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## **BIG BROTHER TO WATCH THE MOVIE OF OUR LIVES**

### **Campaign against proposed changes to the census**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics recently unveiled a proposal for extraordinary changes to the Census.

The proposal involves the use of name and address data, and other indicators of identity, to link together records on every individual in Australia – not just from one census to the next, but continually.

The idea is, to use the language of the ABS, to convert the Census from an anonymous ‘snapshot’ of Australians’ lives once every five years, to a permanent ‘movie’ of every aspect of our lives, on an identifiable and on-going basis.

The building-blocks necessary to implement this proposal are:

- for the ABS to retain name and address data, instead of destroying that data immediately on return of the Census
- for the ABS to use that name and address data to link every person’s Census return with data from birth and death registries, disease registers, immigration data, the agricultural census and other sources, to build up an even more comprehensive picture of every person’s life than the Census currently allows
- for the ABS to then (after using the data for more than a year) delete the name and address from each person’s record – but still keep all other identifying information (such as sex, date of birth, country of birth, geographic region, family relationship, religion, language spoken, etc) that allows further data linking to occur on each person
- for the ABS to then use that more enriched data and identifying information to link each Census to the next, starting retrospectively with data from the 2001 Census

The result will be a national population database, drawing from multiple sources to create a rich, deep and intimate picture of every Australian – not just once every five years, but on an on-going basis.

The Australian Privacy Foundation encourages anyone concerned about this idea to make a submission to the ABS, opposing the proposal.

**Submissions are due 10 June 2005.** The ABS Discussion Paper, “Enhancing the population census: developing a longitudinal view”, is available from [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) under ‘Census’.