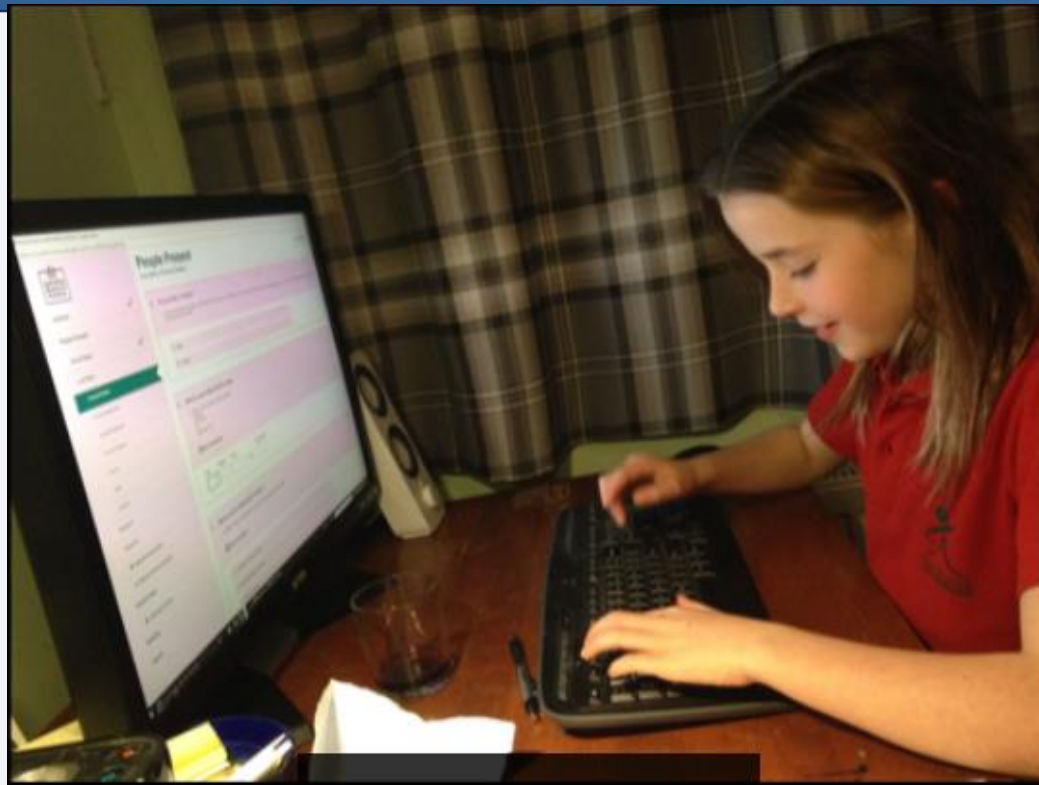
Europe's area (shown): 3.5 million sq km

Darwin to Perth 4396 km • Perth to Adelaide 2707 km • Adelaide to Melbourne 726 km  
Melbourne to Sydney 887 km • Sydney to Brisbane 972 km • Brisbane to Cairns 1748 km



- 550 field interviewers
- 38,000 Census field staff
- 200 km between dwellings

# August 9 2016 ...about 7.10 pm





# 2016 Census Our 'Fantastic Failure'!





# 2016 Census Our 'Fantastic Failure'!

## Australian Bureau of Statistics

The system is very busy at the moment. Please try again later.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.



Thousands vent their anger over website meltdown

# ABS LOSES ITS CENSUS

# CENSUS FARCE

Turmoil as website  
fails its biggest test

The Bureau of Statistics endangers the census by asking  
for names

**MELTDOWN**

Anger as  
fail makes  
no census

Down for the count: census thrown into chaos

Growing census boycott risks quality

# 2016 Census



# Census outcomes



95.1%

**Overall response rate**

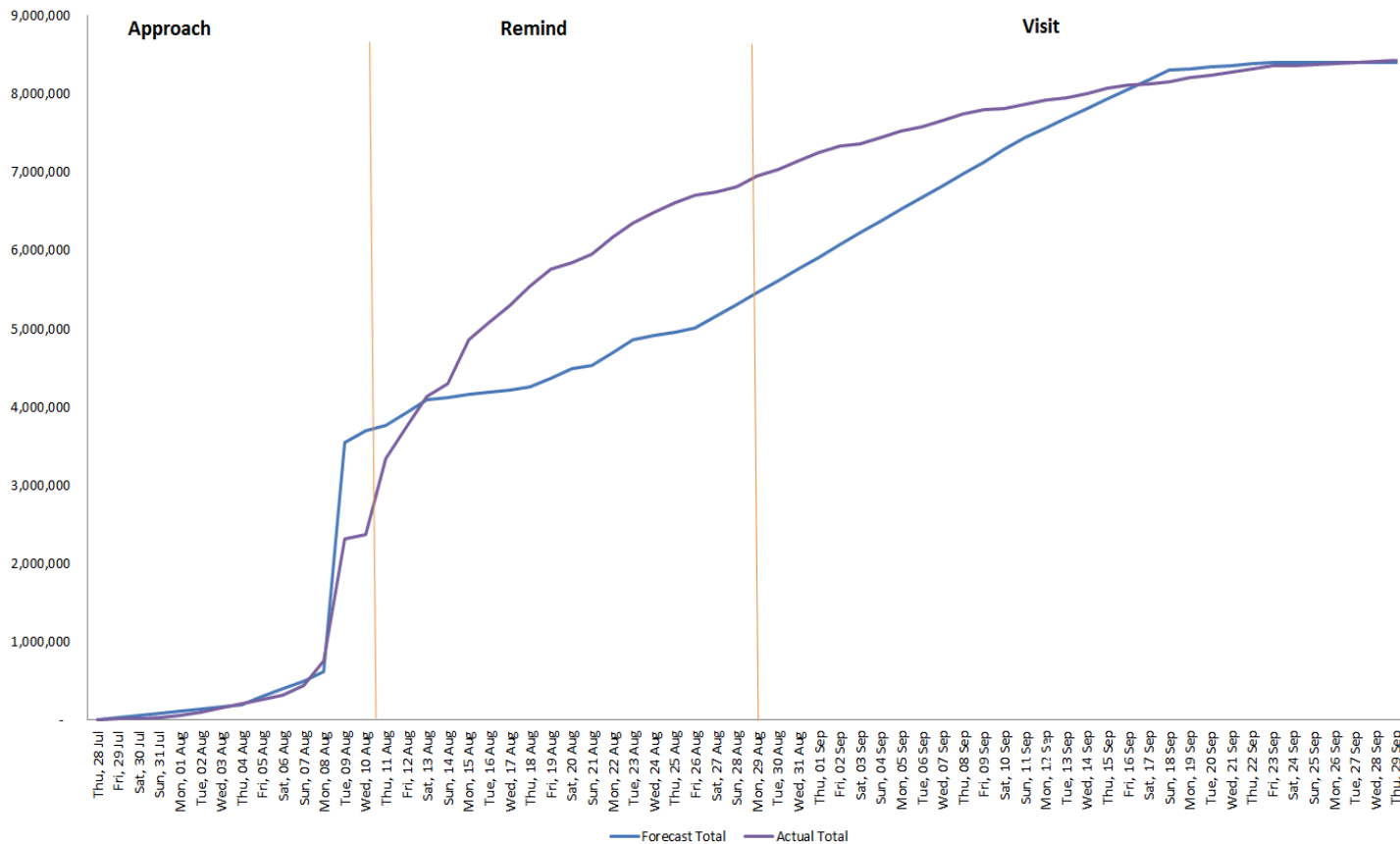
63.3%

**Online response rate**

1.0%

**Net undercount**





# Learnings – public trust, stakeholders, risk



Be Agile

Be Responsive

Comms at table

- ✓ Recognise the context & adjust
- ✓ Use experts to assure
- ✓ Real risk management & contingency plans
- ✓ Communication & service delivery:
  - ✓ Open the 'black box' & map the journey
- ✓ Engage effectively with Government
- ✓ Demonstrate Privacy & Public Benefit



► And then...

# Happy Census-versary – 12 months later

## PM to go postal



AUSTRALIANS will have their say on same-sex marriage by the end of November in a \$122 million postal vote, if the Senate again rejects a compulsory plebiscite.

Liberal and Nationals MPs yesterday endorsed a plan to have the Australian Bureau of Statistics -which is still reeling from last year's bungled census -conduct a postal ballot should, as expected, the plebiscite legislation fail to pass a

used by the Whitlam Labor government to choose a new national song.

If the plebiscite Bill is unexpectedly passed, a \$170 million compulsory vote would be held on November 25. A postal vote would see ballot papers in mailboxes from September 12 and a result declared on November 15. But there would be no publicly funded "yes" and "no" campaigns.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said if there was a

2016 election, with Labor arguing for parliament to decide rather than waste taxpayers' money.

"Strong leaders carry out their promises, weak leaders break them," Mr Turnbull said. "I'm a strong leader."

Labor Leader Bill Shorten asked the PM in Question Time if he endorsed the "vile rubbish" of anti-gaymarriage campaigners such as former Tasmanian Liberal MP Chris Miles. Mr Miles circulated a pamphlet last



- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/absstats/videos/1906760466051950/>

# A complex exercise with 27 partners

64 million letters and envelopes

Australia's largest ever mail out

200 remote and regional locations

Three TV, radio, print and digital campaigns

AMLPS special website

Materials in 38 languages

Translation phone services

Overseas elector mailout & IVR

Corrective services mailout



Call centre

Online survey form

Automated phone survey system

Stakeholder engagement

Office shopfronts

Automated online service requests

99 days to deliver..

# Applying Census learnings to Marriage Law Survey



- ✓ Create a smooth user experience
- ✓ Support community participation
- ✓ Being agile and responsive
- ✓ Support our people
- ✓ Manage risk effectively; use experts
- ✓ Meet stakeholders expectations
- ✓ Keep data safe

# AMLPS: Opportunity to practice our new ways of working

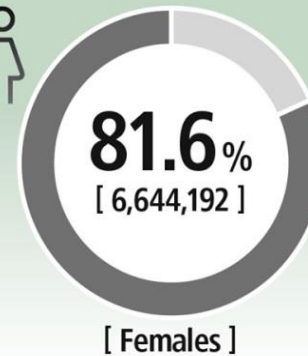




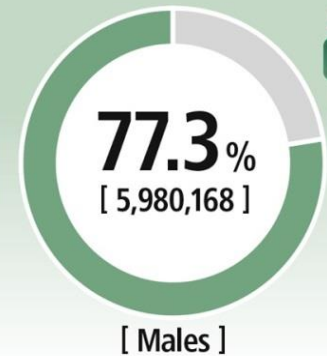
Should the law be changed to allow  
same-sex couples to marry?



Overall participation



[ Females ]



[ Males ]



[AMLPS Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNm0VS795d0)

[youtube.com/watch?v=LNm0VS795d0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNm0VS795d0)

# Results – success based on those learnings

Overall participation

79.5%



81.6%

[ 6,644,192 ]

[ Females ]

77.3%

[ 5,980,168 ]

[ Males ]

“..Australians could  
be assured of the  
integrity of the  
survey.”

– Senator the Hon Matthew Canavan,  
Chair of the No Committee

**\$40m under budget**



# Learnings for ABS from Census and AMLPS experiences

- ▶ Communication and user-centred design
- ▶ Agile
- ▶ Sense of community and positive workforce culture
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Decision making
- ▶ Risk Management

# Transparency and Learnings



Report on the conduct of the  
Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey  
2017



- ✓ Search “conduct postal survey”
- ✓ [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)
- ✓ Publication 1800.0





SSM Marriage announcement: YES vote wins

**VIC NEWS**

## ABS chief statistician David Kalisch makes nation wait for SSM answer

Herald Sun







Thank you  
*Questions?*